

## THE ROLE OF *MEUTUAH*, ACEHNESE WISDOM, IN SHAPING ACEHNESE CHILDREN CHARACTER

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### Abstract

This study investigates the role of *meutuah*, an Islamic Acehese wisdom, in shaping Acehese children character. *Meutuah* itself is widely interpreted as traits and hope that Acehese parents often introduce to their children. This study aims to analyze *meutuah* as a philosophy and moral content in Acehese wisdom; and to examine how *meutuah* contributes to moral formation in Acehese children. Using a qualitative approach, this study collected data from questionnaires and observations. The findings show that *meutuah* is an ideal character that Acehese society wants to achieve because it is associated with good character traits, such as being kind to parents, obedient, honest, and so on. A person who is considered *meutuah* is good according to God and according to society. This indicates that the character of Acehese children is shaped by religious and social ideals. Parents in Aceh shape their children by setting an example (*suri teladan*) and directly instilling good moral values in them.

**Keywords:** *meutuah*; Acehese wisdom; children character; Islamic education; character formation

### INTRODUCTION

*Meutuah* is a term that is familiar to the people of Aceh. Since ancient times, the people of Aceh have used this term as a prayer and wish when meeting children or babies. *Meutuah* is referred to as praise or a positive connotation for the people of Aceh, so that if someone is prayed for to be *meutuah*, others will accept it. Derived from traditional Acehese oral wisdom, *meutuah* refers to an individual who is wise, polite, disciplined, and spiritually conscious—a person whose conduct reflects both moral refinement and religious obedience. In the past, the identity of *aneuk meutuah* ‘a virtuous child’ represented not merely a personal attribute but a communal ideal of how one should live within the moral order of Acehese society. Although it can be divided into more descriptive and representative attitudes, *meutuah* refers to piety towards religion and doing good to one's parents. Some people who mention *meutuah* also associate it with the characteristics of honesty, obedience, and politeness.

However, these characteristics associated with *meutuah* are more often described by older members of the community. Within family relationships, *meutuah* is introduced through the giving of praise, advice, or prayers to children by their parents. In this context, *meutuah* serves as a moral standard for the actions and behavior of Acehese children. Currently, the use of the term *meutuah* or other Acehese languages is more difficult for younger people to understand (Muliawati & Yusnida, 2022). This cultural ideal now faces significant challenges. In the contemporary era—marked by technological advancement, global communication, and

shifting lifestyles—the formation of children’s character in Aceh is increasingly mediated by digital media, formal education, and non-traditional influences. These rapid social changes disrupt the traditional modes through which values were once internalized. This is also believed to be due to a gap in cultural transfer within Acehnese society following conflict (Abdullah, 2018) and natural disasters (Subhi, et al., 2024). Alternatively, it may be because there has been a decline in the number of young Acehnese who actively speak the Acehnese language, resulting in a lack of familiarity with Acehnese terminology. This has led to a loss of meaning and a decline in the role of the younger generation of Acehnese in their authentic culture.

*Meutuah*, as the moral standard and philosophical foundation of Acehnese culture, is a term that needs to be explored and studied, especially by the younger generation of Acehnese society. There is much wisdom to be gained from understanding the meaning of *meutuah*. Moreover, Acehnese society has long had standards of conduct and behavior that have become a social consensus. Some experts refer to it as local wisdom (Kaswandi, Fayyaza, Mansyah, Karim, & Priadi, 2025) or custom (van Engelenhoven, 2021). The gap in understanding *meutuah* among Acehnese children is certainly a cause for concern due to the risk of a decline in social standards and philosophy within the community. There have been several efforts to revive and re-socialize the authentic cultures of the Acehnese people, such as *hadih maja* (Khalsiah, Candrasari, Fadhilah, Praza, & Desiariawati, 2018) or *Rumoh Krong Bade* (Rahman, Amry, & Surya, 2024), which play many roles in society. There are also several recommendations and efforts by educators to incorporate Acehnese local wisdom (Usman & Ibrahim, 2023) into school curricula or lessons (Muhammad, Suhaimi, Zulfikar, Sulaiman, & Masrizal, 2021). However, the values taught in school need to be reinforced in social situations so that students acquire the practical skills to behave appropriately after graduating from school.

In the case of *meutuah*, it is still difficult to preserve its values on a massive and comprehensive scale. The most feasible approach is to nurture the meaning and values of *meutuah* within the family. *Meutuah*, which is a moral and philosophical standard, can be used as a guide by parents in raising and teaching their children how to behave and act before they become proper members of society.

Islamic teachings are also something we cannot forget when discussing Acehnese culture. Islam occupies a central and constitutive position in Aceh’s moral and cultural system (Zubir & Kamaruzzaman, 2022), functioning not merely as a religious belief but as the primary ethical framework through which social conduct is evaluated (Suma, Nurdin, & Umam, 2020). Unlike contexts where religion and culture operate as parallel or loosely connected domains, Acehnese society conceptualizes them as mutually reinforcing. Within this moral ontology, Islamic teachings provide the normative foundation that shapes ideals of character, social responsibility, and personal virtue, which later find their cultural expression in the concept of *meutuah*.

For now, it is believed that *meutuah* has its own philosophy and moral standards that must be embraced by the entire Acehnese community as standards of good behavior. Because it plays such a significant role, it is very important for parents and individuals in Acehnese society to study *meutuah* in greater depth so that they can apply and implement *meutuah* in their daily lives. For parents, *meutuah* can be used as a standard for shaping good character in their children, in accordance with Acehnese values. Saputra et al state that moral character building for Acehnese children through Islamic Religious Education needs to be carried out to improve understanding and application of moral values (Saputra, Saputra, & Efendi, 2025). Similarly, the *malee* character, which has distinctive Acehnese values, is recommended to be

taught to Acehese children (Abubakar, Srimulyani, & Anwar, 2019). These characters can enrich the repertoire of Acehese children in their social lives within Acehese society.

Given the importance of understanding *meutuah* in depth, it is necessary to study the meaning, philosophy, and role of *meutuah* in depth so that it can be used as a guideline for the Acehese community in implementing and reproducing *meutuah*. This study seeks to determine the significance of *meutuah* and its role in shaping good character for Acehese children. Research on character trait has been conducted by Abubakar et al with the aim of identifying *malee* values as part of character education (Abubakar et al, 2019). *Malee* literally means “shyness”. In Aceh, *malee* is used by parents to shape their children's moral character. The results of the study show that the culture of *malee* is used to shape students' character at school, such as *malee hana shalat* “shyness for not doing a prayer” and *malee hana puasa* “shyness for not doing fasting”.

In addition, there is also research by Arfah which states that the tradition of *dodaidi*, a lullaby from Aceh, is taught to children to shape their character because it has moral and religious values (Arfah, 2022). Character building is carried out continuously while the child is being rocked in a swing. This study focuses on the form of children's education through *dodaidi* and the values contained therein. Raising the same topic, Yanti, Nushur, and Anwar analyze characters that demonstrate the sustainability of social values. These characters are religious, tolerance, hard work, spirit of nationalism, social care, and responsibility (Yanti, Nushur, & Anwar, 2024).

This study addresses the character of *meutuah*, which has not yet been raised as an object of scientific study. *Meutuah* is so deeply ingrained in Acehese society that people do not realize that it needs to be studied from a scientific perspective. Although similar to Abubakar's study in that it examines cultural terminology such as *malee*, this study examines other cultural terminology, namely *meutuah*, which has never been the subject of research before. Besides, this study explores the roles that *meutuah* can play in shaping character, unlike the studies by Arfah (2022) and Yanti et al (2024), which examine an oral tradition in shaping children's character from an early age and within the family.

This research is expected to provide many benefits, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the results of this study can contribute to the development of social theory, anthropology, and early childhood education. Practically, the results of this study can be used as a basis for formulating community strategies to deepen culture, especially the authentic character of Aceh, such as *meutuah*. This study contributes to the documentation of *meutuah* as Acehese mindset and wisdom.

From the above explanations, the objectives of this study are as follows: to analyze *meutuah* as a philosophy and moral content in Acehese wisdom; and to examine how *meutuah* contributes to moral formation in Acehese children.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a mixed-method research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the role of *meutuah* as Acehese wisdom in shaping children's character. The mixed-method design was selected to capture both the measurable patterns of respondents' perceptions and the deeper meanings attached to *meutuah* as lived moral practice within Acehese society. The combination of numerical trends and thematic interpretation enabled a comprehensive understanding of *meutuah* as both a cultural concept and a moral framework.

### **Research Design**

The research adopted a descriptive mixed-method design. Quantitative data were used to identify the level of recognition, agreement, and perceived influence of *meutuah* among Acehese respondents, while qualitative data were employed to explore how *meutuah* is understood, practiced, and transmitted in everyday life. This design allowed the study to analyze *meutuah* not only as an abstract moral ideal but also as an embodied cultural practice shaped by religion, language, and social norms.

### **Participants and Data Sources**

The participants consisted of 191 respondents who identified as Acehese or of Acehese descent. They were recruited through online distribution of questionnaires to ensure broader access and participation. The respondents varied in age, educational background, and social roles, enabling the study to capture diverse perspectives on *meutuah*. The primary data source was a single online questionnaire containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions related to respondents' understanding, experiences, and evaluation of *meutuah*.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data were collected through an online questionnaire designed with two main components. The closed-ended items measured respondents' level of agreement regarding the moral, religious, and social dimensions of *meutuah*. The open-ended questions invited respondents to explain their personal interpretations, experiences, and observations related to *meutuah* in daily life and family upbringing. This approach allowed participants to express culturally grounded meanings beyond predefined categories.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The closed-ended questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify dominant patterns and tendencies in respondents' perceptions. The open-ended responses were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to moral values, religious beliefs, parental roles, and character formation. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided triangulation and strengthened the validity of the interpretation.

## **FINDINGS**

This section presents the findings derived from quantitative and qualitative analyses. The findings address the research objectives by demonstrating how *meutuah* is understood, valued, and practiced as a moral ideal in Acehese society. Overall, the results indicate that *meutuah* remains a living moral framework that continues to influence character formation despite social and technological changes.

### The Meaning of Meutuah as Acehese Moral Wisdom

The findings reveal that *meutuah* is widely recognized as a set of moral and religious values embedded in Acehese culture. Most respondents associated *meutuah* with obedience, politeness, honesty, devotion to parents, and religious piety. Quantitative results show a high level of agreement that a person considered *meutuah* is viewed positively both by society and by God, indicating the integration of social norms and Islamic values.

Qualitative responses further illustrate that *meutuah* is understood not merely as personal virtue but as a moral identity shaped through family upbringing and communal expectations. Respondents emphasized that *meutuah* reflects spiritual integrity and social responsibility rather than individual achievement alone.

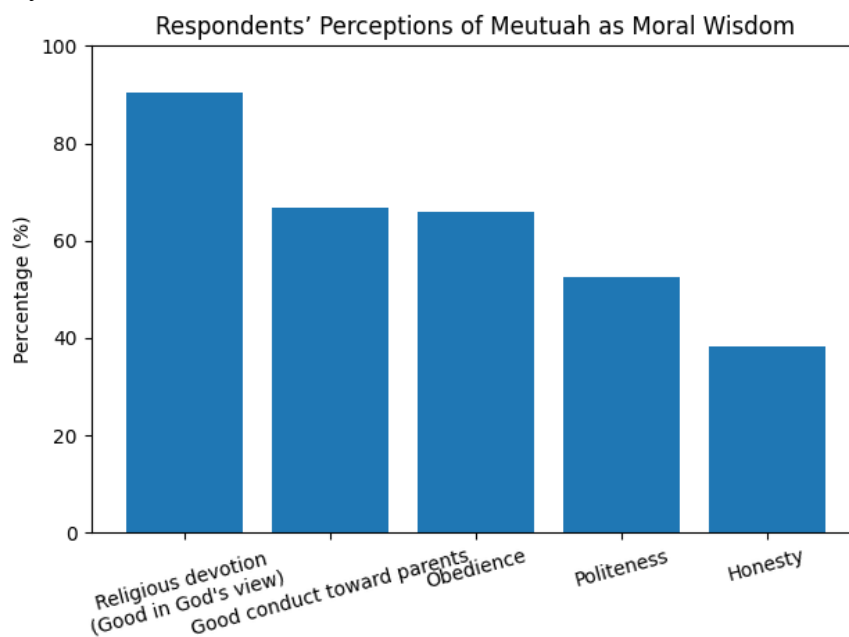


Figure 1. Respondents' perceptions of *meutuah* as moral wisdom

Figure 1 visualizes respondents' perceptions of *meutuah* as a moral and religious ideal embedded in Acehese culture. The figure shows that religious devotion—reflected in being regarded as good in God's view—emerges as the most dominant indicator of *meutuah*. This finding confirms that *meutuah* is primarily grounded in Islamic moral values, where spiritual integrity serves as the core measure of moral worth.

In addition, strong emphasis on good conduct toward parents, obedience, and politeness illustrates that *meutuah* is closely associated with social ethics and interpersonal responsibility. These attributes highlight the integration of religious piety with social norms, indicating that *meutuah* functions as a moral bridge between divine accountability and communal expectations. Honesty, although ranked slightly lower, remains an essential component of *meutuah*, reinforcing its role as a holistic moral framework rather than a single virtue.

Overall, the figure supports both quantitative and qualitative findings by demonstrating that *meutuah* is not perceived merely as an individual moral trait, but as a culturally constructed moral identity shaped through family upbringing and communal values. The dominance of religious and relational indicators over material or achievement-based traits further affirms that *meutuah* reflects spiritual responsibility and social harmony rather than personal success alone.

## **Meutuah in Shaping Acehese Children's Character**

The findings indicate that *meutuah* shapes Acehese children's character primarily through habituation and lived example rather than formal moral instruction. Moral learning is embedded in everyday practices, where children internalize values through respectful speech, modest behavior, obedience to parents, and consistent adherence to religious obligations. Many respondents emphasized that character education occurs naturally in daily life, stating that children "learn by seeing and imitating" how parents and elders behave, rather than through explicit moral lectures.

Parents play a central role as moral exemplars who embody *meutuah* in their interactions with family members and the wider community. Qualitative responses repeatedly highlighted the importance of parental modeling, with respondents stressing that becoming *meutuah* begins "from the closest family environment" and that children tend to mirror what parents practice in their daily conduct. Several respondents explicitly stated that explaining moral values is less effective than demonstrating them, reinforcing the view that *meutuah* is transmitted through example (*suri teladan*) rather than verbal instruction alone.

Furthermore, qualitative data reveal that *meutuah* functions as a moral regulator through linguistic and emotional reinforcement. Many respondents reported intentionally using the term *meutuah* when addressing children, even in corrective situations, viewing the word as both moral encouragement and prayer. Statements such as calling children *aneuk meutuah* were described as a strategy to instill positive self-identification, where repeated verbal affirmation helps children associate good behavior with moral worth. This finding demonstrates that *meutuah* operates as a performative speech act, where language actively shapes moral awareness and behavior.

In addition to positive reinforcement, *meutuah* also serves as a mechanism of boundary maintenance within Acehese society. Respondents noted that behaviors perceived as disrespectful—such as rude speech, disobedience, or neglect of religious duties—are met with social correction or subtle sanctioning, often through culturally embedded expressions and advice. This dual mechanism of praise and sanction allows *meutuah* to guide children toward acceptable conduct while fostering self-regulation. Rather than functioning as a rigid moral code, *meutuah* adapts to everyday contexts while maintaining its core religious and cultural values, thereby shaping children's character through an integrated system of habituation, language, and communal moral expectations.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Religious Devotion and Communal Harmony**

The findings of this study demonstrate that *meutuah* continues to function as a central moral framework in Acehese society, integrating Islamic values with deeply rooted social norms. The strong association between *meutuah* and religious devotion, obedience, politeness, honesty, and respect indicates that moral identity in Aceh is constructed through the inseparable relationship between spirituality and social conduct. This supports the view that indigenous moral concepts often operate as holistic systems, where moral goodness is evaluated not only by individual behavior but also by one's alignment with religious obligations and communal expectations.

*Meutuah* still exerts significant influence in shaping Acehese social life, particularly as a behavioral norm emphasizing caution and communal harmony. This

shows that *meutuah* are both personal discipline and social empathy could serve as a strategic bridge between traditional wisdom and contemporary character education.

Religious devotion and communal harmony dimensions form the moral architecture through which *meutuah* acquires meaning, legitimacy, and social efficacy. Understanding *meutuah* as a philosophy therefore requires situating it at the intersection of inward piety and outward social conduct—an integration that reflects the Acehese moral worldview in which ethical life is simultaneously accountable to God and responsive to the community

The prominence of religious piety as the most dominant indicator of *meutuah* highlights the theocentric nature of Acehese moral reasoning. Being considered *meutuah* is closely tied to how individuals are perceived both by society and by God, reflecting an ethical orientation in which divine accountability reinforces social morality. This finding resonates with broader discussions on Islamic moral education, which emphasize that moral values are not purely secular constructs but are grounded in spiritual consciousness. However, this study adds nuance by showing that such values are not imposed formally but are organically maintained through cultural practices and daily interactions.

Religious devotion constitutes the ontological and ethical foundation of *meutuah*. In Acehese society, moral worth is ultimately measured by one's alignment with divine principles, such as honesty, obedience to parents, and obedience to religious obligations. *Meutuah* embodies these principles by translating them into culturally intelligible forms of conduct—careful speech, humility, restraint, and moral vigilance. As a philosophical concept, *meutuah* presupposes that ethical behavior is not sustained by social surveillance alone but by internalized spiritual accountability.

This internal moral orientation is crucial to Acehese wisdom. A person is considered *meutuah* not merely because they conform to social expectations, but because their behavior reflects sincerity and awareness of divine judgment. Religious devotion thus functions as the source of moral motivation, shaping ethical consistency even in the absence of external control. For children, this devotion instills a sense of self-regulation rooted in faith, allowing moral behavior to persist across contexts. Philosophically, this positions *meutuah* as a value system grounded in metaphysical accountability rather than pragmatic social compliance.

Furthermore, religious devotion ensures the moral durability of *meutuah*. While social norms may shift in response to modernization, the religious principles embedded within *meutuah* provide a stable ethical core that allows the concept to adapt without losing normative force. In this sense, *meutuah* operates as a culturally localized moral philosophy that derives universality from Islamic ethics while retaining contextual relevance within Acehese life.

If religious devotion forms the inner moral axis of *meutuah*, communal harmony represents its outward ethical expression. Acehese wisdom emphasizes that moral excellence is realized not in isolation but through relationships with others. *Meutuah* therefore manifests in behaviors that preserve social balance: cooperation, respect for elders, avoidance of conflict, and sensitivity to communal norms. These practices reflect a moral philosophy in which the individual is understood as inseparable from the collective.

Communal harmony is not treated as a secondary outcome but as an ethical imperative. A person who disrupts social cohesion through arrogance, verbal aggression, or disregard for communal values is regarded as morally deficient, regardless of personal

religiosity. This indicates that *meutuah* demands the harmonization of inner piety with social responsibility. Philosophically, this aligns *meutuah* with relational ethics, where moral value is assessed through the quality of one's contribution to collective well-being.

The philosophical significance of *meutuah* lies in its ability to integrate religious devotion and communal harmony into a coherent moral system. These dimensions are not hierarchical but reciprocal: devotion without social harmony is considered incomplete, while harmony without devotion lacks moral depth. This integration reflects the Acehese ethical principle that moral life must simultaneously satisfy divine and social obligations. As a moral philosophy, *meutuah* offers a model of ethical balance—disciplining the self through faith while nurturing the community through relational responsibility. It provides a culturally grounded framework for understanding virtue as both an inward disposition and an outward practice. This dual orientation distinguishes *meutuah* from abstract moral ideals, positioning it instead as a lived philosophy embedded in everyday conduct, language, and social expectations.

In conclusion, religious devotion supplies *meutuah* with its moral legitimacy and internal coherence, while communal harmony translates this legitimacy into socially meaningful action. Together, these elements define *meutuah* as a core expression of Acehese wisdom—a moral philosophy that shapes character by aligning spiritual accountability with social responsibility. Through this integration, *meutuah* continues to function as a resilient ethical framework for guiding individual behavior and sustaining communal life in Aceh.

### **Roles of *Meutuah***

The qualitative data reveal that *meutuah* shapes Acehese character not through doctrinal instruction but through embodied habituation in everyday life. Respondents repeatedly emphasized that moral learning occurs through consistent practice and modeling, rather than verbalized moral lessons. *Meutuah* operates as a form of experiential pedagogy, where values are internalized through observation, imitation, and repetition of small routines. This pattern corresponds to Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977)—the durable system of dispositions produced through embodied socialization—that indigenous moral knowledge is performed and practiced rather than abstractly taught.

Understanding *meutuah* as habitus provides a powerful analytical lens for explaining how Acehese moral values are sustained, reproduced, and internalized across generations. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, *meutuah* can be interpreted as a system of durable, embodied dispositions that guide perception, judgment, and action without requiring constant conscious deliberation. Rather than functioning as an explicit moral code or a set of articulated rules, *meutuah* operates as an ingrained moral sensibility—one that becomes “second nature” through repeated social practice.

In Acehese society, *meutuah* is not primarily learned through formal instruction or doctrinal teaching. Instead, it is acquired through everyday exposure to patterned behavior within the family and community. Children observe how elders speak politely, restrain emotions, defer to authority, and manage social interactions with caution and humility. Over time, these observations crystallize into embodied tendencies: knowing when to speak, how to behave in public, and how to anticipate the moral expectations of others. This process exemplifies habitus formation, in which moral knowledge is sedimented in the body and expressed through action rather than articulated belief.

The habitual nature of *meutuah* is particularly evident in how moral judgment is exercised in Acehnese communities. Individuals rarely explain why a certain action is inappropriate; instead, they intuitively recognize it as “not *meutuah*.” This intuitive moral evaluation reflects the pre-reflexive quality of habitus, where ethical discernment operates below the level of explicit reasoning. *Meutuah*, in this sense, structures moral perception itself—shaping what feels natural, shameful, respectful, or inappropriate. Such internalized dispositions enable moral regulation even in the absence of external surveillance, reinforcing social order through self-discipline.

Importantly, habitus is not static, and neither is *meutuah*. While durable, *meutuah* remains adaptable, responding to shifts in social conditions such as modernization, education reform, and digital media exposure. Contemporary Acehnese children may express *meutuah* differently from previous generations—perhaps through online etiquette or new forms of social interaction—yet the underlying dispositions of caution, respect, and moral awareness persist. This adaptive capacity allows *meutuah* to survive as a living moral habitus rather than a fossilized tradition.

Furthermore, *meutuah* as habitus bridges the gap between religious devotion and social practice. Islamic teachings provide the moral logic that legitimizes certain dispositions, while habitus translates these teachings into everyday behavior. As a result, moral conduct becomes automatic rather than performative; individuals act ethically not to display virtue but because ethical action feels natural. This integration strengthens the moral durability of *meutuah*, embedding religious values within the texture of daily life.

In the context of child character formation, conceptualizing *meutuah* as habitus highlights why explicit moral instruction alone is insufficient. Character is formed not by teaching children what *meutuah* means, but by immersing them in environments where *meutuah* is practiced consistently. Schools and families that align routines, disciplinary practices, and social expectations with *meutuah* are more likely to produce children whose moral behavior is stable and context-sensitive. This insight underscores the importance of culturally grounded pedagogies that prioritize modeling, repetition, and relational learning.

In relation to children’s character formation, the findings reveal that *meutuah* is transmitted primarily through habituation, lived example, and everyday moral practice rather than formal instruction. This supports social learning perspectives, which argue that children internalize moral values through observation and imitation of significant figures, particularly parents and elders. In the Acehnese context, parents act as moral exemplars whose daily behavior constitutes a living curriculum of *meutuah*. The emphasis on *suri teladan* underscores that moral education is relational, experiential, and embedded in family life rather than confined to institutional or instructional settings.

Such findings reaffirm that *meutuah* functions as a practical moral habitus that continuously shapes behaviour, speech, and emotional discipline. Through everyday enactments—respectful gestures, modest communication, adherence to social propriety—Acehnese individuals learn to embody *meutuah* as part of their social identity. This corroborates previous studies showing that local wisdom in Aceh is effectively transmitted through lived interaction and participation rather than formal instruction.

Furthermore, the role of *meutuah* as a moral regulator highlights its function beyond individual virtue, extending into communal moral governance. The use of *meutuah* as a form of verbal reinforcement—such as addressing children as *aneuk meutuah*—illustrates how language operates performatively in shaping moral awareness and identity. At the same time, the presence of subtle social sanctions for behavior that

deviates from *meutuah* values indicates that moral boundaries are collectively maintained. This dual mechanism of affirmation and correction enables *meutuah* to guide behavior adaptively, ensuring moral continuity while allowing flexibility within changing social contexts. Overall, the findings suggest that *meutuah* remains a resilient and dynamic moral system capable of sustaining character formation amid social and technological change.

Another key dimension concerns the religious foundation of moral authority underlying *meutuah*. The responses are anchored in Islamic faith. Respondents did not treat *meutuah* as merely a cultural inheritance but as a reflection of *takwa* (God-consciousness). This theological framing situates *meutuah* within the Acehnese maxim *adat ngon agama lagee zat ngon sifeut*—that custom and religion are inseparable. In this way, *meutuah* contributes to shaping Acehnese character by offering a religiously sanctioned moral compass, where faith becomes the measure of virtue. Werdiningsih (2022) similarly found that Acehnese poetic expressions in *rateb meutuah* intertwine piety and moral discipline, suggesting that religion remains the core moral infrastructure of Acehnese ethics.

Equally important is the linguistic dimension through which *meutuah* is enacted and reproduced. Respondents described how the phrase “*aneuk meutuah*” (a noble or virtuous child) is deliberately used as a performative utterance—not merely a description but a formative act intended to shape moral identity. This reveals that *meutuah* operates as a speech act (Austin, 1962), where language performs social and moral reality. In Acehnese social life, utterances involving *meutuah*—particularly expressions such as *aneuk meutuah*—do not merely describe a child’s character but perform moral work. Drawing on speech act theory (Austin, 1962), these utterances can be understood as performative acts that shape social reality by invoking expectations, obligations, and moral orientations.

In everyday Acehnese discourse, calling a child *aneuk meutuah* functions as more than praise. It operates simultaneously as a normative declaration, a moral injunction, and a relational affirmation. The utterance positions the child within a moral horizon, signaling how they are expected to behave and how others should relate to them. In this sense, *meutuah* speech acts are illocutionary acts: they enact moral alignment rather than merely report it. When parents repeatedly address a child as *aneuk meutuah*, they are linguistically performing the child’s moral identity into being.

This performative function is closely linked to religious intentionality. Many Acehnese parents explicitly frame the invocation of *meutuah* as a form of prayer or blessing. The utterance is imbued with spiritual force, reflecting a belief that spoken words carry moral and metaphysical consequences. From this perspective, *meutuah* as speech act operates at the intersection of language and faith: speech is not neutral but morally efficacious. The repeated articulation of *meutuah* thus reinforces children’s self-understanding as morally accountable beings, aligning everyday communication with religious devotion.

As a speech act, *meutuah* also functions as a mechanism of soft moral regulation that mentioned before. Instead of issuing direct commands or punitive instructions, parents and elders often rely on implicit moral reminders embedded in language. Saying “be *meutuah*” or “remember to be *meutuah*” gently invokes a shared moral framework without explicit coercion. This indirectness is culturally significant: it preserves social harmony while still guiding behavior. Such linguistic strategies reflect a preference for

moral persuasion over overt discipline, reinforcing communal norms through subtle verbal cues.

Repeated invocation serves both as reinforcement and as a spoken prayer, blurring the line between language, affection, and value transmission. Through this linguistic mechanism, *meutuah* is naturalized within family discourse and becomes part of children's psychological and emotional conditioning. Such findings align with Lestari's (2024) argument that language is a primary medium for sustaining intangible heritage and character formation in local communities.

Ultimately, the qualitative evidence affirms that *meutuah* is not a static or ceremonial symbol but an active pedagogical and relational process that continues to mold character across generations. Its persistence as a lived practice—anchored in faith, articulated through language, and reproduced through family life—demonstrates the resilience of Acehnese moral culture in balancing the demands of tradition and modernity. These findings substantiate the research objective by showing concretely *how meutuah* shapes Acehnese character: through embodied repetition, moral exemplarity, and sacred meaning embedded in daily life.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *meutuah* remains a living and influential moral framework in Acehnese society, deeply rooted in Islamic values and communal norms. It is understood not merely as an individual moral trait, but as a culturally constructed moral identity shaped through family upbringing, everyday practice, and collective expectations. The findings show that *meutuah* plays a crucial role in shaping children's character through habituation, parental exemplarity, linguistic reinforcement, and social regulation, rather than through formal moral instruction alone. By integrating spiritual accountability with social responsibility, *meutuah* offers a holistic model of character education that emphasizes moral consistency, relational ethics, and communal harmony. This study contributes to the field by highlighting the enduring relevance of local wisdom in moral and character education, suggesting that indigenous moral concepts such as *meutuah* can provide valuable insights for culturally grounded approaches to character development in contemporary societies.

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