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Article

Governing Islamic Education in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate: Religious Authority, Educational Institutions, and Knowledge Transmission

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ABSTRACT
Islamic education in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate developed through a complex interplay of political authority, religious scholarship, educational environments, and textual traditions. Although previous studies have explored educational practices, writing culture, manuscript traditions, and Islamic intellectual activities in Riau-Lingga, these dimensions have rarely been examined collectively from the perspective of educational governance. This study investigates how Islamic education was governed through the interaction of religious authority, educational settings, and mechanisms of knowledge transmission. It employs a qualitative historical approach based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources, including Riau-Lingga manuscripts, royal and Islamic court documents, Qur'anic manuscripts, the works of Raja Ali Haji, and relevant historical scholarship. The findings reveal that Islamic education in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate was not administered through a centralized educational bureaucracy comparable to the modern school system. Instead, its governance was characterized by three interconnected dimensions: relational, distributed, and textually mediated governance. First, religious authority was shaped through interactions among rulers, religious scholars, intellectuals, teachers, learners, and local communities. Second, educational functions were distributed across various learning settings, scholarly networks, libraries, and textual traditions. Third, manuscripts, Qur'anic texts, scholarly books, and printed materials functioned as essential infrastructures for preserving, circulating, and transmitting Islamic knowledge across generations. This study concludes that Islamic educational governance in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate constituted a historically situated system in which religious authority, educational environments, and knowledge networks operated in an interconnected manner. These findings highlight the importance of examining Islamic educational history in the Malay world beyond formal institutions, particularly by considering the social relationships, textual resources, and intellectual networks that sustained the production, preservation, and circulation of knowledge.

Keywords
Islamic educational governance; Riau-Lingga Sultanate; religious authority; knowledge transmission

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Introduction

The history of Islamic education in Southeast Asia cannot be separated from the political, intellectual, and social institutions through which Islamic knowledge was produced, authorized, transmitted, and preserved. Before the emergence of modern schools and state-regulated educational systems, Islamic learning was embedded in a wider social and religious environment involving rulers, religious scholars, teachers, mosques, surau, households, manuscript traditions, and networks of intellectual mobility. Education, therefore, was not merely a process of transferring knowledge from teachers to students. It was also a social process through which religious authority was established, knowledge was legitimized, institutions were sustained, and particular understandings of Islam were transmitted across generations.

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The Riau-Lingga Sultanate provides an important historical setting for examining the development of Islamic education in the Malay world. Following the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, the sultanate developed as a distinct political entity in the nineteenth century. Its political structure involved the Sultan, based in Lingga, as the highest ruler, and the Yang Dipertuan Muda, based in Pulau Penyengat, who played an important role in administration and political affairs. This relationship also contributed to the development of religious and intellectual activities within the sultanate. During this period, Riau-Lingga became an important center of Islamic scholarship, education, and Malay literary culture, supported by religious scholars, teachers, manuscript production, libraries, and intellectual networks. However, the development of these activities took place under increasing Dutch colonial influence, which gradually limited the political authority of the sultanate. Despite these restrictions, Islamic education and intellectual activities continued to develop through scholarly networks, religious institutions, and manuscript traditions.

This historical condition raises an important question that has received comparatively limited attention: How was Islamic education governed within the social and political order of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate? The question is different from asking simply where Islamic education took place or who the prominent scholars were. It concerns the mechanisms through which educational authority was organized and reproduced. Who possessed the legitimacy to teach religious knowledge? What relationships connected rulers, religious scholars, teachers, and learners? What institutions enabled knowledge to circulate? How did manuscripts, libraries, religious gatherings, and learning communities function as instruments of knowledge transmission? And how did political authority interact with religious authority in sustaining the educational and intellectual life of the sultanate?

These questions are particularly significant because Islamic education in the premodern and colonial Malay world cannot adequately be understood through the institutional categories of the modern school. The absence of a centralized modern educational bureaucracy did not mean the absence of educational governance. Rather, governance operated through networks of authority, patronage, institutions, texts, and social relationships. In the Riau-Lingga context, the royal household, religious scholars, intellectual circles, libraries, mosques, and manuscript traditions formed interconnected spaces in which knowledge could be produced and transmitted. The educational environment was consequently shaped not only by formal instruction but also by patronage, scholarly mobility, access to books, religious networks, and the authority of particular teachers and texts.

Existing scholarship has provided important foundations for understanding these dimensions. Zakariya and Oktasari, for example, examined the development of education, libraries, and writing culture in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate and demonstrated the importance of manuscripts and intellectual institutions in the development of the region's educational culture. Their study shows that religious education and access to libraries contributed to the emergence of prominent Muslim scholars and to the flourishing of writing culture. Other studies have focused on Raja Ali Haji's role in the transmission of Islam in nineteenth-century Riau-Lingga. His position within the political and religious networks of the sultanate, as well as his connections with Islamic scholars and the intellectual centers of Mecca and Medina, demonstrate that Islamic knowledge circulated through transregional networks rather than remaining confined to local institutions.

Research on Raja Ali Haji and the intellectual history of Riau-Lingga has also highlighted the importance of his writings for understanding Islamic thought, ethics, political ideas, and Malay intellectual culture. His works should therefore not be

treated merely as literary products but also as historical evidence of the intellectual environment in which Islamic knowledge, ethical norms, political authority, and social relations were articulated. Recent scholarship on his linguistic and textual works further indicates that manuscripts associated with Raja Ali Haji constitute important sources for reconstructing the intellectual history of the Riau-Lingga world.

Nevertheless, the existing literature tends to examine these elements separately. Studies of Riau-Lingga education have emphasized educational development and writing culture; studies of Raja Ali Haji have emphasized Islamic transmission, intellectual history, or political thought; while manuscript-oriented studies have focused primarily on textual, linguistic, or philological dimensions. What remains less explored is the relationship among religious authority, educational institutions, and knowledge transmission as interconnected components of a historical system of educational governance. In other words, scholarship has established that Islamic education, religious scholarship, manuscripts, libraries, and royal patronage existed in Riau-Lingga, but it has not sufficiently explained how these elements interacted to constitute a particular mode of governing Islamic education.

This gap is important for two reasons. First, it allows the history of Islamic education to move beyond an institutional narrative that measures educational development primarily through the emergence of schools. Such an approach risks overlooking the diverse forms of learning that existed before modern educational institutions became dominant. Second, examining educational governance historically can contribute to a broader understanding of how Islamic societies organized knowledge without relying on modern bureaucratic structures. In the Riau-Lingga case, governance may be observed through the relationships between political authority and religious authority, the patronage of scholars and religious activities, the existence of learning spaces and libraries, the circulation of manuscripts, and the networks connecting local scholars with wider Islamic intellectual centers.

The concept of governance is therefore used in this study not as a direct projection of contemporary educational management onto the nineteenth-century past. Rather, it is employed as an analytical category derived from historical evidence concerning the distribution of authority, institutional arrangements, and mechanisms of knowledge transmission. Such an approach makes it possible to investigate education as a historically situated social system. The central concern is not whether the Riau-Lingga Sultanate possessed a modern "education management system," but how actors and institutions in that historical setting collectively shaped the production, authorization, organization, and transmission of Islamic knowledge.

The study consequently focuses on three interconnected dimensions. The first is religious authority, particularly the position of ulama, religious teachers, and intellectual figures within the political and social order of Riau-Lingga. Previous research has shown that Raja Ali Haji occupied a strategic position within the sultanate's religious and political networks and participated in activities that facilitated the transmission of Islamic knowledge. The second is educational institutions, understood broadly to include not only formalized learning institutions but also mosques, surau, households, libraries, scholarly circles, and other spaces in which learning occurred. The third is knowledge transmission, including the movement of teachers and students, the circulation of manuscripts and books, the use of libraries, and the intellectual connections between Riau-Lingga and other centers of Islamic learning.

Based on these considerations, this study asks: How was Islamic education governed in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate through the interaction of religious authority,

educational institutions, and mechanisms of knowledge transmission? More specifically, it examines (1) how religious authority was constructed and exercised in the educational sphere; (2) how educational institutions and learning spaces were supported and connected to the wider political and religious order; and (3) how Islamic knowledge was produced, preserved, and transmitted across local and transregional networks.

This article argues that Islamic education in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate was not governed through a centralized educational bureaucracy but through a distributed system of authority and institutional relationships involving the royal establishment, religious scholars, teachers, learning communities, textual traditions, and networks of knowledge. Within this system, religious authority provided legitimacy, educational institutions provided spaces for learning, and manuscripts, books, scholarly networks, and teacher-student relationships enabled knowledge to circulate across generations and geographical boundaries. The historical governance of Islamic education in Riau-Lingga was therefore embedded within the broader political, religious, and intellectual structure of the Malay-Islamic world.

By reconstructing these relationships through historical and textual evidence, this study contributes to the historiography of Islamic education in Southeast Asia in two ways. First, it offers a more expansive understanding of educational institutions by treating learning spaces, manuscript cultures, libraries, and scholarly networks as components of an educational system. Second, it proposes historical educational governance as a useful analytical perspective for understanding how Islamic societies organized religious knowledge and educational authority before the consolidation of modern state-based education. In doing so, the study positions Riau-Lingga not merely as a historical center of Malay literature and Islamic scholarship, but as a significant site in which political authority, religious legitimacy, educational institutions, and knowledge transmission were historically intertwined.

Method

This study employs a qualitative historical research design to reconstruct the governance of Islamic education in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather than examining educational management through contemporary institutional categories, the study approaches education as a historical system of authority, institutions, and knowledge transmission. The methodological framework combines historical inquiry, intellectual history, and textual analysis to examine how religious authority, educational spaces, and textual traditions interacted within the socio-political context of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate.

The study relies primarily on documentary and textual sources associated with the Riau-Lingga Sultanate and the wider Malay-Islamic intellectual world. Primary sources include Malay-Islamic manuscripts, royal and administrative documents, religious and intellectual writings, manuscripts of the Qur'an, and literary-historical works produced or circulated in the Riau-Lingga intellectual environment. Particular attention is given to texts associated with Raja Ali Haji, including *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, *Gurindam Dua Belas*, and *Bustan al-Katibin*, as well as *Samrah al-Muhimmah*, because these works provide evidence concerning political authority, religious ethics, education, literacy, knowledge, and the relationships between rulers and religious scholars. Manuscript and archival materials from the Riau-Lingga collection preserved through digital repositories, including the British Library's Endangered Archives

Programme and the Khastari Kepri collection, are also used to identify evidence of institutional practices, religious learning, textual circulation, and administrative arrangements.

Primary sources are complemented by secondary historical scholarship published predominantly during the last decade (2016–2026). These sources include peer-reviewed studies of Riau-Lingga history, Raja Ali Haji and Malay intellectual history, Islamic education, manuscript culture, religious networks, and the history of Islamic institutions in the Malay world. Secondary literature is used not as a substitute for primary evidence but to establish historiographical context, identify previous interpretations, and evaluate the originality of the present study.

Historical data are verified through external and internal criticism. External criticism is conducted by examining the provenance, authorship, approximate date, language, script, material context, repository information, and transmission history of each primary source. Where possible, manuscript records are cross-checked against institutional catalogues and scholarly editions to establish the reliability and historical location of the documents.

Internal criticism is used to assess the content, perspective, terminology, and historical context of the sources. Particular attention is given to the intended audience, political and religious position of the author, and the distinction between normative prescriptions and descriptions of actual social practices. This distinction is essential because texts such as royal advice literature and ethical works may describe an ideal form of governance rather than directly documenting everyday institutional practice. Claims derived from normative texts are therefore compared with administrative records, historical narratives, manuscript evidence, and relevant secondary scholarship whenever possible.

Triangulation is employed by comparing evidence from different types of sources. For example, claims concerning religious authority are examined across historical narratives, religious texts, administrative documents, and biographical or intellectual records. Evidence concerning educational institutions is compared with manuscript collections, descriptions of learning activities, library records, and historical accounts. Knowledge transmission is examined through references to teachers, students, books, manuscript copying, scholarly mobility, and connections between Riau-Lingga and other Islamic intellectual centers.

The analysis follows four sequential stages. First, the historical context of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate is reconstructed to identify the political, religious, and intellectual conditions within which Islamic education developed. Second, the sources are coded thematically around three analytical categories: religious authority, educational institutions, and knowledge transmission. Third, relationships among these categories are examined historically rather than treated as independent variables. The analysis therefore asks how authority shaped access to knowledge, how institutions provided spaces and resources for learning, and how teachers, texts, libraries, and scholarly networks facilitated the transmission of Islamic knowledge.

Fourth, the findings are synthesized to reconstruct a model of historical educational governance. In this stage, the concept of governance is derived inductively from the historical evidence rather than imposed as a contemporary management framework. Governance is understood as the distribution and exercise

of authority, the organization of educational spaces and resources, and the mechanisms through which knowledge was authorized, preserved, and transmitted. This procedure enables the study to explain Islamic education in Riau-Lingga as a historically embedded system rather than as a precursor that is simply measured against the institutional standards of modern schooling.

The interpretation is conducted through contextual reading, comparison of sources, and historical triangulation. Particular care is taken to distinguish documented historical evidence from analytical interpretation. Through this procedure, the study seeks to produce a historically grounded account of how Islamic education was governed within the Riau-Lingga Sultanate and how religious authority, educational institutions, and knowledge transmission were interconnected within the Malay-Islamic intellectual world.

Result and Discussion

The historical evidence examined in this study indicates that Islamic education in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate was not governed through a centralized educational bureaucracy comparable to the modern school system. Rather, its organization emerged through relationships among political authority, religious authority, learning environments, textual resources, scholars, teachers, and communities of learners. The evidence does not support the claim that the sultanate possessed a formally centralized system for administering education. It does, however, reveal a historically specific configuration through which religious knowledge acquired legitimacy, was preserved in textual forms, circulated through scholarly and learning networks, and was reproduced across generations. This study therefore conceptualizes the historical arrangement as a form of **relational, distributed, and textually mediated educational governance**.

The first dimension of this governance concerns the institutional recognition of Islamic authority within the political order of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate. The surviving archival material is particularly important here because it provides evidence that Islamic authority was not merely an informal or private phenomenon. The British Library's Endangered Archives Programme collection EAP153 contains documentary materials produced by indigenous administration in the Riau-Lingga region, including royal correspondence, administrative documents, and records associated with the Mahkamah Islam Lingga. One particularly relevant document, **Surat Keterangan Mahkamah Islam Lingga** (EAP153/1/59), is explicitly associated with the Islamic Court of Lingga and identifies a judge of the court. The document therefore provides direct evidence for the institutional presence of Islamic legal authority within the political and administrative environment of the sultanate. It should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that the Islamic Court directly administered education. Its historical significance for this study is more precise: it demonstrates that Islamic authority possessed an identifiable institutional position within the wider political order.

This distinction is important because it prevents the historical evidence from being interpreted through an anachronistic model of educational administration. The existence of an Islamic court does not demonstrate the existence of a ministry of education, a centralized curriculum, or bureaucratic supervision of teachers. What it demonstrates is that religious authority could be institutionally recognized and socially consequential. The educational implications must therefore be reconstructed

through the interaction of this institutional authority with intellectual and textual evidence rather than assumed from the existence of the court itself.

Other documents within EAP153 reinforce the significance of written authority in the political environment of Riau-Lingga. *Surat Wakel Keradjaan di Lingga* (EAP153/1/60) and correspondence associated with Sultan 'Abdulrahman Mu'azzamsyah (EAP153/1/63) demonstrate the use of written documents in the exercise and communication of political authority. These records are primarily administrative rather than educational, but they establish an important historical context: authority in the sultanate operated partly through documentary practices. Written instruments connected rulers, officials, courts, and subjects through relatively durable forms of communication. This documentary environment provides an important institutional background for understanding the parallel importance of manuscripts and written knowledge in religious and intellectual life.

The relationship between political authority and religious-moral authority becomes more visible in the intellectual writings associated with Raja Ali Haji. Rather than treating these texts as policy documents for education, this study reads them as normative and intellectual sources that reveal how knowledge, leadership, morality, and social order were conceptualized. *Samrah al-Muhimmah*, for example, discusses royal regulations, the responsibilities of palace officials, and the ethical obligations of rulers and political leaders. Rehayati (2018) shows that Raja Ali Haji connected political regulation with principles of *aqidah*, *sharia*, and *akhlak*, and related moral leadership to justice and social welfare. The significance of this evidence for the present study is that leadership was not conceptualized merely in administrative terms. Political authority was situated within a moral and religious framework.

This relationship helps explain why religious knowledge had significance beyond ritual instruction. In the intellectual environment represented by Raja Ali Haji's writings, knowledge could contribute to the formation of ethical persons, responsible leaders, and an ordered society. The educational dimension of Islamic intellectual life was consequently broader than the transmission of theological information. It included moral formation, linguistic competence, ethical conduct, political responsibility, and the cultivation of appropriate social behaviour. The evidence thus suggests that Islamic education was embedded within a wider conception of social and moral formation.

This interpretation is consistent with, but also extends, previous scholarship. Zakariya and Oktasari (2020) demonstrate that Riau-Lingga developed significant educational, library, and writing cultures during the nineteenth century. Their study identifies the sultanate as an important intellectual, literary, and religious center and examines the development of education, libraries, and writing culture through historical research and textual analysis. Their contribution is important because it establishes that educational activity cannot be reduced to the history of modern schools. The present study builds on this insight by asking how these educational and intellectual activities were connected through relations of authority and knowledge transmission.

The historical evidence suggests that education in Riau-Lingga is better understood as an *ecology of learning* than as a collection of formally bounded educational institutions. Libraries, manuscripts, religious texts, scholarly circles, and relationships between teachers and learners formed interconnected environments through which knowledge could be accessed and reproduced. This interpretation is supported by the evidence discussed by Zakariya and Oktasari (2020), including the presence of libraries and Islamic books in *Penyengat* and the role of literary and

religious activity in the intellectual development of the region. Their findings indicate that libraries were associated with scholarly activity and that religious education and access to books contributed to the development of Riau Muslim intellectuals.

The term “institutional ecology” is used here deliberately. It does not imply that all learning spaces were formally organized institutions with fixed administrative structures. Rather, it describes a historically interconnected environment in which different sites and actors performed complementary educational functions. A library could provide access to texts; a scholar could interpret them; a teacher could transmit them to learners; a manuscript could preserve them; and a literary work could extend their circulation beyond the immediate learning environment. Governance consequently emerged from the relationships among these components rather than from a single administrative centre.

The textual dimension of this ecology is particularly important. Manuscripts were not simply historical objects preserved for contemporary researchers. They constituted part of the infrastructure through which knowledge could be recorded, reproduced, interpreted, and transmitted. The Qur'anic manuscripts associated with Pulau *Penyengat* and Pulau Lingga provide particularly strong evidence of this material dimension. Rahmawati (2020) documents the existence of Qur'anic manuscripts in the Riau Islands and identifies manuscript copying by Malay Muslim scholars in *Penyengat* and Lingga. Such evidence demonstrates that religious knowledge was supported by material practices of textual reproduction.

The importance of manuscript production should therefore be understood as an educational issue as well as a philological one. The copying of Qur'anic texts required literacy, textual competence, access to exemplars, material resources, and communities that valued the preservation of religious knowledge. A manuscript could subsequently function as an object of reading, recitation, interpretation, instruction, and preservation. Its educational function was consequently not necessarily dependent on a formal classroom. Knowledge could remain socially active through the circulation and use of texts.

The same principle can be observed in the literary and intellectual works associated with Raja Ali Haji. *Gurindam Dua Belas*, for example, provides an important example of the transmission of ethical and religious ideas through Malay Jawi literary form. The manuscript tradition identifies the work with Raja Ali Haji and associates its contents with ethical and religious guidance directed toward individuals, rulers and leaders, society, and family relationships. Its significance for educational history therefore lies not only in its literary value but also in its capacity to communicate moral and religious knowledge through a culturally accessible textual form.

This finding suggests that knowledge transmission in Riau-Lingga was not limited to one genre or one type of text. Qur'anic manuscripts transmitted sacred scripture; religious and ethical works articulated normative knowledge; linguistic works supported literacy and textual competence; historical works preserved collective memory and political experience. The textual environment was therefore heterogeneous but interconnected. It created multiple channels through which knowledge could be preserved and transmitted.

The role of Bustan al-Katibin is particularly relevant to this argument. The work is associated with Raja Ali Haji's concern with language, writing, and literacy within an Islamic intellectual environment. Rather than treating literacy as a neutral technical skill, the work can be situated within a broader culture in which writing

served as a means of organizing and preserving knowledge. This interpretation is strengthened by research on Riau-Lingga's print and writing culture, which shows that manuscript culture gradually interacted with lithographic and typographic printing and that the emergence of print expanded the possibilities for knowledge transmission (Zakariya & Oktasari, 2019).

The transition from manuscript to print is significant for the present argument because it demonstrates that the infrastructure of educational governance was not static. The basic function, preserving and transmitting knowledge, could be performed through changing technologies. Manuscripts provided one mechanism of continuity, while lithography and printing subsequently expanded the potential scale and speed of circulation. Zakariya and Oktasari (2019) show that printing gradually became an important means of knowledge transmission in Riau-Lingga, particularly in connection with the activities of the Rushdiah Club. The history of education in the region can therefore be understood partly as a history of changing knowledge infrastructures.

The interaction between textual infrastructure and human agency is equally important. Texts do not transmit themselves. Their educational significance depends upon people who copy, read, teach, interpret, memorize, discuss, and reproduce them. The historical evidence associated with Raja Ali Haji demonstrates the importance of scholars and intellectuals as mediators of knowledge. Rehayati and Farihah (2017) show that Raja Ali Haji occupied an important religious and political position and that his intellectual formation was connected to wider Islamic scholarly networks, including the Middle East. Such connections demonstrate that the production and transmission of Islamic knowledge in Riau-Lingga cannot be understood exclusively within local geographical boundaries.

The transregional dimension is particularly important because it modifies the concept of “local” Islamic education. Riau-Lingga was not an isolated intellectual space. Its location within the Malay world facilitated encounters among local scholars, travellers, pilgrims, religious teachers, manuscripts, books, and ideas. The movement of people and texts connected local educational activity to broader Islamic intellectual traditions. Consequently, educational governance operated not only through local institutions but also through networks extending beyond the immediate political territory of the sultanate.

The historical pattern emerging from these sources can be summarized as a relationship among *legitimacy, infrastructure, and transmission*. Political and religious authority contributed to the legitimacy of knowledge and moral norms. Libraries, manuscripts, books, and later print technologies provided the infrastructure through which knowledge could be preserved and accessed. Scholars, teachers, writers, and learners constituted the human networks through which knowledge was interpreted and transmitted. These dimensions were mutually dependent rather than sequential.

Table 1. Historical Components of Islamic Educational Governance in Riau-Lingga

Dimension	**Historical evidence**	**Function in the governance of knowledge**
Political authority	Sultanate correspondence and administrative documents	Provided political and institutional context
Religious authority	Mahkamah Islam Lingga and religious scholars	Institutionalized and legitimized aspects of Islamic authority
Intellectual authority	Raja Ali Haji and other scholars/writers	Produced, interpreted, and articulated knowledge

Learning infrastructure	Libraries, manuscripts, books, and later print	Preserved and made knowledge accessible
Textual transmission	Qur'anic manuscripts, religious and literary works	Reproduced and circulated religious and moral knowledge
Scholarly networks	Local and transregional Islamic connections	Facilitated movement of scholars, ideas, and texts
Learning community	Teachers, readers, students, and wider society	Received, interpreted, and reproduced knowledge

Source: Author's synthesis based on primary archival/manuscript evidence and previous scholarship.

The table clarifies an important distinction. None of these components alone constitutes an educational governance system. Governance emerges analytically from their relationships. Political authority without intellectual actors does not explain knowledge transmission. Texts without readers and teachers do not explain educational reproduction. Religious authority without institutional or social recognition does not explain its historical influence. The governance of Islamic education was therefore relational.

It was also distributed. The evidence does not indicate that a single institution controlled all educational activity. Instead, different actors performed different functions. Political authorities established the broader political environment; religious authorities provided normative and legal legitimacy; scholars produced and interpreted knowledge; libraries and textual collections supported access to learning; and teachers and intellectual networks transmitted knowledge. The resulting configuration differs fundamentally from a centralized modern education system.

Table 2. Centralized Educational Administration and Historical Educational Governance in Riau-Lingga

Dimension	**Centralized modern model**	**Historical Riau-Lingga pattern**
Authority	Concentrated in formal bureaucracy	Distributed among political, religious, and scholarly actors
Institution	Formal school and administrative unit	Multiple learning environments and knowledge infrastructures
Curriculum	Formally prescribed	Transmitted through texts, teachers, and scholarly traditions
Knowledge infrastructure	Official curriculum and institutional records	Manuscripts, books, libraries, and later print
Teacher authority	Institutional position and certification	Religious knowledge, scholarly reputation, and intellectual networks
Transmission	Primarily classroom-based	Reading, teaching, copying, scholarly interaction, and textual circulation
Accountability	Bureaucratic and regulatory	Moral, religious, scholarly, and communal
Structure	Hierarchical	Relational and distributed

Source: Author's analytical comparison based on the historical findings of this study

This comparison is not intended to portray the Riau-Lingga arrangement as an alternative version of modern educational management. Rather, it demonstrates why modern administrative categories are insufficient for reconstructing historical

education. The historical actors did not operate a system called “educational governance” in the contemporary sense. The concept is used here as an analytical category for describing how authority, knowledge, people, and resources interacted to reproduce Islamic learning.

The distinction between historical evidence and analytical interpretation is particularly important in this respect. The existence of the Mahkamah Islam Lingga is evidence of institutionalized Islamic legal authority; it is not direct evidence of a centralized education authority. The existence of libraries is evidence of knowledge infrastructure; it does not by itself establish a standardized curriculum. The existence of Qur'anic manuscripts is evidence of textual reproduction and preservation; it does not identify every context in which those manuscripts were taught. The presence of scholars and intellectual networks demonstrates the circulation of knowledge; it does not necessarily demonstrate formal teacher certification. The argument of this study is produced by bringing these different forms of evidence into dialogue rather than treating any one of them as sufficient by itself.

This approach also clarifies the relationship between the present study and previous scholarship. Zakariya and Oktasari (2020) examined the development of education, libraries, and writing culture in Riau-Lingga. Their study established the importance of the region as an intellectual and religious center and demonstrated that education and writing culture developed within the broader historical context of the sultanate. The present study extends this contribution by asking how these educational and textual activities were connected with authority and knowledge transmission. The focus therefore shifts from the existence and development of educational culture to the relationships through which that culture was historically sustained.

Similarly, Rehayati (2018) focuses on leadership ethics in *Samrah al-Muhimmah*, demonstrating how Raja Ali Haji connected political leadership with Islamic moral and legal principles. The present study does not reinterpret *Samrah al-Muhimmah* as an educational management manual. Instead, it uses the text as evidence that political leadership and moral-religious knowledge were conceptually connected. This helps explain the normative environment within which Islamic knowledge could acquire social significance.

Rahmawati (2020) provides a different but complementary perspective through the study of Qur'anic manuscripts in Penyengat. Her findings demonstrate the importance of manuscript production and preservation in the Islamic intellectual heritage of the Riau Islands. The present study extends the significance of this evidence by considering manuscript reproduction as part of the infrastructure of knowledge transmission. The manuscript is therefore treated not only as an artifact of Islamic heritage but also as evidence of historical processes of textual reproduction.

The historiographical implications become clearer when the Riau-Lingga case is compared with later educational developments in the Riau Islands. Arman and Deswita's (2023) study of the history of Muhammadiyah schooling in Tanjungpinang demonstrates the value of institutional history for understanding the development of formal educational organizations. The present study concerns a substantially different historical configuration: a period in which educational activity was not yet dominated by modern school institutions. The comparison suggests that the history of Islamic education in the region should not begin with formal schooling. Rather,

modern schools represent one stage in a longer historical transformation of educational institutions and knowledge infrastructures.

The same principle is relevant to more recent research on manuscript transmission after the sultanate. Studies of post-sultanate manuscript practices demonstrate that Islamic ethical and educational transmission continued through textual and interpersonal networks after the political structure of the sultanate had changed. Such evidence is important because it indicates that the reproduction of Islamic knowledge did not depend entirely on the continuity of a particular political institution. Educational authority could migrate, adapt, and survive through scholarly and community networks.

This continuity provides a further explanation for the resilience of Islamic intellectual traditions in the Riau-Lingga region. Political authority could change, but textual traditions, scholarly relationships, literacy practices, and community-based learning could persist. The governance of knowledge was therefore more resilient than the political institutions with which it was historically associated. This does not mean that the political environment was irrelevant. Rather, it suggests that political authority was one component within a wider ecology of knowledge reproduction.

The findings consequently support a more dynamic understanding of the relationship between political power and Islamic education. Political authority could provide an enabling environment for religious scholarship and intellectual production, but it did not necessarily monopolize educational transmission. Religious scholars and intellectuals possessed forms of authority that were not reducible to political office. Texts could preserve knowledge beyond the lifespan of individual teachers or political regimes. Communities could reproduce learning through relationships that were not fully dependent on bureaucratic institutions. The resulting system was therefore neither completely centralized nor completely autonomous; it was relational and negotiated.

The concept of textually mediated governance captures another important dimension of this historical arrangement. Texts mediated relationships between authorities, scholars, teachers, and learners. They stabilized ideas across time, provided objects for interpretation, and allowed knowledge to travel across geographical and social boundaries. The movement from manuscript to print further strengthened this function. In this sense, governance did not operate only through commands or institutional regulations. It also operated through the production and circulation of knowledge that shaped how individuals understood religion, morality, leadership, language, and social order.

The concept should nevertheless be used carefully. A manuscript did not “govern” in the same way that a contemporary educational regulation governs a school. Textual mediation refers instead to the capacity of written knowledge to shape relationships, preserve normative ideas, and facilitate repeated acts of teaching and interpretation. This historically specific meaning avoids projecting modern bureaucratic concepts onto nineteenth-century Islamic society.

The central findings can therefore be represented through the following analytical model:



Figure 1. Relational, Distributed, and Textually Mediated Governance of Islamic Education

The model should not be interpreted as a rigid hierarchy. The arrows represent relationships of influence, mediation, and transmission rather than administrative command. Religious scholars could participate in political and intellectual networks; texts could circulate through different learning environments; libraries could connect local scholars with wider intellectual traditions; and learners could become subsequent transmitters of knowledge. The governance structure was therefore better characterized by interconnected nodes than by a single chain of command.

This analytical reconstruction also reveals an important methodological contribution. Historical studies of education can become overly dependent on surviving formal institutional records. In societies where modern schooling had not yet become dominant, such an approach risks making education appear absent simply because schools in the contemporary sense were absent. The Riau-Lingga evidence demonstrates the value of combining administrative documents, religious manuscripts, literary texts, intellectual biographies, and studies of writing and print culture. Each source type reveals a different dimension of educational life.

At the same time, the surviving sources impose clear limitations on what can be claimed. First, documentary survival is uneven. Elite intellectuals, political authorities, and literate communities are more visible in the archival record than ordinary learners and groups whose educational practices were primarily oral. Second, normative texts such as *Samrah al-Muhimmah* articulate ideals of leadership and moral conduct; they cannot automatically be treated as evidence that those ideals were uniformly practiced. Third, the digital availability of manuscripts is selective and shaped by preservation histories and archival projects. The available corpus therefore cannot be assumed to represent the entire educational experience of the Riau-Lingga population.

A fourth limitation concerns the analytical category of governance itself. The historical actors did not necessarily conceptualize their activities using the modern term “educational governance.” The concept is employed retrospectively to identify recurring relationships among authority, knowledge, institutions, and transmission.

The study therefore makes a historiographical argument rather than claiming that the Riau-Lingga Sultanate possessed a modern educational governance system under a historical name.

These limitations also identify areas for further research. The experiences of women and non-elite learners remain insufficiently visible and require additional sources. The economic foundations of learning, including patronage, endowments, land, and book acquisition, deserve closer investigation. The circulation histories of specific manuscripts could reveal how texts moved between teachers, students, libraries, households, and regions. Comparative research with other Malay sultanates could determine whether the relational and distributed pattern identified in Riau-Lingga was distinctive or part of a broader Southeast Asian Islamic educational configuration.

The study's main contribution, therefore, is not the discovery of a previously unknown formal educational institution. Rather, it is the reconstruction of the relationships through which Islamic knowledge was historically governed and reproduced. The evidence demonstrates that Islamic educational life in Riau-Lingga was embedded within a wider political, religious, intellectual, and textual order. Political authority provided an institutional environment; religious authority provided legitimacy; scholars and intellectuals produced and interpreted knowledge; libraries and manuscripts provided material infrastructure; and scholarly and learning networks facilitated transmission. These functions were distributed across multiple actors rather than concentrated in a single bureaucratic institution.

The historical governance of Islamic education in Riau-Lingga can consequently be characterized by three interrelated features. It was relational, because educational authority operated through relationships among rulers, religious scholars, writers, teachers, learners, and communities. It was distributed, because educational functions were dispersed across political, religious, scholarly, textual, and community domains rather than controlled by a centralized educational bureaucracy. And it was textually mediated, because manuscripts, books, libraries, and later print technologies provided durable mechanisms for preserving, interpreting, and circulating knowledge.

This formulation extends existing scholarship on Riau-Lingga education and intellectual history by bringing together dimensions that have often been examined separately. Studies of education and writing culture establish the intellectual vitality of the region; studies of Raja Ali Haji illuminate religious and political thought; manuscript studies reveal the material preservation of Islamic knowledge; and studies of later educational institutions demonstrate the transformation toward more formal schooling. By connecting these strands, the present study proposes that the history of Islamic education in Riau-Lingga is best understood not simply as a history of schools, scholars, or manuscripts, but as a history of governance through authority, relationships, texts, and knowledge networks.

Such an interpretation also contributes to the broader historiography of Islamic education in Southeast Asia. It demonstrates that educational governance does not necessarily require a centralized bureaucracy or a formally standardized school system. Historically, knowledge could be governed through the interaction of religious legitimacy, political order, scholarly authority, learning environments, textual infrastructures, and social networks. The Riau-Lingga case therefore illustrates a historically specific form of educational organization in which institutional boundaries were porous and the reproduction of Islamic knowledge

depended upon relationships that extended beyond the formal political structure of the sultanate.

The significance of this historical configuration ultimately lies in its capacity to explain both intellectual vitality and continuity. The Riau-Lingga Sultanate became an important center of Malay Islamic intellectual activity not simply because it possessed political authority, but because political authority interacted with religious scholarship, literacy, manuscript culture, libraries, intellectual networks, and mechanisms of knowledge transmission. When political circumstances changed, these knowledge networks could continue to operate and adapt. Islamic educational traditions could therefore outlive particular political institutions. The history of Riau-Lingga thus demonstrates that the durability of Islamic education was rooted not in a single institution, but in an interconnected ecology of authority, knowledge, texts, and human relationships.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Islamic education in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate was governed through the interaction of religious authority, educational environments, and knowledge transmission. Rather than relying on a centralized educational bureaucracy, its governance developed through relationships among political authorities, religious scholars, teachers, learners, and local communities.

First, educational authority was relational. The Mahkamah Islam Lingga and the writings of Raja Ali Haji illustrate the relationship between Islamic authority, religious knowledge, moral values, and social order. Second, educational functions were distributed across scholars, learning environments, libraries, and scholarly networks. Third, knowledge transmission was textually mediated through Qur'anic manuscripts, religious writings, books, and printed materials that supported the preservation and circulation of Islamic knowledge.

These findings indicate that Islamic educational governance in Riau-Lingga operated through interconnected social relationships, learning environments, and textual traditions. Therefore, the history of Islamic education in the Riau-Lingga Sultanate should be understood not only through formal educational institutions but also through the networks and resources that supported the transmission of Islamic knowledge.

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