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Chapter 4

Recitation of the Quran: Maintaining tradition

4.1. Introduction

Two important identifiers of the Minangkabau people are that they are adherents to a matrilineal society and that they are pious Muslims. Maintaining this identity was a central theme when the provincial government issued provincial law 9/2000 on village administration (*Pemerintahan nagari*). This law was aimed at returning to a nationwide unified village structure, based on the Javanese *desa* to *nagari*, the lowest government structure based on Minangkabau tradition (Von Benda-Beckmann 2007). A return to the *nagari* system would signal a return to their identity. To be a pious Muslim is important to the identity of the Minangkabau people and as a Muslim one should adhere to Islamic teachings. For this purpose, an ability to recite the Quran is necessary. This ability provides an individual with the ability to perform Islamic rituals.

A village prayer house, called *surau*, or a mosque is an important Islamic institution located in the village. According to the *adat* rules, there cannot be *nagari* without the *surau*. Historically, the *surau* has functioned as more than a place for performing rituals and as a center for Islamic learning, it also had a social function; under *adat* rules it was a place where male youths might spend the night if there was no place available for them at their matrilineal/parental house (Dobbin 1983:118-119). However, this function has gradually deteriorated since the government and Muslim reformers introduced a program of modernization early in

the twentieth century (Azra 1990). The current situation shows that this institution plays a very limited role, largely limited to ritual purposes, i.e. praying and other various Islamic celebrations. Its function as the educational center has been transformed and it is now part of a modern schooling system. However, the schooling system has not fully accommodated all the functions of the *surau*. Thus, the idea behind returning to *surau* is to restore Minangkabau identity and also to revitalize the function of *surau*.

One important aspect of the identity of the Minangkabau people, related to the function of *surau*, is being a pious Muslim. *Surau* plays a significant role in this regard as a place of Islamic teaching, including the teaching of recitation of the Quran. Culturally, the essential characteristic of a pious Muslim is having the ability to recite the Quran. This is an important requirement not only for performing the obligatory prayers five times a day, but also for other rituals during, for example, the fasting month. In recent decades, the increasing number of people without the skills to recite the Quran has been a cause for public concern. Indeed, this situation is commonly seen as an indication that the identity of the Minangkabau people has significantly deteriorated and might even threaten the continuity of Islam. Thus, a number of local authorities and other public figures advocated a plan to restore this identity using a legal approach, i.e. issuing provincial and regional/municipal laws aimed at introducing new subjects into schools, including recitation of the Quran.

This chapter presents those provincial and regional/municipal laws concerning Quranic recitation. It attempts to answer three questions: How is recitation of the Quran regulated? To what extent is the provincial, regional/municipal law applied? What is the implication of the law for other Islamic institutions? In order to answer these questions, this chapter is divided into seven sections: 1) rules on recitation of the Quran; 2) recitation of the Quran in the Muslim world; 3) the Indonesian government's policy on this theme; 4) Quranic recitation within

Minangkabau society; 5) the contents of provincial, regional/municipal law on this issue; 6) actual practice of Quranic recitation in Padang, including *SD plus*, recitation of the Quran in elementary schools, public response, and its impact on Quranic education institutions; and finally, 7) conclusions relating to the topic of this chapter are presented.

4.2 Rules on recitation of the Quran

Reciting the Quran in a correct way is an important subject for Muslims. This can be explained by the importance of the Quran for Islamic society; it is the word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad and, thus, the Prophet was concerned that it should be recited correctly for the purposes of proclaiming, pondering and remembering the message of God in worship and in devotional life. It also deals with the desire to obey the Quran through understanding and applying its contents in practical ways in the life of Islamic society. These concerns lead to dominant modes of Quranic piety: recitation (*qirā'āt*) and exegesis (*tafsīr*) (cf. Denny 1980:91; Nielson 2001:xvi). This section is confined to the rules regarding the recitation of the Quran

The Quran was revealed to the prophet in the Arabic language,⁵¹ which consists of several dialects. Traditions (*ḥadīth*) say that the revelation was given to the prophet in seven dialects (*aḥruf*) (Wensinck 1927:130). Muslim scholars have different opinions on the meaning of seven dialects. One view is that they are the dialects of all the Arabic tribes. Others say that it deals with seven issues: noun gender and number, verbal tense and mood, inflection, adding or dropping of words, difference in word order,

⁵¹The Quran mentions this matter in eleven verses: *al-Naḥl*/Bees (16):103; *al-Shu'arā'*/The poets (26):195; *Fuṣṣilat*/Expounded (41):44; *Yūsuf*/Joseph (12):2; *al-Ra'd*/The thunder (13):37; *Tāhā* (20):113; *al-Zumar*/The crowd (39):27; *Fuṣṣilat*/Expounded (41):3; *al-Shūrā*/Consultation (42):7; *al-Zukhruf*/The gold adornment (43):3; *al-'aḥqāf*/Winding sand-tracts (46):12 ('Abd al-Bāqī 1992:579).

substitutions, and dialect references (Nielson 2001: 200). The rules for reciting the Quran (*tajwīd*) aim to guarantee the correct method of recitation. Modern copies of the Arabic text of the Quran contain symbols of the *tajwīd* and complete rules for recitation are also attached to copies of the Quran.⁵²

The methods for reciting the Quran must conform to the rules that are now commonly called *tajwīd*. This notion is elucidated in the chapter *al-Qiyāma*/the resurrection (75): 16-18. The word *tajwīd* is derived from *jawada*, literally meaning 'to be or become good, to become better, to improve' (Wehr 1979:172). This meaning has come to be understood generally as the art of reciting the Quran, *ʿilm al-tajwīd*. Although, this term does not occur in the Quran itself, it was used in the early period. According to a ḥadīth, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalib, a son-in-law of the prophet, was asked about the meaning of the Quranic phrase *wa-rattil al-Qur'āna tartīlā*⁵³ (to recite the Quran in slow, measured rhythmic tones). He replied by saying it was *tajwīd al-ḥurūf wa ma'rīfat al-wuqūf*, an excellent rendering of the consonant sounds and knowledge of the pause. The *al-wuqūf* has come to be known as the pause (*al-waqf*) and this, in turn, developed into *al-wuqūf wa al-'ibtidā'*, the location of pauses and commencement that are important for *ʿilm al-tajwīd* (Denny 2000:72-3). While it is never incorrect to use the word 'recitation' in relation to the Quran, this term is so general that it fails to indicate precisely what is meant in a given instance. For example, the term *tartīl* expresses the precise, deliberate, rhythmic recitation of the words and phrases of the Quran, measuring them out properly in relation to each other in correct sequence and without haste (Denny 1980:97).

⁵² I possess two copies of the Quran, both of which contain the rules for reciting the Quran. They were printed in Semarang, Indonesia, in 2006 and 1993.

⁵³ This phrase is mentioned in the chapter *al-Muzammil*/the enfolded one (73):4.

There are two other related terms: *‘ilm al-qirā’a* and *‘ilm al-tilāwa*. The word *qirā’a* derives from the Arabic word *q-r-*, meaning ‘to recite, to read’ (Wehr 1979:882). A person who recites the Quran is called *qurrā’*⁵⁴ and the meaning of the Quran itself is the recitation. The word *tilāwa* literally means ‘to read, read out loud, to recite’ (Wehr 1979:117). However, *tilāwa* does not relate specifically to performance; that is the domain of *tajwīd* and, to a lesser extent, *qirā’a* (Denny 2000:73).

The rules for reciting the Quran cover several topics. This includes: the point of articulation (*makhrāj al-ḥurūf*), manner of articulation (*ṣifāt al-ḥurūf*), allophones (*ḥurūf al-far‘īya*), assimilation (*idghām*) and dissimilation (*iḏhār*), extended duration of syllables (*madd*), and pause and beginning (*wuqūf wa-al-ibtidā’*) (al-Ḥuṣri 1999:17; Denny 2000:73-4; Nielson 2001:18-19). The etiquette of recitation and compensation for the reciter are also included in these rules.

On the whole, there are three styles of reciting the Quran: *taḥqīq*, *ḥadr* and *tadwīr*. The *taḥqīq* style is a very slow recitation that the reciter takes time for and focuses on complete articulation. In contrast, *ḥadr* is a rapid style of recitation in which the reciter adapts to a faster pace by eliding or assimilating phonemes. This method of recitation is purely for the reciter and is conducted in a monotone. The *tadwīr* style of recitation places finds a middle course between *taḥqīq* and *ḥadr* and adopts a medium tempo (Nielson 2001:20).

The following paragraph presents selected technical aspects of the rules for reciting the Quran.⁵⁵ The rules deal with, first, the letters of the Arabic alphabet and how they are

⁵⁴ In the early period of Islamic history the *qurrā’* also meant villagers (Juynboll 1973).

⁵⁵ The rules are summarized from the manual of *tajwīd* (*kitāb al-tajwīd*) that is attached to the author’s two copies of the text of the Quran printed in Semarang, Indonesia, in 2006 and 1993.

articulated in the human vocal anatomy (*makhrāj al-ḥurūf*). They also provide an illustration of the mouth, throat, teeth and lips with indicators showing where the utterances originate. These kinds of diagrams are generally only included in modern *tajwīd* manuals. Second, the rules outline the manners of articulation (*ṣifāt al-ḥurūf*).

What follows is a brief presentation of the etiquette of articulation of the Arabic alphabet. First is the conjunction of syllable-final n/ن, which has no following vowel (*sukūn*) or marks of short vowels or when doubled at the end (*tanwīn*). This category is classified as *izhār* (clear) and *idghām* (assimilation). The *izhār* governs that the n/ن *sukūn* or *tanwīn* is clearly uttered according to its place of origin if it is followed by one of the letters of *izhār*: ء (أ), (إ), (هـ), ح, خ, ع and غ. For example, *nārun ḥāmīya* is pronounced *nārunḥāmīya*. The *idghām* (assimilation) governs that the n/ن *sukūn* or *tanwīn* is assimilated into the following letters.

The *idghām* consists of *idghām bi-ghunna*, *idghām bi-lā-ghunna*, *iqlāb* and *ikhfā'*. *Idghām bi-ghunna* governs that the n/ن *sukūn* or *tanwīn* is fully assimilated with nasality (*ghunna*) into the subsequent consonants: و, م, ن and ي. For example, *surūrun marfū'a* is pronounced *surūrummarfū'a*. In contrast, *idghām bi-lā-ghunna* governs that the n/ن *sukūn* or *tanwīn* is assimilated without nasality to the consonants r/ر or l/ل. For example, *khayran yarah* is pronounced *khairayyarah*. *Iqlāb*, literally meaning to change, governs that the conjunction of syllable-final n/ن *sukūn* or *tanwīn* is transformed into m (م) with nasality (*ghunna*) if it is followed by b/ب. For example, *min ba'd* is pronounced *mimmba'd*. *Ikhfā'*, literally meaning hiding, governs that the conjunction of syllable-final n/ن *sukūn* or *tanwīn* is pronounced with nasality (*ghunna*) if it is followed by a number of consonants, *huruf al-ikhfā'*. These are: t/ت, th/ث, j/ج, d/د, dh/ذ, z/ز, s/س, sh/ش, ṣ/ص, ḍ/ض, ṭ/ط, ḏ/ظ, f/ف, q/ق, k/ك. For example, *min ṭīn* is uttered *minṭīn*. The effect of n/ن and *ghunnah* in the cases of *ikhfā'*, *iqlāb* and *idghām* and the doubling in

idghām and the double *n/ن* into *m/م* (م), is to prolong the duration and to change the timbre.

Second is the conjunction of syllable-final *m/م*, which has no following vowel (*sukūn*). This category consists of *ikhfā' shafawī*, *idghām mutamāthilayn* and *izhār shafawī*. *Ikhfā' shafawī* governs whether the conjunction of the syllable-final *m/م* *sukūn* is uttered with nasality if it is followed by the consonant *b/ب*. For instance, *tarmīhim bi-hijāratin* is pronounced *tarmīhimbiḥijāratin*. *Idghām mutamāthilayn* governs whether the conjunction of syllable-final *m/م* *sukūn* is assimilated to the following consonant *m/م* with nasality. For example, *innahā 'alayhim mu'ṣada* is pronounced *innahā 'alayhimmu'ṣada*. *Izhār shafawī* governs that the conjunction of syllable-final *m/م* *sukūn* is clearly voiced in its original place without nasality if it is followed by any Arabic letter with the exception of the consonants *m/م* and *n/ن*. For instance, *alam nashrah* is voiced *alamnashrah*.

The third rule of etiquette concerns the consonants *m/م* and *n/ن* with *tashdīd* (ّ), which is marked over a double consonant and the letter's repletion saved. It governs that the consonants *m/م* and *n/ن* with *tashdīd* (ّ) are voiced with nasality and prolonged with two *madd*.⁵⁶ For example, *'amma yatasā'alūn* is pronounced *'ammmayatasā'alūn*. The fourth rule relates to *qalqala*. This is defined as vibrating the place of articulation so that a strong form is heard. This is the insertion of *ə* (*schwa*) for the consonants *ب, ج, د, ط* and *ق*, and is commonly called *hurūf al-qalqala*.

Another important rule concerns the pause and the beginning and the etiquette of recitation. The location of pauses and commencement are symbolized by seven marks: *م* is the sign for an obligated pause (*al-waqaf lāzim*); *لا* is the sign for a prohibited

⁵⁶ *Madd* is the length of a voiced consonant. The length of *madd* varies between one and six *madd*.

pause (*'adam al-waqaf*); قلى is the sign that suggests it is better to pause than to continue (*al-waqaf 'awlā*); صلى is the sign that suggests it is better to continue than to pause (*al-waşlu 'awlā*); ج is the sign that indicates that to continue or to pause is optional (*waqaf jaiz*); .: .: are two separated signs that indicate that it is permissible to pause in one of the signs, but it is not allowed to pause between the two (*waqaf mu'anaqa*); and finally, ع is the sign for the end of a chapter (*şūra*) or a particular verse (*āyat*) (*rukū'*).

The etiquette of recitation of the Quran consists of six points. They are: an ablution should be performed before the recitation; the recitation should be conducted in a clean place and that a mosque is the best place for the recitation; the reciter should be wearing clean and tidy clothes, facing *qibla* (*ka'ba*); reciting the prayer that is called *basmala*; that is: *Allāhumma aftaḥ-lanā ḥikmata-ka wa-nshur 'alaynā raḥmati-ka min khazā'ini raḥmati-ka yā 'arḥam al-raḥīmīn*; starting with reciting *a'ūdhu bi-llāhi min al-shayṭān al-rajīm* (I seek refuge in God from the accused satan) that is called *ta'awwudh* (seeking protection) and *bi-smi llāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* (in the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful). The ritual should end with reciting *şadaqa llāhu l-'aẓīm* (God the Mighty has spoken truly) (al-Ghazālī n.d; al-Suyūṭī 1967).

It is important to make a final remark regarding the above rules, and that is that in actual practice the rules are a supplementary text in the process of learning to recite the Quran. The most important method for applying the rules is through direct transmission from a teacher to student. Thus, without a teacher it is almost impossible to learn the art of reciting the Quran.

4.3 Recitation of the Quran in the Muslim world

As we have established, having the skill to recite the Quran in a correct way is essential for every Muslim, whether or not they are native Arabic speakers. This is not only because recitation of the

Quran is a ritual itself, but also because this skill is required in order to successfully perform other rituals; for example, for performing prayer five times a day. Thus, this skill has become the foremost concern of pious Muslim individuals, families and society. Indeed, religious study usually begins with learning to recite and read the Quran.

Across the Muslim world, the recitation of the Quran has remained the model for elementary religious education. In Arabic speaking countries, like Egypt (Starrett 1998; Nielson 2001) and Morocco (Eickelman 1985), the recitation of the Quran often takes place in a small school known as a *kuttāb* or *maktab*. In Egypt, the *kuttāb* is small local institution for the memorization of the Quran in which students are taught basic reading and writing skills (Starrett 1998:27). As a country where Islam is the state religion and Arabic its official language, the government of Egypt is obligated by the Constitution and by Law no.139 of 1981 to teach the recitation of the Quran in educational institutions, and to encourage the home environment and society to promote such skills. Consequently, the government has introduced the recitation and memorization of the Quran in schools and it regularly organizes competitions for the recital of the Quran (Starrett 1998:118; Nielson 2001:136-7). There is a similar story in Morocco where memorization and the ability to recite the Quran correctly and accurately have become important themes in schools where this subject is taught from the first year of primary education (Eickelman 1978:492).

Recitation of the Quran has also become an important part of Islamic education in non-Arabic countries, including in Southeast Asia. Teaching takes place in mosques, prayer houses, teacher's houses and in educational institutions managed by the government or private Muslim benefactors (Hefner 2009:7). In Malaysia, for example, recitation of the Quran was first introduced in an Islamic educational institution in the early 1800s. At this time, students were expected to master recitation of the Quran,

even without possessing skills in the Arabic language (Hefner 2009:112).

4.4 The Indonesian government's policy on Quranic recitation.

In the 1960s, the Indonesian government began to consider the idea that Muslim traditions regarding Quranic matters were part of the government's concern. Initially, the government was mainly concerned with holding symbolic events related to these matters, but gradually it extended its remit and introduced more substantial activities.

The government manages at least two symbolic events in connection with the Quran: the annual commemoration of the first revelation of the Quran and MTQ (*Musabaqah Tilawatil Quran*) the national competition for reciting the Quran. The event of commemorating the first revelation of the Quran was first held during Sukarno's presidency and has grown into an annual appointment in the Presidential agenda. Although the ulama have different opinions concerning the date of the first revelation, there is consensus that it occurred during Ramadan, as indicated in the Quran. The government decided to conduct the commemoration on the seventeenth day of Ramadan, bearing in mind that this was also the day that Indonesia declared independence in 1945. This event is held alternately in the State Palace or at the Istiqlal mosque and it usually consists of three programs: the recitation of a few verses of the Quran by a *qāri'* (reciter), followed by a translation, a speech from a Muslim scholar concerning the revitalization of Quranic values, a short speech from the President and, lastly, *do'a* (prayers, Arabic: *du'ā'*) often conducted by someone from the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

In 1968, the government introduced the national competition for reciting the Quran, namely MTQ (*Musabaqah Tilawatil Quran*). This event was held for the first time in Makasar in

that year (Muchtar 1998:260). Since then, the competition has been held every two or three years and in 2012 the competition celebrated its 25th anniversary. Before the government began sponsoring MTQ, similar events had been organized on a voluntary basis by the Muslim community in a number of cities, including in Asahan, North Sumatra in 1946, in Makasar in 1949, and in Jakarta in 1952. Prior to the 1950s, the organization of Quranic reciters (*qurrā'*) existed in number of regions; for example, in Jombang, Makasar, Banjarmasin, Palembang, Kudus, and Medan. On 15 January 1951 Wahid Hasyim, the Minister of Religious Affairs, established the organization of Quranic reciters, *Jami'iyatu al-qurrā' wa al-ḥuffāḍ*, based in Jakarta. In subsequent years, sister organizations were established in other regions. In 1953, this organization held its first national summit in Jakarta (Halim 2006:168-172).

Today, MTQ is a regular feature of the governmental agenda from national to village level. The first MTQ was aimed only at adult reciters, but subsequent events introduced various levels of competitions. For instance, the 24th MTQ in 2009 was open to adults, teenagers and children. The types of competition were also extended into understanding the meaning of the Quran, memorizing entire texts, and writing Quranic texts, i.e. calligraphy. In addition, MTQ events have also been held by different government departments and private institutions, including special MTQ events for university students, journalists, and disabled people. In short, MTQ has emerged as the public face of Quranic tradition. However, this competition has not been without criticism. Abdurrahman Wahid, popularly called Gus Dur, the fourth President of Indonesia, once criticized the national event for being 'useless'. However, he was not expecting this event to be withdrawn from the government's agenda; he was merely expressing his own opinion.

Besides the symbolic purpose of holding regular competitions for reciting the Quran, the government relates these

events to its concern for Quranic education and how the Quran is taught to Muslims. In 1971, Mohammad Dachlan, the Minister for Religious Affairs, together with Ibrahim Hossen, the head of the Bureau of Public and Foreign relations of Religious Affairs, established a higher Quranic education institution, namely PTIQ (*Pendidikan Tinggi Ilmu al-Quran*). This institution primarily provided training in the art of Quranic recitation and the study of related knowledge (Mughtar 1998:260). Similar institutions were subsequently established in a number of provinces throughout Indonesia, including in West Sumatra in 1993.

A more fundamental policy towards Quranic education was introduced on 13 May 1982 when two ministries, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, issued the joint decree No.128 and 44A concerning this issue. The decree was aimed at improving Muslims' (mainly students) ability to recite and write Quranic texts. This development demonstrated the government's desire to enhance the ability of Muslim students in this area and make compulsory the subject of religion (*agama*), which had long been implemented from primary school to university. The Minister for Religious Affairs followed up the decree by issuing the Ministerial Instruction No.3 in 1990, aimed at providing a manual for reciting and writing Quranic texts.

The current trend shows that the government's interest in this subject has gradually increased. The government amended the 1945 constitution and the National Education System law No. 20 of 2003 in relation to this subject. Sections 12 (4), 30 (5) and 37 (3) of the constitution require the government to provide more space for religious education. Subsequently, the government issued the government regulation No. 55 of 2009 to implement these three articles. Section 3 of the government regulation gives the authority to the Ministry of Religious Affairs – the government institution whose main tasks concern religious matters – to manage religious education at all levels. This government regulation also elucidates the task of the Ministry of Religious Affairs to design religious

education (*pelajaran agama*) and to include Quranic education (*pendidikan al-Quran*) for all levels of education. Section 24 of the regulation defines Quranic education as educating Muslim students to have the ability to recite, write, understand and implement the Quran. Subsection 5 elucidates that the curriculum for Quranic education consists of reading and writing Quranic texts, memorizing certain verses of the Quran, understanding the way to pronounce the letters (*tajwid*) and memorizing some prayers (*do'a*) that are stated in the Quran.

On 6 December 2010, the Ministry of religious Affairs issued the Ministerial Decree No. 16 of 2010 on the management of religious education in schools. This decree states that it aims to standardize religious education from kindergartens to senior high schools. Section 6 of the decree elucidates the contents of this subject, focusing on building the personality of students with the following topics: first, deepening and extending religious knowledge; second, motivating students to obey their religious teachings in daily life; third, obeying religious teachings as the foundation of life as an individual, family member, community, and nation; fourth, maintaining a good personality with a focus on honesty, self-discipline, hard work, independence, self-esteem, competitiveness, cooperation, sincerity and responsibility; and fifth, maintaining inter-religious understanding among students.

These objectives indicate that the direction of religious education will be shaped by the government. Current developments in government policy regarding religious education demonstrate the role of the Indonesian government in shaping religious understanding and this is set to become more significant in the coming decades.

Prior to the central government's involvement with the issue of Quranic education, decentralization and local autonomy meant that a number of local governments had been concerned with these issues. For example, in the province of Aceh *Qanun* no. 5 of 2008 obligates students to have the ability to recite the Quran.

Furthermore, this ability is also obligatory for anyone running for the post of governor, *bupati*/the mayor and members of the parliament regulated under section 13 (1) c of the *Qanun* no. 3 of 2008 (<http://dishubkomintel.acehprov.go.id>). The government of Bulukumba issued the regional law no. 6 of 2003 on the obligation for students and bridegrooms to have the ability to recite the Quran. A number of regions in West Sumatra have also issued similar laws.

4.5 Quranic education within West Sumatran tradition

The history of the learning tradition in West Sumatra shows that it is not necessary to learn the Arabic language in order to learn the Arabic alphabet with the aim of gaining the ability to recite the Quran for ritual purposes. This situation continues in present times. Historically, a *surau* located in the surrounding area of a village played the role of an Islamic as well as an *adat* institution. As an Islamic institution it was the center for basic Islamic training, including for prayers, learning the Quran, *fiqh* and other religious subjects. As an *adat* institution, it was a place where *adat* rules were taught to a new generation, a sleeping place for male teenagers, and for short stays for journeying traders (Dobbin 1983:120; Radjab 1974:23; Azra 1990:66).

However, this tradition is no longer compatible with the development of society, which has been responsive to the social changes and modernization introduced by the colonial government and Muslim reformers. On the one hand, at the end of the nineteenth century, most people adjusted swiftly to the modernization programs introduced by the colonial government, including the system of education. On the other hand, in the early twentieth century, Muslim reformers also targeted the *surau* tradition in order to modernize society. These two factors gradually reduced the role of *surau* as centers for Islamic

education. After independence the deteriorating role of *surau* continued.

Despite this deterioration of the function of *surau*, they have contributed significantly to forming the identities of Minangkabau people, their adherence to Islamic teachings as well as *adat*. Practicing rituals and being able to recite the Quran are two important communal identities of the Minangkabau people. A conversation with Minangkabau people revealed that someone lacking the skills to perform these two things will be stigmatized and no longer seen as a Minangkabau person, and only as an animal, specifically a buffalo (*kabau*).⁵⁷ For most people, particularly those in traditional Muslim families, the ability to recite the Quran is required for a number of events. For example, the Quran is read when a family member is approaching death, or during a gathering commemorating the death of relatives. Extracts of the Quran are also recited at the graveyard during visits before or after the fasting month. Because the ability to recite the Quran is seen as a marker of identity, attaining this goal is celebrated in the villages and a celebration, namely, *Khatam Quran*, will be held. This event is also seen as being a symbol of *mukallaf* (obligated to follow the law). Further, the skill of reciting the Quran is also required for those wanting to get married and raise a family according to the Islamic teachings.

The current situation shows that only a small number of people are still learning the skills to recite the Quran in *surau*. In most villages, as well as in urban areas, this form of teaching has transferred to other places or institutions under the initiative of family members, community based organizations or even the local

⁵⁷To stigmatize one who does not practice Islamic rituals or has no ability to recite the Quran is common among the Minangkabau people. It is spoken of in a metaphoric way, i.e. using the Minangkabau words, *minang* meaning Islam and *kabau* meaning buffalo. Thus, one who does not practice Islamic teachings is no longer part of the Minangkabau people, and is seen only as a *kabau* (buffalo).

government. Families who have someone who can teach the Quran often establish centers of learning, not only for their family members, but also for other children in the neighborhood. Since the 1960s, mosques have gradually transformed into the primary centers for Quranic learning, such as TPA (*Taman Pendidikan Alquran*/Education center for the Quran) and TPSA (*Taman Pendidikan Seni Alquran*/Education center for the Quranic arts). Subsequently, similar institutions were established in most of the mosques in West Sumatra. In the last two decades, reciting the Quran has also been taught in formal education institutions owned by private Muslim benefactors. This new subject has mainly been introduced in these private schools in order to attract new students. It should be noted, however, that this subject is an additional subject, to be taught alongside the religious education enforced by the government. This subject is set up for those students who do not have the ability to recite the Quran.



Figure 4.2. Children learning how to recite and write the Arabic alphabet at the Quranic learning center located in Kampung Baru.

Besides reciting the Quran, theology, history of the prophet, the performance and meaning of ritual, ethics, memorizing a number of verses of the Quran and *do'a* (prayers) are also taught in these institutions. Generally, these subjects are not systematically arranged in a curriculum, but rather are taught dependent on the ability of the students. Various teaching methods are used in these centers, including *metode juz amma*, *metode iqra'* and *metode tartil*.⁵⁸

In short, this section has shown that both continuity and change have been present in relation to the function of *surau* in maintaining the identity of the Minangkabau people. The ability to recite the Quran is still an important identifier for the society and thus is continued in the changing institutions. In the beginning, *surau* was the only institution that maintained this identity, but this function has been gradually deteriorating and it has been transferred into other institutions that are no longer fully under the control of the society. This change has been followed by changes in the methods of teaching. When the government shifted from *desa* to *nagari* as the lowest level of government structure, the spirit of returning to *nagari* was followed by the desire to revitalize the function of the *surau* as the *nagari* institution that plays a role in maintaining the identity of society.

⁵⁸ A handbook, namely *juz amma*, is commonly used for teaching *metode juz amma*. This handbook consists of two main parts: the first part consists of how to read the Arabic alphabet, starting from single letters and moving on to combined letters; the second part consists of 36 verses, starting from *al-Fatiha* (the Opening) and subsequently moving on to *al-Nās* (Mankind) and ending with the verse *al-Nabā'* (the Great event). *Metode iqra'* was initially designed by As'ad Humam in Kota Gede, Jogjakarta and this method soon spread throughout the archipelago. This method is particularly effective for students who have the ability to read Roman letters. The *tartil method* was introduced by Gazali, a teacher at STIQ (The Higher Education for the Quranic Arts) in Padang. According to him, an integrated approach is applied in teaching the students to recite the Quran. This method consists of seven sub-subjects, including reciting the Quran, writing words of the Quran, dictating words of the Quran, applying rhythm in reciting the Quran (*murattal*), *'ilmu tajwid*, and adopting a proper attitude towards the Quran (*akhlāq al-karīma*) (Interview with Gazali, 16/10/2009).

4.6 Local law on Quranic recitation

It is widely believed that the identity of Muslim and *adat* adherents has, at best, been changing gradually and at worst is in crisis. This situation has occurred on the one hand as a consequence of social changes, including the decreasing function of social actors and institutions, including ulama, *adat* functionaries and *surau*, and the increasing dominance of central government in terms of defining almost all aspects of the society on the other hand. When the local government was given the authority to define what is best for the society, it voiced the opinion that attempts must be made to maintain a society in which Muslims in West Sumatra should have the ability to recite the source of Islamic teachings, the Quran. This could be achieved by introducing a new subject to the school's curriculum, i.e. recitation of the Quran. This skill was excluded from the aims of those religious subjects (*pelajaran agama*) that were regulated under law 2/1989 on the national education system. Thus, introducing the new subject to schools was meant to fill the gap between social need and the educational system applied by the government. Besides obligating students to learn this skill, brides and bridegrooms are also expected to be able to recite the Quran. Such a step was seen as a way of achieving the collective identity of the society. In order to provide legal grounds for this purpose, a number of local authorities attempted to issue provincial and regional laws on this matter.

4.6.1 Provincial law

The provincial parliament of West Sumatra was rather late in taking action on the issue of Quranic education. It passed a provincial law on this subject in 2006, while a number of other regional governments had already passed legislation as early as 2001. However, members of the 1999-2004 parliament had prepared a draft bill on this subject in 2004, but they decided to suspend it given the imminent general election of that year and

the influx of newly elected members. The draft was primarily prepared by members of parliament belonging to Islamic parties,⁵⁹ but subsequently this draft received support from almost all parliament members.

On 11 September 2006, parliament tabled the draft of the provincial law. According to the explanation in parliament, there were three main purposes for issuing a provincial law on this subject. First, they sought to maintain the social identity of Minangkabau people, which placed great store in the ability to recite the Quran. Indeed, as previously mentioned, culturally, it was unacceptable not to possess these skills and other members of the community would be critical of those without the ability to recite the Quran. Members of parliament expressed concern that the number of people without this ability has been significantly increasing. Second, they were attempting to improve the quality of people's lives. The Quran states that religious teachings must be the foundations of life. Consequently, every Muslim should have the ability to understand the rules in the Quran and the government has an obligation to introduce this subject in schools. Third, the provincial law is meant to guarantee continuity and reflect the way this issue has been regulated under regional or municipal laws.

The draft was named *Pendidikan Alquran* (Quranic Education) and consisted of 12 chapters and 21 sections. The drafters acknowledged that, initially, the draft was named '*Pemberantasan buta huruf al-Quran*' (the elimination of illiteracy of the Quran), and subsequently this title was changed into '*Pandai baca tulis al-Quran*' (the ability to recite and write Quranic text).

⁵⁹ There are fourteen members of DPRD who are from different political parties: Mahjeldi Anharullah, Muslim M. Yatim, and Mochklasim from PKS; Rizal Moenir, and Syafril A. Hadi from Demokrat; Salmiati from PBB; Irdinansyah Tarmizi, Saidal Masfiyuddin, and Usman Husen from Golkar; M.Asli Chaidir and Hayatul Fikri from PAN; Guspari Gasand Abdul Kadir from PPP; Erwina Sikumbang from PDIP (Adnan 2006:244).

Finally, the title of the draft that was proposed on 11 September 2006 was '*Pendidikan al-Quran*' (Quranic education). No more than half a year later, on 15 February 2007, the parliament and the governor agreed to approve the draft as Provincial law No. 3 of 2007 on Quranic education. This title differs from that of the regional law on this issue, which uses the words 'obligation to have the ability to recite the Quran'.

This provincial law is fuelled by the spirit of returning to *nagari* and *surau* and also refers to national law No. 20 of 2003 on the national education system. The main purpose of this provincial law is to introduce Quranic education as a new subject in both private and state schools. Its objectives further aim to improve the personal development of students and to encourage them to become pious, skilled in the recitation of the Quran, and to help them understand and implement Quranic values. To achieve this, Quranic education is defined as a systematic attempt to improve the ability of students in terms of reading, writing and understanding the Quran. Section 4 elucidates that this provincial law only applies to Muslims, but to Muslims at all stages of education. In addition, this law also states that Quranic education must be applied at both formal and informal educational institutions.⁶⁰ With regard to formal education, recitation must be taught for two hours every week. Further, section 14 elucidates that this skill should also be learned by a prospective bride and groom.

This law also determines a standard competency that is to be achieved. These competencies are regulated under section 13:

- a. Competency for primary school students, meaning to have the ability to recite the Quran, to write Quranic words, to understand certain verses of the Quran, to understand basic *tajwid*

⁶⁰The classification of educational institutions is referred to in Law No. 20/2003 on the educational system.

[rules of pronunciation, duration and dividing Quranic texts] and to memorize ten verses of *juz' amma* [the last thirty chapters of the Quran].

b. Competency for the junior high school students means to have the ability to recite the Quran, to write Quranic words, to understand certain verses of the Quran, to understand *tajwid* and Quranic arts, to memorizing fifteen verses of the *juz' amma* and other verses of the Quran.

c. Competency for senior high school students means to have the ability to recite the Quran, to write Quranic words, to understand certain verses of the Quran, to understand *tajwid* and Quranic arts, to memorize twenty verses of *juz' amma* and other verses of the Quran.⁶¹

In addition, students should have a certificate to prove that he/she has accomplished the desired level of competency and has the ability to recite the Quran. The certificate may be officially issued by one of the above mentioned three education systems. In order to implement the provincial law, the provincial as well as regional government has the obligation to provide teachers, financial support and other facilities for this education.

Other important elements of this law deals with punishment and this is regulated in section 18. This sections also states that any student who does not meet the requirements of standard competency regulated under section 13, cannot be allowed to continue on to the next level of education. However, there is an exception to this rule and that is if the parent provides a written guarantee to the school that their child will meet the necessary standards within a short period of time. If this is

⁶¹ Students in primary school should memorize the following chapters: of al-Nās, al-Falaq, al-Ikhlāṣ, al-Masad, al-Naṣr, al-Kāfirūn, al-Kawthar, al-Mā'ūn, Quraysh, and al-Fīl. Students in junior high school should memorize five more chapters: al-Humaza, al-'Aṣr, al-Takāthur, al-Qāri'a, and al-'Ādiyāt. Students in senior high school are required to memorize five other chapters: al-Zalzala, al-Bayyina, al-Qadr, al-'Alaq, and al-Tīn.

forthcoming, the school is permitted to accept an unqualified student to continue in his/her studies. At the same time, a prospective bride and groom who do not fulfill the requirements for reciting the Quran must delay their marriage for a certain period of time. Further, section 18 also states that the punishment for an official who issues a fake certificate for Quranic education is a maximum of three months in jail and/or a fine of a maximum of 30 million rupiah. Lastly, this provincial law obliged the government to begin implementing Quranic education in the academic year of 2008.

On 20 August 2009, the parliament and governor issued provincial law No. 2 of 2009 on the implementation of education. This provincial law mentions that the education system in West Sumatra must adopt the values held by the Minangkabau community, i.e. *adat is based on Sharia and Sharia is based on the Quran*. To implement this notion, section 14 (3) determines that Quranic education and BAM (*Budaya Alam Minangkabau/Minangkabau culture*) will be taught in primary schools through to senior high schools. In the following year, the governor issued the governor decree No. 71 of 2010 with the requirement to implement provincial law No. 2 of 2009. The provincial government has prepared a handbook for students in the first six classes of primary schools. However, the implementation of Quranic education in schools in some regions in West Sumatra is not based on this provincial law, rather it is based on the regional law that has been issued by the regional government before the provincial authorities became involved in this issue.

4.6.2 Regional law

As soon as the government returned to *nagari* as the lowest structure in 2001, the regional government became involved in a number of social issues related to the identity of local people. Most people recognized that one of the social problems to be dealt with

was the lack of ability in the community to recite the Quran, something which is widely perceived as important to the communal identity of the Minangkabau people. There were two solutions for this problem, firstly, to introduce Quranic recitation into the curriculum in schools and secondly, to require prospective brides and grooms to have the ability to recite the Quran. A legal basis was necessary for such steps and consequently, almost all regional governments planned to issue a regional law in this regard. This section of the chapter presents five of these regional laws, selected because they were the first regions to issue such legislation. They are the regions of Solok in 2001, Sawahlunto/Sijunjung, Limapuluh Kota and the Municipality of Padang in 2003, the region of Pesisir Selatan in 2004 and the region of Agam in 2005.

The title of these regional laws indicates the obligation for various groups of people to have the ability to recite the Quran. Students and prospective brides and grooms are included in the regional laws of Solok, Limapuluhkota, Pesisir Selatan and Sawahlunto/Sijunjung. Meanwhile, the regional law of Sawahlunto/Sijunjung extends the obligation to civil servants as well. The regional law of Agam elucidates that all people are required to obtain this skill, not just students and prospective brides and grooms. The municipal law of Padang only requires students in primary schools to be taught recitation of the Quran. The regional laws of Solok, Sawahlunto/Sijunjung, Limapuluh Kota, Padang, and Agam focus on rules regarding the obligation to learn to recite and write the Quran, while the regional law of Pesisir Selatan adds the obligation to perform prayers. Despite these differences, these regional governments have three interconnected reasons for legislating on this issue: the central position that the Quran holds for Muslims in performing ritual, the position of Islam and *adat* in the community, and the important role of educational institutions.

The main purpose of these regional laws is to maintain the identity of Muslims and Minangkabau people. This can be achieved by ensuring that people have the ability to recite and write texts from the Quran. This skill will enhance knowledge that can subsequently be applied to their lives. For this purpose, Quranic education must be added to the curriculum of all schools, from primary to senior high school. The regional law further determines that the standards of competency required for this subject vary depending on the level of education: For primary school, students are expected to have the ability to recite and write Quranic texts and to know the basics of *tajwid* (the rules for pronunciation, duration and dividing Quranic texts). Students of junior high schools are expected to reach an intermediate level of ability in reciting and writing Quranic texts and to know *tajwid*. Finally, senior high school pupils must attain an advanced level in terms of reciting and writing Quranic texts and knowing *tajwid*, but in addition they are also expected to have a basic ability in performing Quranic arts. Besides these competencies, they must also have the skills to perform prayers and memorize some verses of the Quran. In addition, the regional law of Agam elucidates that Quranic education also applies to kindergartens and to higher education institutions. The regional law of Pesisir Selatan obligates students to perform regular prayers. And the regional law of Sawahlunto/Sijunjung obligates civil servants to have the ability to recite the Quran.

Any student who has fulfilled the standard competencies will be awarded a certificate. Obtaining this certificate is a requirement for applying to the next level of education and they will also have to undergo an oral examination to test their skills. All the regional laws determine that applicants who meet the necessary requirements will be accepted for the level of study it applied to. However, if their parents can provide a guarantee that the applicant will reach the standard of ability within a short

period of time, the school may also accept an unqualified applicant.

In respect of the issue of prospective brides and grooms having the ability to recite the Quran, the regional laws vary in terms of punishment. The regional laws of Solok, Limapuluh Kota, and Pesisir Selatan regulate that a marriage can only be undertaken if the couple can prove that they have the necessary skill. However, the regional law of Sawahlunto/Sijunjung regulates that the marriage may go ahead if both of them give a guarantee that they will learn to recite the Quran. They will not be given a marriage certificate, validating their union, until they have proved themselves in this matter. The regional law of Agam is more sympathetic and regulates that a marriage may be undertaken in all cases and it only recommends that recitation of the Quran be learned after the marriage has taken place. It should be noted here that this requirement violates what has been regulated in the Marriage Law of 1/1974 and the KHI.

There are also penalties for anyone issuing a fake certificate for the accomplishment of Quranic education. In this regard, the regional laws of Solok, Limapuluh Kota, and Padang regulate that the offender will be punished with a maximum six months in jail and/or fined with a maximum of 5 million rupiah. The regional law of Pesisir Selatan regulates a slightly different punishment, i.e. if the offender is a civil servant the punishment will be determined under the government regulation 30/1980 on the discipline of civil servants. By contrast, the regional law of Sawahlunto/Sijunjung makes no mention of any penalty for this issue. In addition, the regional law of Agam does not prescribe a penalty for people who do not have the ability to recite the Quran. Instead, section 4 only suggests that people gain the ability to recite the Quran.

In sum, a number of local governments now obligate people to gain the skills to recite the Quran, although not all regional laws prescribe penalties for those who do not fulfill this requirement. The different approaches to this issue depend on the significance

of this issue in each region. However, an important consequence of this development is that regional governments have to provide facilities for the implementation of this regional law. These facilities include teachers, allocated time for the subject, and textbooks and manuals for this subject. This is, of course, a very costly policy for local governments. Besides the financial implications, this situation has also resulted in the government reducing the role of *surau* or mosques or other private places as the centers of Quranic learning. This contradicts with the idea of returning to *nagari* and *surau*. This matter will be discussed further in the following section.

4.7 Practices of Quranic recitation

The municipal law of Padang No. 06 of 2003, issued in December 2003, is the legal basis for the government to obligate students to meet a required level of competency in terms of reciting the Quran. To implement this municipal law the mayor issued the instruction No. 451.422/Binsos-iii/2005 on 5 March 2005. The municipal government has introduced recitation of the Quran into selected primary schools since 1998. However, the municipal government has been involved with this issue since 1998 when it implemented the *SD Plus program* in a handful of primary schools. Before examining the implementation of the municipal law, this section will discuss the *SD plus* program, followed by a discussion about people's response to the implementation of Quranic education, and then it will discuss the impact of this program on the learning centers voluntarily managed by the Muslim community.

4.7.1 *SD Plus*

The municipal government initially introduced Quranic recitation, namely the *SD Plus* program, in a select number of primary schools in 1998. This program was specifically designed for students in the

fifth and sixth years of primary school who have not yet achieved the ability to recite the Quran in a proper way. The students are required to attend three sessions of one and a half hours every week. This program was put in place for one academic year, thus, there are a total of 84 sessions a year. Although the program is taught in schools, the sessions have no impact on the existing resources available for formal education. Rather, the municipality provides financial support and facilities for this special program. It is the responsibility of Gazali, a member of the teaching staff at STIQ (High Education for Quranic Arts and knowledge), the originator of the program. He was given a number of tasks following his initial proposal to the municipal government in 1998, including designing the curriculum, recruiting and training the teachers and evaluating the program. This program was first implemented in the academic year of 1998 and ended in 2005.

Gazali once commented on the historical background of the program:

Quranic education is non-formal education that is commonly held in Quranic learning centers such as MPA/MDA [*Madrasah Pendidikan Alquran/Madrasah Diniyah Awaliyah*] located in mosques elsewhere in this city. Its curriculum has been standardized and is very good. However, most of the teachers do not have the necessary ability to implement the curriculum. Consequently, the students who have finished the Quranic education in those institutions do not meet a standard competency in reciting the Quran according to the curriculum. This situation is shown in the results of a survey conducted in 1998, which indicates that 70 per cent of the students do not have the ability to recite the Quran in a proper way. Then, I discussed this finding with Zaitul Ikhlas, a member of E commission of DRPD from *Golkar*, and I proposed an *SD Plus* program to overcome the problem among students (*Interview with Gazali, 16/10/2006*).

Gazali's personal relationship with the members of parliament is an entry point for developing the idea of a *SD plus* program. This subject immediately became the concern of parliament and Gazali was asked to design the *SD Plus* program. In short, the municipality agreed to implement it in selected primary schools. For this purpose, Gazali prepared a method of learning the Quran that he named the *tartil* method. This method applies an integrated approach to seven aspects of learning the Quran: reciting, writing, dictating, reciting the Quran in *murattal* (a proper way), reciting with a rhythm of *murattal*, applying *'ilmu tajwid*, and proper manners for reciting the Quran.

The number of primary schools where this program is applied increased every year. Between July 1998 and June 1999 this program was only applied in two primary schools, primary school No. 25 in Kuranji and No. 33 in Rawang. In the following years the number of SD programs gradually increased to reach four primary schools in 1999/2000, eleven in 2000/2001, 75 in 2001/2002, eventually reaching 250 primary schools in 2002/2003. Since 2003/2004 the number of primary schools teaching the SD program has been decreasing, first to 150, then to 75 in 2004/2005 and the program ended in the 2005/2006 academic year with only 50 primary schools teaching SD. The peak of the program occurred in 2003/2004 when the municipality provided 2 billion rupiah to support the program. The SD program gained public attention and a number of private primary schools also adopted the system. For instance, the primary school in Pratiwi has been teaching the SD program since 1999 (*Haluan*, 29/8/2003).

This issue finally became the concern of the municipal government. Besides funding the *SD Plus* program in primary schools belonging to the government, the municipality also became involved in how this subject could be taught at the Quranic learning centers organized by the Muslim community. In 1999 the municipality provided two million rupiah for each learning center in this regard, and in subsequent years the municipality provided a

financial incentive for 483 teachers teaching at 90 Quranic learning centers. In 2003, the municipal government tabled a draft municipal law regarding Quranic education in primary schools in parliament. Within a short time the draft was approved as municipal law No.6 of 2003 in December 2003. Local politics changed in 2004 when a new figure was elected by the parliament to the post of mayor of Padang. The new mayor subsequently implemented municipal law No.6 of 2006 in the academic year of 2005. This saw the end of the *SD Plus* program in this year.

4.7.2 Quranic recitation

When the newly elected the mayor took up his post in 2004, he became involved in the issue of religious education in schools. According to him, the religious education that has been introduced at all levels of education was not sufficient for the students. Thus, he decided it should be enriched by adding other religious subjects and activities (*Interview, with the mayor, 20/07/2010*). In 2004, the mayor decided to hold religious activities for Muslim students during the fasting month and to introduce a new subject, namely BTA (*Baca-tulis al-Quran/reciting and writing the Quran*) in primary schools starting in 2008.

On 7 March 2005, the mayor issued an instruction obligating Muslim students to attend religious activities held in mosques in their neighborhood. This includes religious gatherings for adolescents (*wirid remaja*) and early morning education (*didikan subuh*). The former is designed for students of junior and senior high schools and is held at the mosque every first and third Thursday of the month at 7.30pm. School teachers are encouraged not to give students homework on the nights of these Thursday classes. The early morning sessions are designed for students of primary schools and involve attending the mosque in their neighborhood starting at 5.30am every Sunday. These two activities are supervised by school teachers living in the neighborhood. The curriculum for these activities is provided by

educational institutions belonging to the municipality and the religious Ministry. Besides these extracurricular activities, the students are also obliged to attend other annual activities, namely, *Pesantren Ramadan* (Ramadan School) where the municipality decides to switch teaching sessions from the school to the mosque. At the *Pesantren Ramadan* the students will receive a number of courses including theology, Islamic jurisprudence, reciting the Quran, and other subjects indirectly connected to religious teachings, including learning about drug abuse and other psychotropic substances. In addition, since 2008 the municipal government has also obligated non-Muslim students to attend religious activities organized by their church or temple. The municipality provides equal financial support for religious activities organized for both Muslim and non-Muslim students.⁶²

According to the mayor, the objective of these religious activities is the implementation of a return to the *surau* as the center of religious activities. For Muslims, *surau* is the mosque and for non-Muslims it is the church or temple. Furthermore, this idea is also linked to the mayor's own personal experiences and opinions. He once said:

First, I was inspired by the religious tradition among Buddhist people when I was visiting Cambodia. Most of the youth there spend a number of months in religious places learning religious teachings, aimed at maintaining a religious foundation for their life. We had a similar experience when the younger generation spent their childhood in *surau*. So, when I was appointed as the mayor of Padang in 2004, I introduced some religious activities based in mosques as well as in schools. For instance, I introduced *Pesantren Ramadan* in 2004 and this was followed by other

⁶²The municipality provides financial support of 15,000 rupiah per student and school teachers who organize activities receive an incentive of 25,000 rupiah per day.

religious activities. I expect these activities will establish religious foundations for the younger generation and that we will see the results in the next 20 years. Second, referring to my personal education in sport, regularly performing *ṣalat* (prayers) in proper ways will be good in terms of shaping students' posture and to prevent them from developing hunched backs (*Interview with the mayor, 20/07/2010*).

Aside from these two reasons, the mayor also justifies this policy by saying that teaching the students *pelajaran agama* (religious subject) for only two hours per week is inadequate.⁶³ Thus, the students are obligated to attend a number of religious activities and the BTA (*Baca Tulis al-Quran*) was introduced for students in primary school. He further argued that the participation of the community is required to support these mosque-based programs. Thus, these mosque-based programs are seen as the responsibility of the government and Muslim communities.

BTA is applied in primary schools as the implementation of the municipal law 6/2003.⁶⁴ For this purpose, the municipality

⁶³The total hours for studying religion at school amounts to only 80 hours per year. This number is accumulated from 2 hours per week for the 40 weeks of study in a year. Meanwhile, the total hours of studying Islam within *wirid remaja*, and *Pesantren Ramadhan* for the students of SMP and SMA is approximately 250 hours per year. For BTA, *Didikan Subuh*, and *Pesantren Ramadan* students of SD the number amounts to 370 hours per year.

⁶⁴ In order to examine the practices of BTA in primary schools, data is gathered from two schools: the primary schools located in Kampung Baru nan XX and primary school No.30 located in Cengkeh Nan XX of sub-district of Lubuk Begalung. The total number of primary schools in this sub-district are 38, located in 15 *kelurahan*, with the total number of students reaching 9,616 in 2006; 8,989 in 2007 and 9,720 in 2008. The total number of students in the primary school of Kampung Baru nan XX reached 506 in 2008, and for SD 30 in Cengkeh nan XX it was 825. www.padang.go.id/v2/content/view/291/226/, accessed on 10 August 2011. The main reason for selecting these two primary schools is that primary school No.30 is one of the best schools in the municipality, while SD is considered of average quality.

provides the teachers and curriculum as well other facilities. BTA is taught to students in each year for two hours per week. The handbook for the students has only been available since the 2009/2010 academic year. As can be seen in the handbook, the standard competency for this subject is described as: 1) the first year students must have the ability to pronounce and write single Arabic letters from *alif* to *ya*, and understand a few basic manners in terms of reciting the Quran; 2) second year students must have the ability to pronounce and write combined Arabic letters; 3) the third year students must have the ability to pronounce and write Quranic words. The students are required to have the ability to recite the Quran and memorize one chapter of the Quran, i.e. *al-Nās*; 4) In the fourth year, students should have the ability to recite in a proper way, to write, memorize, and translate chapters of the Quran: *al-Nās* (114), *al-Fīl* (105), *al-Baqara* (2):155-158, and *al-Humaza* (104); 5) Fifth year students should have the ability to pronounce long vowels and to recite, write, memorize and translate chapters of the Quran: *al-Takāthur* (102), *al-Qāri'a* (101), *al-Ādiyāt* (100), *al-Zalzala* (99); 6) Students in the sixth year are expected to be able to recite, write, memorize and translate the chapters of the Quran: *al-Tīn* (95), *al-Sharḥ* (94), *al-Ḍuḥā* (93), *Āli 'Imrān* (3):133-135 and 159 (concerning *akhlāq*), *al-Nisā'* (4):142-145 (concerning *akhlāq al-mazmūma*). This competency is extended from the standard competency regulated under the municipal law.

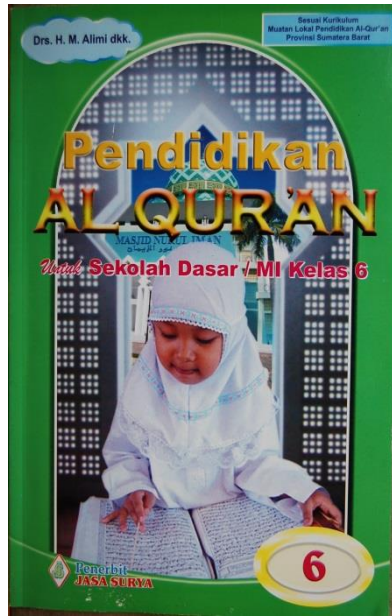


Figure 4.2: The cover of a handbook for students in the sixth year of primary school. It shows a five-year old child reciting the Quran.

The attitude of students toward this subject may be classified in two main categories. The first group of students perceives this subject as easy to follow and have little difficulty with it. They mention that they have learned each topic at the mosque or Quranic learning center in their neighborhood or in their home with a private tutor. A sixth-year student at primary school No. 30 said, 'I always gain more than 9 every semester in this subject, because it is very easy. I learned it when I was five years old. This subject is boring and useless. I think there is no need to learn this subject at schools, this is *mubazir* (useless)' (*Conversation* with a student of primary school No.30, 10/06/2010). A similar impression was expressed by another student: 'I have been able to recite the Quran since I was five years old and able to memorize some verses from *juz amma*. When I was studying BTA at school, it was very easy' (*Conversation* with a student at primary school No. 30, 05/06/2010). Most of the students at the primary schools belonged

to this category. The second category relates to a small number of students who do not have any difficulty in following the subject, but they have problems memorizing selected verses of the Quran and the words for performing prayers. The students in this category have not yet learned to recite the Quran, or, if they did, they lacked the serious attention necessary. One student said: 'I like this subject and it's useful for me because I never learned to recite the Quran in the mosque' (*Conversation with a student at primary school No.25, 05/05/2010*). In addition, many of the students belonging to this category receive little input from their parents regarding religious activities at home.

Thus, most of the students lacked enthusiasm for this subject. According to a number of teachers of this subject, BTA can only benefit students who have never learned to recite the Quran at Quranic learning centers. 'For the students who have been learning to recite the Quran at MDA or TPA, this subject is *mubazir*. But, I am only doing my job' (*Interview, with a teacher at primary school No.30, 15/05/2010*).

It seems that the municipal authorities realized that the atmosphere in which BTA was being taught needed stimulation. For this purpose, the municipality held an annual competition for memorizing verses of the *juz amma* for primary school students.⁶⁵ The competition consists of two rounds. The first round is held at the sub-district (*kecamatan*) level and each primary school sets up a group consisting of fifteen to twenty students. This round is aimed to determine who the best five groups are. The second round is held at the municipal level and the best five groups from eleven sub-districts compete to find the best five once again. However, the students selected for the competition are not those students who gained the skills to memorize the Quran at primary school;

⁶⁵For the best five groups in the first round, the students must be able memorize 12 verses of *juz amma*, i.e *al-nās* (114) to *al-duhā* (93) and in addition the verse *al-tāriq* (86).

rather, they learned at the Quranic learning centers in their neighborhood.

Clearly, the implementation of BTA in primary schools has been a costly policy. Not only because the municipality has to provide teaching staffs for 354 primary schools in Padang, but also in terms of providing facilities and other supporting material for these classes. The facts show that this subject is largely a repetition of what the majority of students have already been learning at the Quranic learning centers. Moreover, most of the students have met the standard of competency before they begin BTA at school, because the standard of competency applied at the Quranic learning centers are much higher than those of the primary schools.

Since 2000, the municipality has attempted to standardize the competency of students who have been undertaking Quranic education at the Quranic learning centers by conducting a test. This test is held every May and is conducted in the Quranic learning centers. The test consists of two parts: a written and a spoken test. The written test aims to evaluate six subjects regarding theology, Islamic jurisprudence, *ilm tajwid*, history of the Prophet Muḥammad, *do'ā*, and memorizing some verses. The spoken test aims to evaluate the students' ability to recite the Quran, words of prayer, *do'ā* and to write Quranic texts. Students who have passed the test obtain a certificate issued by the municipal authority. This certificate will be used as a requirement for the students applying for the next level of their education.

Applying BTA in primary education has been a costly policy, because the government provides funds, teachers, and other facilities. Meanwhile, most students continue to study at the Quranic learning centers. This situation could be explained by local authorities aiming to increase their political reputation.

4.7.3 Response

Since the municipal government has become involved with the issue of the obligation for students to have the ability to recite the Quran, people have raised their response to this subject. These responses can be classified into two categories: supportive responses and opposing responses. Those people who opposed the idea voiced two main arguments. Firstly, the government should not issue any regulation that only applied to Muslims. Doing so was viewed as contravening the principle that everybody is equal before the law (Ali Fauzi & Saiful 2009:35). This opinion was commonly raised by NGO activists.

Secondly, some argued that issuing and implementing a municipal law concerning this matter was not the best solution for the problem of the degradation of Minangkabau identity and the role of *surau* or mosques as Quranic learning centers:

The deterioration of Minangkabau identity cannot be solved by a legal approach such as issuing a municipal law to obligate students to have the ability to recite the Quran. This problem must be solved by a cultural approach, such as facilitating society to solve its own problems, improving the facilities of Quranic learning centers managed by the community, or improving the capacity of the teachers by offering them capacity building training (*Conversation*, with a lecture of IAIN, 05/05/2010).

In addition, they suggested that rather than adding Quranic education to the primary school curriculum, it was best for the government to play a part in improving the quality of the learning process in the Quranic learning centers managed by the community (*Conversation*, with a lecture of IAIN, 03/05/2010).

In contrast, those supporters of the government's plan were many. This support was revealed in a survey conducted by the Freedom Institute⁶⁶, centered in Jakarta, in 2007 and 2008. It shows that 92.3% (2007) and 76.9% (2008) of the respondents agreed with a regional law that obligates Muslims to have the ability to recite the Quran, and a further 92.3% of the respondents in 2007 and 2008 said that this regulation was not discriminatory to non-Muslims (Ali-Fauzi & Saiful 2009:47). Further, this support lies in an argument that the government has the obligation to provide Quranic education in primary schools as part of its attempts to implement Islamic teachings, as guaranteed by the constitution of 1945 (*Conversation, with a civil servant, 05/04/2010*). Another supporter argued that 'It is good that the government is now concerned with this issue, but I do not agree that Quranic education, a new subject, should be introduced in the schools. It is better for the government to support the Quranic learning centers as places to continue learning the Quran' (*Conversation, with a local ulama, 25/08/2010*).

These responses show that the majority of people supported the involvement of the government in this issue. In contrast, it also suggests that only a small number of people believed that the government should not become dominant in connection with social problems and that solutions should be found without the involvement of the authorities.

4.7.4 Impact

The introduction of Quranic education in primary schools demonstrates that the ability to recite the Quran has become an obligation. Previously, it has been a voluntarily initiative of the people. There is little doubt that this decision is a political matter and one initially aimed at progressing the political interests of the

⁶⁶This survey was also conducted in the municipality of Padang.

decision maker, in this case the mayor. He has certainly gained a good political reputation and won the election for a second term as mayor of the municipality in 2008. It has also been successful in terms of increasing the ability of students to recite the Quran. The evidence can be seen, for example, in the fact that all applicants to junior high school No.11 during the selection process for the academic year 2010/2011 possessed the ability to recite the Quran. This situation is different from previous years when there were a number of applicants who lacked the necessary recitation skills. The principal of primary school No. 30 also claimed that all his students from the third to the sixth class now have the ability to recite the Quran. She acknowledged that there were a few students who were not able to recite the Quran when BTA and other religious activities were first introduced in 2005 (*Conversation with the principal of the primary school no. 30 30/07/2010*).

A similar impact may also be seen in those students attending ritual activities at the mosque in their neighborhood. For example, it is common for an *imām* of prayer to be criticized by his *makmum* (follower) students if he does not pronounce the words of the Quran correctly, or if he repeatedly recites the same short verse of the Quran as the *imām* of prayer. Indeed, students are now very outspoken and often gossip about a preacher conducting the Friday sermon if he mispronounces or mistranslates verses of the Quran. One preacher expressed his appreciation for the improvement the students have made in terms of both reciting and memorizing verses of the Quran. He said: 'The program of the government to improve the ability of students to recite the Quran has shown its results. For example, the students may openly criticize the *imām* if he mispronounces a verse of the Quran. I now have to recheck the Quran to see whether or not my recitation is still accurate' (*Conversation with a daī, 10/09/2010*). A similar notion was also expressed by an adult Muslim who regularly performs his prayers at the mosque in his neighborhood. He said that an *imām* of prayer must now be aware of his own ability in

relation to pronouncing the words of the Quran; otherwise he will be a target of criticism from the students (*conversation* with an adult Muslim, 06/10/2009).

The obligation to have the ability to recite the Quran has also raised concern among Muslim activists regarding the fact that it has gradually reduced the interest of students to learn the Quran in the Quranic learning centers managed by the Muslim community. This waning interest is influencing the function of these institutions. This concern was voiced by the head of the Quranic learning centers forum in 2003. According to him, since the involvement of the government in this area, and particularly since the implementation of *SD plus*, the number of students who are studying at Quranic learning centers (TPA/MDA) has decreased (*Haluan*, 22/10/2003). Similar concerns have been voiced by other local ulama and scholars. This development indicates that the government's dominance and power in issues of public life is gradually increasing. Nevertheless, there is no significant form of resistance from the public to this dominance. Perhaps this lack of resistance is the result of the public's lack of power to resist the increasing authority of, for instance, local ulama, adat leaders, and other public leaders.

However, introducing Quranic education in primary schools is not the only factor that has caused a decrease in the interest of students to learn the Quran in Quranic learning centers. Other factors include a lack of teaching facilities and the teaching method applied. A mother who works as a teacher at a university said: 'I do not want to send my two children to the TPA/MDA to learn the Quran. My children would be sitting on the floor during their studies. This is not good for their health' (*Conversation*, with a female civil servant, 20/07/2010). Similar reasons were voiced by another mother that decided to invite a teacher to come to their house to teach her children to recite the Quran. She argued that 'the learning method that is used by the teachers at the TPA/MDA at the mosques here is very old fashioned and the teachers use a

stick during their learning processes' (*Conversation*, with a mother of two children, 05/08/2010).

These complaints appear to confirm the situation at the majority of the learning centers. Most of them are located in mosque buildings and *surau* or *muşalla* (private mosque). In Padang, the total number of mosques reaches almost six hundred and with the *surau* or *muşalla* this reaches almost seven hundred and fifty (BPS 2010:157). Only a few of these buildings provide special rooms for teaching the Quran and, thus, pupils generally sit on the floor during the learning process. Furthermore, only a few of the teachers in these learning centers are professionals and most of them are working there to supplement their income. For example, a number of students from IAIN are working as teachers in these learning centers.

4.8 Conclusions

This chapter shows that the contents of a number of local laws concerning the obligation to have the ability to recite the Quran differ from region to region. Most of them obligate students to be able to recite the Quran, but they differ in terms of whether it is also obligatory for civil servants or prospective brides and grooms. The municipal law of Padang only obliges students of primary schools in this regard. To achieve this, the authority applies BTA in primary schools and obligates students of primary and senior high schools to attend religious activities held in mosques in their neighborhood. Despite the fact that the practices have been showing signs of success and most of the students are now able to recite the Quran, this policy has created competition between the schools managed by the government and the Quranic learning centers managed by the Muslim community.

Current developments indicate that introducing Quranic recitation in primary schools has gradually weakened the function of Quranic learning centers managed by the Muslim community.

This situation became more intense once the central government implemented Quranic education regulated under the government regulation 55/2007 and the ministerial decree of the Ministry of Religious Affairs 16/2010, which elucidate that religious subjects, including Quranic education, were exclusively the authority of the government. Implementation of this scheme appears to be successful in terms of maintaining the identity of the Minangkabau people, as both Muslims and *adat* adherents, who have the ability to recite the Quran and to perform Islamic rituals. However, the role of the Quranic learning centers managed by the Muslim community is gradually being diminished. Consequently, since the start of the twentieth century, the function of the mosque, *surau* and *muşalla* has transformed into places solely for ritual activities. However, further development will depend on the Muslim response to the growing domination of the government in public life. Thus, further empirical study on the issue of how Muslims respond to the increasing dominance of the government in public life is required.