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**Learning Innovation in Dayah: The Effectiveness of Experiential Learning
Methods in Developing Students' Skills**

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LEARNING INNOVATION IN DAYAH: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING METHODS IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' SKILLS

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of experiential learning in developing students' competencies within two Acehnese salafiyah dayah: Mudi Mesra and Ummul Ayman. It aims to reinterpret how experiential learning operates across ritual, vocational, institutional, and digital dimensions, thereby formulating a contextual framework for transformative Islamic education. Using a qualitative multiple-case design, data were collected from fifteen participants – including leaders, teachers, and students – through interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Thematic analysis, supported by triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing, ensured credibility and reflexivity. Findings reveal that experiential learning is systematically embedded in ritual and communal practices (muhadzarah, khutbah, tajhiz mayat), vocational and entrepreneurial training (banking, printing, tailoring, IT), institutional mediation through teungku-centered authority, and emerging digital engagement such as WhatsApp-based muzakarah. These practices affirm Dewey's and Kolb's experiential frameworks while contextualizing constructivist learning within Islamic communal culture. The study introduces the concept of an "experiential ecology of Acehnese dayah," which integrates spirituality, institutional authority, and innovation. Theoretically, it enriches global debates on experiential pedagogy in faith-based education; practically, it provides a model for enhancing vocational and digital readiness without compromising religious authenticity.

Keywords: Experiential Learning; Acehnese Dayah; Vocational Skills; Constructivism;



A. Introduction

Education in *Salafiyah Dayah* represents a vital legacy within the Islamic scholarly tradition of the *Nusantara* (Munzir et al, 2023; Usman, 2021). The *dayah* has long functioned as a central institution shaping generations of students who are knowledgeable in religion, morally upright, and socially responsible (Munzir et al., 2023). This enduring role is clearly reflected in various communal religious activities such as *tahlilan* and collective *dhikr*, where *dayah* serve as key institutions mobilizing wide community participation (Masrizal, 2021). The competencies of *dayah* alumni thus extend beyond mastery of religious texts; they embody leadership, ethical integrity, and practical wisdom in daily life (Nasir, 2017; Tabrani ZA et al., 2023). However, this long-standing trust from the community also exposes a critical gap: while the textual depth of Islamic learning in *dayah* is widely acknowledged, the pedagogical mechanisms through which *dayah* integrate ritual practice, vocational competence, and community leadership remain insufficiently explored in academic discourse.

Traditionally, *dayah* pedagogy relies on the *bandongan* and *sorogan* systems, which are methods centered on textual recitation, memorization, and teacher-centered explanation. These methods have proven effective in preserving the authenticity of religious transmission (Maskuri et al., 2020; Nurainiah, 2021; Saiful, 2021). Yet, in the contemporary era of globalization and technological transformation, such approaches alone are increasingly inadequate to cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and practical skills essential for navigating social and economic change (Saifuddin, 2023, 2023). The contrast between religious textual mastery and modern societal demands highlights the urgency of an educational paradigm that maintains Islamic authenticity while fostering the adaptability and agency of learners.

In response to this pedagogical challenge, experiential learning offers a compelling framework that connects knowledge and action. Kolb (1984) defines learning as a process of knowledge creation through transforming experience, encompassing four interrelated stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active

experimentation. Dewey (1938) similarly posits that meaningful experiences must be continuous, enjoyable, and conducive to moral and intellectual growth (Zulfikar, 2024; Winditya, 2021; M. Nurdin, 2020). In the *dayah* context, these theories suggest that ritual practices, vocational training, and community engagement can be authentic learning arenas that facilitate cognitive and moral development. The challenge lies in understanding how these experiences are institutionally structured and socially mediated within traditional Islamic education systems.

Several *pesantren* across Indonesia—particularly the modern type such as Pondok Modern Gontor in East Java—have successfully incorporated experiential learning by combining religious instruction with life-skill training, empowering students to manage organizational, economic, and social responsibilities (Agani et al., 2022; Zulkhairi et al., 2024). These practices reflect a shift from passive knowledge reception toward active participation and problem-solving. However, most studies on experiential learning within *pesantren* or *dayah* education have focused on vocational or organizational modernization while paying limited attention to the ritual-communal dimension, which remains the foundation of *salafiyah* identity. This oversight has led to a partial understanding of how *dayah* education translates spirituality into lived practice, social responsibility, and collective learning.

In this regard, the Acehnese *salafiyah dayah*—such as Mudi Mesra and Ummul Ayman—offer a distinctive ecology that integrates spiritual formation, institutional hierarchy, and practical learning. These *dayah* represent living laboratories where rituals are not merely religious obligations but pedagogical tools for cultivating discipline, leadership, and social legitimacy. At Dayah Mudi Mesra, for instance, the educational management extends beyond traditional *kitab kuning* instruction to include formal schools and higher education institutions that promote financial independence and entrepreneurship (Fakrurradhi, 2022; Masrizal, 2021). This demonstrates an emerging hybrid model that merges the ritual-communal ethos of the *dayah* with vocational-economic practices—a form of pedagogical synthesis that situates religious learning within broader community networks.



Similarly, Dayah Ummul Ayman integrates the study of *kitab kuning* with vocational training, entrepreneurship education, and cooperative enterprises that develop students' independence and social responsibility (Amrullah, 2019; Lukman et al., 2021; Rahmati et al., 2020). These initiatives show that *dayah* are increasingly responding to social change by embedding practical skills into their spiritual curricula. However, there remains limited empirical investigation into how these practices operate as a cohesive learning system and produce balanced competencies between religious devotion and worldly engagement. Most previous research either emphasizes the transmission of classical Islamic sciences (Saiful, 2021; Nuroniah, 2023) or highlights modernization in *pesantren* outside Aceh (Agani et al., 2022), leaving unanswered how Acehnese *dayah* localize experiential learning while maintaining their traditional authority structures and moral values.

This study thus seeks to fill that scholarly gap by exploring the mechanisms through which experiential learning takes shape in Acehnese *salafiyah dayah*. The inquiry assumes that learning in *dayah* extends beyond the classroom and textual instruction, encompassing a complex network of ritual, vocational, institutional, and digital interactions. Within this ecosystem, the *teungku* authority functions not only as a source of knowledge transmission but also as an institutional framework that mediates access, discipline, and legitimacy. The combination of spiritual authority, social hierarchy, and collective practice constitutes what this study conceptualizes as an "experiential learning ecology," in which knowledge and experience continuously inform one another.

Theoretically, this study aligns with Dewey's and Kolb's perspectives while contextualizing them within Islamic educational philosophy. Dewey's notion of continuity and interaction in experience resonates with the *dayah's* collective learning environment, where repetition, reflection, and application occur within the rhythm of religious life. Kolb's model provides an analytical lens to understand how concrete experiences in *muhadzarah*, *khutbah*, or community service are transformed into competencies through cycles of

reflection and practice. Yet, unlike the secular contexts where experiential learning is often discussed, *dayah* education integrates moral-spiritual dimensions and communal accountability, emphasizing learning as both personal transformation and social contribution.

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach that bridges education, sociology, and religious studies, this study positions the Acehnese *dayah* as a dynamic site for examining how traditional Islamic institutions engage with global pedagogical paradigms. The analysis contributes to current debates on constructivist learning, faith-based education reform, and the indigenization of experiential pedagogy within non-Western contexts. It also responds to the increasing scholarly interest in how Islamic educational systems adapt to contemporary challenges—digital transformation, gender inclusion, and economic sustainability—while maintaining their spiritual authenticity and epistemological integrity.

In light of these considerations, this research aims to reinterpret the meaning and effectiveness of experiential learning in Acehnese *salafiyah dayah*. It specifically examines how experiential learning operates through ritual, vocational, institutional, and digital domains; how authority and access shape students' participation; and how these processes collectively form a contextualized framework of transformative Islamic education. Ultimately, this study seeks to formulate the concept of an *experiential ecology of Acehnese dayah*—a model that integrates spirituality, community, and innovation, offering both theoretical enrichment and practical implications for Islamic education within and beyond Indonesia.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multiple-case comparative design to examine the effectiveness of experiential learning in developing students' competencies within two *salafiyah dayah* in Aceh: Dayah Mudi Mesra and Dayah Ummul Ayman. These two institutions were purposively selected because they maintain a strong *kitab kuning* tradition while simultaneously showing openness to innovation through



intermediary units such as community banks, vocational training, and cooperative schools. This design allowed for an in-depth exploration of how experiential learning is institutionalized and how contextual variations emerge between the cases.

The participants comprised fifteen individuals representing three categories: *teungku* (leaders), teachers, and students, with diversity in gender, length of residence (three to eight years), and institutional roles encompassing ritual, vocational, and managerial functions. Participants were purposively selected based on sustained involvement in the day-to-day learning and communal practices of the *dayah*, while individuals with limited participation in ritual or vocational programs were excluded from the sample. This selection ensured that the data reflected experiential engagement rather than peripheral observation.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, teachers, and *teungku* to obtain insights into learning processes, participation mechanisms, and institutional mediation. Second, participatory observation was conducted during key religious and vocational activities, including Friday sermons, *muhadzarah*, *tajhiz mayat*, agricultural and printing-unit training, and information technology classes. Third, document analysis was undertaken by reviewing institutional curricula, student assignments, and internal reports, enabling triangulation across narrative, behavioral, and textual data sources. These procedures collectively ensured the depth and reliability of the qualitative evidence.

Data analysis followed an inductive thematic procedure. The researchers began with line-by-line open coding to identify key ideas, followed by the grouping of codes into subthemes such as “ritual training”, “economic units”, and “gendered skills”. These subthemes were subsequently synthesized into broader categories— “ritual-communal roles”, “vocational practices”, and “institutional mediators”. To illustrate transparency, Table 1 presents examples of how verbatim excerpts were transformed into analytical themes, demonstrating the interpretive progression from field data to conceptual patterns.

Table 1. Example of coding flow from quote to theme

Excerpt (Verbatim Quote)	Initial Code	Subtheme	Theme
"Only selected senior students are allowed to manage the Bank Mudi".	Selective participation	Restricted access to economic units	Vocational practices
"Delivering <i>muhadzarah</i> every week made me more confident to speak in public."	Confidence building	Ritual-based oratory training	Ritual-communal roles
"Female students are usually given responsibility in the catering unit rather than IT".	Gendered division	Gendered allocation of vocational skills	Institutional mediators

Coding was conducted manually and cross-verified by all team members to ensure inter-coder reliability. Triangulation among interviews, observations, and documents, combined with member checking and peer debriefing, further enhanced the trustworthiness of findings. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process. Given the researchers' cultural and academic proximity to the *dayah*, reflexive journals were used to document how positionality and access to *teungku* authority may have influenced interpretation. These reflections were discussed among team members to minimize elite bias and ensure balanced representation of participants' voices.

Ethical procedures were strictly observed. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by replacing real names with initials in the transcripts and reporting. Sensitive religious topics were discussed in consultation with the *teungku* to maintain cultural appropriateness and to respect institutional hierarchies. Ethical clearance was aligned with university research standards and the cultural ethics of Acehese Islamic institutions.

The study's scope was limited to two *dayah*; thus, its findings are not intended for statistical generalization. Instead, the results provide rich contextual insights into the structure and dynamics of experiential learning within Acehese *dayah*, offering an initial model that can be further tested through broader and mixed-method research designs in the future.



C. Results and Discussion

The findings from the two *dayah*—Mudi Mesra and Ummul Ayman—demonstrate that experiential learning is systematically structured across four interconnected domains: ritual-religious roles, vocational and practical skills, media and creativity, and variations in access and limitations. Each domain reveals how learning is embedded in daily *dayah* life while simultaneously exposing the institutional hierarchies and constraints that influence participation. The following subsections present these results thematically, supported by interview excerpts, field observations, and institutional documents.

1. Results

a. *Ritual-religious roles*

Ritual and religious activities form the fundamental foundation of the *dayah* learning system. In both Mudi Mesra and Ummul Ayman, ritual practices are not only acts of worship but structured pedagogical instruments designed to instill discipline, leadership, and communal service. Through daily prayers, Qur'anic recitations, dhikr assemblies, and collective rituals, students internalize moral values and spiritual awareness that guide their personal and social conduct. These activities cultivate a sense of obedience and respect toward their teachers (*teungku*), while simultaneously strengthening communal bonds among students. Moreover, participation in ritual routines becomes a formative experience that shapes their sense of responsibility, humility, and commitment to collective welfare—key elements of character formation within the traditional Islamic education framework of Aceh.

At Dayah Mudi Mesra, ritual-based learning is institutionalized through weekly *muhadzarah* sessions in which students prepare and deliver sermons or short lectures before their peers. These sessions simulate public preaching and develop communication confidence. One teacher explained, “Our students are deliberately sent to deliver Friday sermons so that they become accustomed to speaking before congregations. And we train them first so they are ready to perform” (Interview with Tgk. MS, 2024).

Observations revealed that several students were later appointed as *imam rawatib* (permanent prayer leaders) in local mosques even before graduation (Observation, 2024; Mosque profile document). A student reflected, “When I first stood to deliver the Friday sermon, my hands were shaking, but my teacher reminded me that this was not just practice—it was a trust from the community” (Interview with AR, 2024). Another alumnus shared, “After giving sermons for two years, I learned not only to speak fluently but also to manage emotions and understand people’s reactions” (Interview with AL, 2024).

Similarly, the practice of *tajhiz mayat*—managing funeral rites—serves as a comprehensive learning process that combines cognitive knowledge and social responsibility. Initially taught through demonstrations in the *dayah* courtyard, students are later assigned to handle real community funerals. One student explained, “At first, I only watched my seniors, but later I was told to wash and shroud the body myself. That was when I truly understood the meaning of service” (Interview with Zulfan, 2024). Another participant confirmed the communal impact of this practice: “When there is a death, it is usually students from Mudi who help. We trust them because they have been trained properly” (Interview with CL, 2024).

At Dayah Ummul Ayman, ritual learning is equally diverse, involving collective *zikir*, *Yasin* recitations, *tahlil*, and assignments as *imam* and *muazzin*. A teacher remarked, “The best training is when students practice what they learn from the kitab. We let them lead prayers, recite *Yasin*, and conduct *zikir* regularly” (Interview with Tgk. MD, 2024). The Ramadan month, in particular, becomes a laboratory of *dakwah* training. “During my first Ramadan sermon, I only read from a text. Now I am confident enough to speak without notes and make my own outline” (Interview with ZF, 2024).

Ritual arenas thus serve as a structured environment for developing *santri*’s public speaking, empathy, and leadership. Beyond spiritual formation, they strengthen social legitimacy by connecting students to community life. Through continuous practice, reflection, and social validation, these rituals exemplify the first stage of the *dayah*’s experiential learning ecology.

b. Vocational and practical skills

The vocational domain provides a tangible arena where *dayah* integrate spiritual discipline with technical and entrepreneurial competence. In both Mudi Mesra and Ummul Ayman, vocational units function as laboratories for developing work ethics, accountability, and financial literacy.

At Dayah Mudi Mesra, the *Bank Mudi* is a central hub of experiential training. Students manage deposits, withdrawals, and accounting records under the supervision of teachers. *"Students in Bank Mudi learn discipline, accuracy, and honesty. If they are not honest, it becomes obvious quickly because the money must always balance"*, explained one supervisor (Interview with Tgk. MZ, 2024). Another teacher added, *"Parents feel secure because this bank teaches students to manage their own allowances and save responsibly"* (Interview with Tgk. KR, 2024). Yet, participation in the bank is selective. *"I wanted to join Bank Mudi, but the quota was limited; only senior students were chosen"*, noted a younger student (Interview with AR, 2024). The sense of exclusivity underscores the *teungku*-centered trust system that regulates access to institutional responsibilities.

Other vocational programs include the printing press, agriculture, carpentry, and electrical installation. A teacher explained, *"Sometimes they build or renovate their own rooms. As for farming, the dayah has rice fields managed together with teachers"* (Interview with Tgk. MS, 2024). Field observations confirmed this, showing students planting rice while reciting *dzikir*—a blend of labor and devotion that exemplifies learning through practice (Observation, 2024). One participant described, *"We take turns cultivating the land. It's tiring, but it teaches patience and cooperation"* (Interview with MR, 2024). At Dayah Ummul Ayman, the vocational component is more formalized through the integrated vocational high school (SMK), offering programs in catering, information technology, and entrepreneurship. *"We want our alumni to be independent – some should be able to cook, some to handle computers, and some to trade"*, said a senior teacher (Interview with AD, 2024).

Students confirmed this multi-skill orientation. *"I joined the catering unit because I enjoy serving food for big events. It trains us to work fast and be responsible"*, remarked a female student (Interview with NS, 2024). Another commented, *"We have to take turns using the computers. Sometimes I wait two hours for my turn, but I still enjoy learning"* (Interview with FS, 2024). Sewing units, dominated by female students, represent another locus of practical learning. *"I sewed a uniform for my junior, and it was displayed during graduation. It made me proud and confident"*, shared one participant (Interview with FT, 2024).

These experiences highlight how *dayah* embeds moral and practical education simultaneously. However, disparities remain: opportunities are often influenced by gender, seniority, and institutional resources. While male students tend to dominate IT and finance units, female students are channeled into catering and sewing activities, reflecting persistent gender norms in traditional settings.

c. Media and creativity

The third experiential domain emerges through digital engagement and creative expression. As modern technologies permeate Islamic education, *dayah* institutions cautiously incorporate media literacy while ensuring alignment with religious ethics. At Mudi Mesra, teachers and students use WhatsApp for *muzakarah*—ongoing discussions on *kitab kuning* interpretation and contemporary *fiqh* issues. One teacher explained, *"With WhatsApp, we can continue our lessons even after students go home for vacation. They can send questions, and we discuss them online"* (Interview with Tgk. MS, 2024). Students view this practice as both flexible and valuable: *"Sometimes, I ask my teacher about nahwu problems late at night, and he replies immediately. It makes me more engaged in learning"* (Interview with RS, 2024).

Beyond digital communication, artistic creativity is encouraged as a means of reflection and stress relief. *"Painting helps me focus and calm my mind after long hours of reading kitab"*, said a student artist (Interview with MB, 2024). Teachers acknowledge their role in maintaining psychological balance: *"We*

encourage them to draw or decorate classrooms. It beautifies the environment and stimulates imagination" (Interview with Tgk. AZ, 2024).

Photography and digital documentation also function as learning tools. "I enjoy photographing religious gatherings, Islamic holidays, and guest visits. The photos are displayed on the bulletin board and uploaded to the *dayah* website", shared another student (Interview with IL, 2024). At Ummul Ayman, students record short *dakwah* videos during class activities to practice public speaking and digital presentation skills. "We record our speeches, then watch them together to see mistakes", noted a female student (Interview with SY, 2024).

These creative and digital initiatives remain supplementary but play a growing role in bridging traditional religious learning with technological realities. They introduce new experiential spaces where reflection, aesthetics, and technology intersect, albeit still constrained by infrastructure and teacher readiness.

d. Variation in access and limitations

Although experiential learning has become integral to *dayah* life, the research identified several disparities in participation. Access to learning opportunities is unevenly distributed across gender, seniority, and institutional position, reflecting the hierarchical nature of *dayah* authority.

At Mudi Mesra, only selected senior students participate in *Bank Mudi* or the printing press. "We choose students who are disciplined and trustworthy. Managing money requires strong character", stated a teacher (Interview with Tgk. KR, 2024). Meanwhile, some junior students expressed limited access: "I focus more on *kitab kuning*, so I'm not chosen for vocational units" (Interview with IR, 2024). At Ummul Ayman, gender segregation shapes participation patterns. "We are more directed to sewing and cooking, while IT is usually for male students", said a female student (Interview with FT, 2024). Another added, "I wanted to learn computer design, but they said the lab was full and only boys were prioritized" (Interview with RT, 2024). Resource scarcity further exacerbates inequality. "With only ten computers for one hundred students, the practice is far from optimal", explained a teacher (Interview with ST, 2024).

Observations across both institutions revealed that seniority remains the most decisive factor in determining access. Older students are often given managerial or leadership roles, while newcomers are assigned supportive tasks. “I used to clean the hall and prepare equipment for seniors. Only after two years did I get the chance to teach younger students,” shared a participant (Interview with MR, 2024). These structural patterns indicate that experiential learning is embedded within a moral economy of trust and hierarchy. While they foster responsibility and respect for authority, they reproduce social boundaries limiting inclusivity. Consequently, experiential learning in dayah is both empowering and selective – granting opportunities for moral and professional growth but constrained by institutional traditions and limited infrastructure.

This layered system of hierarchy also reflects the *dayah's* attempt to balance meritocracy and seniority, where learning is not only measured by academic mastery but also by ethical maturity and service experience. Senior students are expected to model humility, patience, and pedagogical care, serving as intermediaries between teachers and juniors. At the same time, this system subtly reinforces the traditional social order that prioritizes deference over innovation. As a result, while experiential learning provides valuable space for leadership cultivation and moral development, it remains bounded within a framework that privileges continuity and obedience rather than transformation and equality.

e. Summary of empirical findings

Overall, findings across the two *dayah* suggest that experiential learning operates through an integrated system where ritual, vocational, and creative practices converge within the moral framework of Islamic education. These domains collectively form what this study conceptualizes as an *experiential ecology*—a living educational environment where knowledge, experience, and authority intersect to shape students’ competencies.

Ritual learning establishes moral grounding and leadership rehearsal; vocational training provides practical independence; media activities foster creativity and adaptation; and limitations reveal the structural conditions of participation. The interplay among these elements demonstrates that



experiential learning in *dayah* is not incidental but systematically cultivated through cultural design and social relations. To summarize the empirical evidence and highlight cross-domain patterns, the following table presents the synthesized findings.

Table 2. Summary of Experiential Learning Findings in Acehnese Dayah

Domain	Types of Activities	Representative Quotes	Variation in Access & Limitations
Ritual-Religious Roles	Muhadzarah, Friday sermons, <i>tajhiz mayat</i> , mosque imams, <i>zikir</i> , Yasin, <i>tahlil</i> , Ramadan sermons	“Our students are deliberately sent to deliver Friday sermons so that they get used to speaking in front of congregations”. (Tgk. MS, 2024) “I delivered my first Friday sermon while still in my final year... the experience gave me confidence when I returned to my village”, (AL,2024) “At first I only followed, but now I can lead the prayers after burial”. (ZF, 2024) “When there is a death, it is usually students from Mudi who lead the prayers”. (CL, 2024) “During my first Ramadan sermon, I only read from a text. Now I am confident enough to speak without notes”. (ZF, 2024)	Broadly open, but experiences vary by seniority; competence is also evaluated by the community
Vocational & Practical Skills	Bank Mudi, printing press, farming, carpentry, electrical installation, SMK (catering, IT, entrepreneurship), sewing	“Students in Bank Mudi learn discipline, accuracy, and honesty”. (Tgk. MZ, 2024) “Parents feel secure because this bank helps students manage their daily money”. (Tgk. KR, 2024) “I wanted to join Bank	Strict selection (discipline/trust); gender-based access (sewing → female, IT → male); limited facilities (computers, machines)

Domain	Types of Activities	Representative Quotes	Variation in Access & Limitations
Media & Creativity	WhatsApp for online <i>muzakarah</i> , painting, and photography	<p>Mudi, but the quota was limited, so only seniors were chosen". (AR, 2024)</p> <p>"Sometimes they build or renovate their own rooms". (Tgk. MS, 2024)</p> <p>"I sewed a uniform for my junior, and during graduation, it was displayed. That was something to be proud of". (FT, 2024)</p> <p>"We have to take turns using the computers, sometimes waiting two hours". (FZ, 2024)</p> <p>"With WhatsApp, we can continue discussions even when students are in their villages". (Tgk. MS 2024)</p> <p>"Painting helps relieve stress while beautifying the environment". (MB, 2024)</p> <p>"I enjoy photographing activities... photos are posted on the bulletin board and uploaded to the dayah website". (IL, 2024)</p>	Access is flexible, but remains supplementary compared to ritual and vocational domains
Variation in Access & Limitations	Selective participation, gender roles, and limited facilities	<p>"I focus more on kitab kuning, so I don't have time to join the printing unit". (IR, 2024)</p> <p>"We are more directed to sewing or cooking, while IT is usually for male students". (FT, 2024)</p> <p>"With only ten computers for one hundred students, the practice is far from optimal". (ST, 2024)</p>	Key barriers: selection (seniority/ trust), gender, and limited resources

2. Discussion

The results of this study reinforce the position of Acehnese *dayah* as a distinctive model of experiential education that integrates ritual, vocational, and institutional learning into a cohesive moral system. This confirms Dewey's (1938) conception of learning as transforming experience into reflective growth and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle through concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation. However, unlike the individualist assumptions of Western experiential theories, the *dayah* framework is collective and moral in nature—anchored in faith, authority, and communal accountability. This communal orientation demonstrates how experiential learning can be localized within the moral ecology of Islamic education while remaining dialogical with broader educational paradigms (Belawati, 2023; Tabrani ZA et al., 2021; Ridwan & Rizal, 2019).

In the ritual domain, learning occurs through structured practices such as *muhadzarah*, *tajhiz mayat*, *khutbah*, and *zikir*, where students transform knowledge into lived religious experience. These activities embody Dewey's (1938) argument that education should emerge from meaningful and continuous experience. The findings also echo Humaidi et al., (2024), who emphasize that *kyai* leadership in *salafiyah* institutions shapes moderate understanding through example and repetition rather than formal instruction. Similarly, the ritual pedagogy of the *dayah* sustains moral formation through embodied participation, emotional discipline, and repetition—maintaining the continuity between devotion and education central to Islamic spirituality (Tabrani et al., 2024; Syafieh, & Nur, 2022).

The vocational dimension extends experiential learning beyond spiritual formation toward economic and social capability. At Mudi Mesra and Ummul Ayman, students are trained through community-based enterprises—such as *Bank Mudi*, printing, farming, and the integrated SMK program—to cultivate honesty, responsibility, and self-reliance. These practices affirm Saifuddin's (2023, 2023) call for holistic education that combines *kitab kuning* scholarship with practical life skills. The development of vocational programs also reflects the managerial evolution of Islamic

institutions discussed by Rohmadiyah et al., (2024) and Hariadi et al., (2025), where leadership strategies and management systems play a role in improving educational quality. Within this structure, *dayah* education demonstrates its adaptability—sustaining traditional authority while responding to social change.

However, the results also reveal institutional asymmetries. Access to experiential programs remains selective, often influenced by *teungku* authority, seniority, and gender norms. These limitations correspond to what Buto and Hafifuddin (2022) describe as the persistence of formal innovations that do not comprehensively reform organizational culture. The same dynamic appears in the hierarchical management of other *pesantren* institutions, where the relationship between trust and control determines students' learning opportunities (Sirojuddin et al., 2022). The findings thus illustrate that experiential learning within *dayah* cannot be separated from the moral economy of authority. While it reinforces discipline and responsibility, it also restricts inclusivity—a challenge that continues to shape the balance between authority and equality in Islamic education.

Institutional variation between Mudi Mesra and Ummul Ayman further highlights this dynamic. Mudi Mesra maintains an informal trust-based system under *teungku* supervision, while Ummul Ayman adopts a more structured curriculum through its accredited SMK. These differences align with Haryanto et al., (2024), who explain that Islamic-based institutions now negotiate between traditional paradigms and modern management systems. Both types of institutions exemplify gradual adaptation rather than radical reform. This adaptive transformation parallels Mutammam et al., (2024), who discuss how *pesantren* evolve incrementally to address the societal demands of the Muslim Society 5.0 era.

The inclusion of digital media and creative expression adds another layer to experiential practice. WhatsApp-based *muzakarah* and digital documentation represent efforts to maintain continuity of learning in a virtual environment (Knoblauch, 2023). These practices indicate that digital technology can coexist with spiritual objectives, provided it remains anchored in ethical guidance. The cautious integration of media aligns with



the cultural negotiation described by Muchimah et al., (2024), where ritual and modern tools are reinterpreted without eroding religious values. Similarly, initiatives in art and photography resonate with the aesthetic dimension of Islamic learning that Fatchiatuzahro et al., (2024) associate with creative religious communication. This indicates that the *dayah* environment, though traditional, is capable of engaging digital and creative literacy in an ethically grounded manner.

Leadership remains an essential mediating factor in these processes. The findings reaffirm that charismatic and moral leadership among *teungku* ensures institutional stability and coherence, corresponding with the observations of Hariadi et al., (2025) and Supriani et al., (2023) regarding the role of moral leadership in shaping students' values. Leadership at the *dayah* is not managerial in the conventional sense but rooted in service, example, and community legitimacy. This characteristic distinguishes the *dayah* system from secular schools while allowing it to sustain continuity between spiritual authority and educational practice.

When viewed from an interdisciplinary and global perspective, the experiential ecology of Acehnese *dayah* contributes to ongoing discussions on the contextualization of education in faith-based systems. The integration of spirituality, social participation, and institutional mediation parallels discussions on ethical and ecological education within Islam, as explored by Haris et al., (2024) and Nur et al., (2025), where human development is seen as part of a moral ecology linking knowledge, environment, and community responsibility. The *dayah* thus exemplifies a form of experiential education that speaks to global debates on sustainability, moral citizenship, and values-based learning. Its model demonstrates that faith-oriented education can engage with contemporary character, leadership, and ethics discourses while preserving local authenticity.

Globally, these findings position the Acehnese *dayah* within the wider conversation on experiential and transformative education. The *dayah's* approach resonates with efforts in other regions to harmonize tradition and innovation (Bano, 2010; Moazzen, 2024; Cochrane, 2021). In the context of

international education, this study contributes a Southern perspective to the discourse on constructivist and community-based learning—demonstrating how experiential learning can flourish in religious settings through the integration of collective practice, authority, and reflection. By emphasizing values of trust, service, and cooperation, the Acehnese *dayah* model offers insights for educators globally on how moral and social capital can be cultivated alongside cognitive growth (Tabrani ZA et al., 2021).

Building on this perspective, the Acehnese *dayah* experience provides a meaningful contribution to the global discourse on how faith-based and community-rooted education systems can respond to the challenges of modernity without eroding their foundational values. Its integrative learning ecology—linking ritual, vocational practice, and institutional cooperation—illustrates that moral formation and skill development can evolve in symbiosis rather than tension. This resonates with emerging discussions in international education that emphasize the balance between spiritual intelligence, socio-emotional learning, and sustainable development goals. In a world where education increasingly prioritizes instrumental and market-oriented outcomes, the *dayah* reminds us that learning grounded in ethical purpose and communal responsibility can cultivate resilience, empathy, and intercultural understanding. Therefore, the *dayah* model is not merely a local educational form but a global moral reference point—contributing to a broader vision of education as a transformative, value-driven, and socially responsive enterprise.

Theoretically, this study expands the conceptual reach of Kolb's experiential learning by situating it within a faith-based communal structure. It suggests that learning through experience does not have to center on individual reflection alone but can be socially mediated through shared authority, mutual accountability, and collective spirituality. This perspective enriches the broader theory of experiential learning and aligns with the argument of Haryanto et al., (2024) that Islamic educational institutions can serve as bridges between religious tradition and scientific rationality. Moreover, it reinforces the proposition that experiential education remains relevant across diverse cultural and epistemological contexts when localized appropriately.



Despite these contributions, this research has several limitations. The study was limited to two *dayah* in Aceh with fifteen participants; thus, the findings cannot be generalized to represent all forms of Islamic education in Indonesia. The qualitative approach, while offering depth and contextual understanding, also limits statistical generalization. Furthermore, resource constraints, gender-based access, and technological limitations within the studied institutions might have influenced the scope of experiential practices observed. These constraints highlight the need for broader and more comparative studies to examine how the experiential ecology identified here manifests across different cultural and institutional settings.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that experiential learning within Acehnese *salafiyah dayah* operates as an integrated educational ecology that unites ritual, vocational, institutional, and digital dimensions into a coherent moral framework. Learning in this context is not confined to textual transmission but emerges through continuous interaction between spiritual practice and social engagement. Ritual activities—such as *muhadzarah*, *khutbah*, and *tajhiz mayat*—serve as formative experiences that nurture leadership and moral discipline. Vocational and creative programs, such as *Bank Mudi*, the printing press, and *SMK* training, translate these moral values into practical competencies, while digital and artistic practices expand the scope of reflection and communication. Collectively, these domains illustrate how the *dayah* fosters character, independence, and adaptability through lived experience, confirming that experiential learning in Islamic contexts is both moral and transformative.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the global understanding of experiential learning by situating Kolb's and Dewey's frameworks within a faith-based communal structure. The proposed concept of an *experiential ecology of Acehnese dayah* advances experiential learning theory by emphasizing collective spirituality, institutional mediation, and the moral economy of trust

as integral components of the learning process. This framework offers an alternative paradigm to the predominantly individual-centered models in Western education and highlights how moral formation and skill development can coexist synergistically. Practically, the research underscores the strategic role of *dayah* institutions in producing graduates who are not only religiously competent but also socially responsible and vocationally capable. The findings offer implications for Islamic education policy, particularly in strengthening vocational readiness and digital literacy while maintaining spiritual integrity. The *dayah* model provides a contextual example for reforming Islamic education across Southeast Asia through a balanced approach that integrates moral, intellectual, and practical dimensions of learning.

Building on the limitations noted in this study, future research should expand the scope of inquiry to include a wider range of *dayah* across different regions of Indonesia or other Muslim-majority countries to test the transferability of the *experiential ecology* model. Comparative research could also explore variations in gender inclusion, authority structures, and institutional management to understand how experiential learning adapts within diverse socio-cultural contexts. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches may further measure the long-term impact of experiential practices on students' cognitive, moral, and vocational outcomes. Such extensions will deepen theoretical refinement and enhance the empirical validity of the framework introduced here.

Finally, this research reaffirms that education rooted in faith and community can remain relevant in a rapidly changing world. The Acehese *dayah* demonstrates that experiential learning is not merely a pedagogical method but a living moral practice that shapes individuals and societies simultaneously. By bridging spirituality and innovation, authority and participation, the *dayah* experience enriches both local and global conversations on transformative education. Its message is clear: learning that unites ethical consciousness, practical competence, and social responsibility offers one of the most enduring pathways toward educational renewal and human flourishing.



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