

# Responses of Madrasah toward Social Changes in Aceh Society

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**Abstract**-This article discusses about how *madrasahs* respond the social changes occurred in Aceh society. Why do, nowadays, Acehnese parents are more interested to send their children to *madrasahs*? This research therefore aims to reveal any endeavors made by *madrasah* as responses toward changes in Aceh society and to find out any driving factors that may influence Aceh society to send their children to *madrasahs*. This study indicates that any changes occurred during the early emergence of *madrasahs* are mainly caused by sociopolitical and religious circumstances. Furthermore, the dynamic of post-independence *madrasahs* is mainly affected by government's policy. Changes occurred in *madrasahs* during next periods began to indicate an increasing quality of its education service as the result of regional autonomy and the implementation of Islamic sharia. As the implication, the autonomy of education is now conducting quality-oriented education, relevant with current global situation and corresponds with local needs. To attain this goals, government implement school/*madrasahs*-based management concept (MBS). This MBS concept gave opportunity for each *madrasahs* to improve and initiate featured programs that corresponds with local needs. This is one of many factors that increase society's interest toward *madrasahs*, aside from Islamic education available in *madrasahs*.

**Keywords:** madrasah, social changes, Aceh

## 1. Introduction

*Madrasahs* in the tradition of Indonesia's Islamic education came as a response toward Western secular education system brought by Netherland Indies colonial government and is a result of the rising reform movement in Indonesia's Islamic society. Though historically has been developed since before 10 AD, the existence of *madrasahs* in Indonesia is considered as a modern phenomenon because it has just started in the 20<sup>th</sup> AD. In Indonesia's Islamic society, *madrasahs* as an Islamic education institution serve as a link between the classical, *dayah/pesantren* education system widely assumed as 'traditional' system, with Western education system brought by Netherland Indies colonial government.<sup>1</sup> Its basic philosophy is to maintain old but applicable values and to pick something new from sciences, technology and economics that would be advantageous for Islamic society. This philosophy is an inseparable principle in the tradition of *pesantren* education. This principle could also likely be adopted by *madrasahs*, especially in a case where there's a changing model of *madrasahs* prior to independence and before any intervention from government in *madrasah*. Fundamental changes made to *madrasahs* are related to the composition of subjects by accomodating general sciences.<sup>2</sup>

According to Baihaqi, *madrasahs* in Aceh has progressed since the end of Netherlands occupation and during Japan's invasion. This is considerably influenced by the significant role of PUSA's ulema in Aceh society. Not merely active in religious matters, PUSA ulema are also actively

<sup>1</sup> Farish A. Noor, et al, (eds.) (2008), "Behind the Walls Re-Appraising the Role and Importance of Madrasahs in the World Today" in Farish A.Noor, et all, (eds.) (2008), *The Madrasa in Asia Political Activism and Transnational Linkages*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, h. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Abasri (2007), "Sejarah dan Dinamika Lembaga-lembaga Pendidikan Islam di Nusantara: Surau, Meunasah, Pesantren dan Madrasah", in Samsul Nizar, (ed.), *Sejarah Pendidikan Islam: Menelusuri Jejak Sejarah Pendidikan Era Rasulullah Sampai Indonesia*, Jakarta: Kencana, h. 290-291.

involved in the development. However during post-Independence era, their activities are gradually shifting toward religious matters only. As a result, education in *madrasahs* were also declining because its output are considered suitable solely for religion-related institutions. Besides that, the government's attention that merely goes for formal schooling furthermore left *madrasahs* with poor facilities and low-competence teachers.<sup>3</sup> This was clearly evident during New Order that paid relatively limited attention in the matter of developing *madrasahs* compared to other education system.

Regardless its lack of attention toward *madrasahs*, Indonesia's government issued equalization policy in 1974 that inflict changes in *madrasahs* curriculum to adjust it with formal schooling curriculum. As a consequence, *madrasahs* will have to replace most of its religion-related subjects with general sciences. Government's intervention has brought significant influence for *madrasahs* because since then, diploma from *madrasahs* are considered equal with other formal schooling, its graduates will also be able to continue their studies to the higher degrees both in normal schools or *madrasahs*, or move to another normal school.<sup>4</sup>

In its further development, *madrasahs* has shown its progress. According to a research conducted by Baihaqi in 1975, there's currently a shifting trend in Aceh society to send their children to public (national) school instead of *madrasahs*. Even, there are only a few lecturers from both Unsyiah and IAIN who send their children to *madrasahs* though this trend is recently changing. Since early 90's, at a significantly rapid rate, Aceh parents are increasingly more interested to send their children to *madrasahs* especially for elementary level. It's based on the assumption that education regarding religion should be considered as important. The overflowing number of prospective students who signs up for *madrasahs* suggests that there's an increasing parents interest to send their children to *madrasahs*, which then require these *madrasahs* to close the registration before its initial due date.

In general, *madrasahs* in Aceh has experienced progress and setbacks. In its early stage, *madrasahs* has caught people's interest to send their children to *madrasahs* but this trend was then reversed significantly during post-independence era. During recent years, parents are more increasingly more interested to send their children to *madrasahs*. Meanwhile, research that studies about contemporary phenomenon in *madrasahs* is currently non-existent. Hence, a research regarding *madrasahs* in Aceh will explain its ability to respond social changes in Aceh society.

Studies regarding *madrasahs* in Indonesia to date are frequently discuss about its historical context and its general development, regardless of its particular existence in various areas in Indonesia,<sup>5</sup> which has its own sociological dimension in responding local social changes. In Aceh, the emergence of *madrasahs* can be considered as late, compared to other provinces in Indonesia. This is mostly due to the continous warfare between Aceh people against Netherland occupation which cost them physical and non-physical loss. As a result, Aceh society were experiencing setbacks in many of its living aspects, including education. Besides that, all existing studies about *madrasahs* mainly discuss about its existence in historical context.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, studies regarding *madrasahs* as an education phenomenon since post-independence era is practically very few. If such studies do exist, it's merely relevant for national context and was not covering local dynamics like the one occured in Aceh which has its own strong historical dimension in Islamic education.

Besides that, although there's an observed changing paradigm regarding parents and society's interests to send their children to school during this decades, there's yet no academically certain answer as to what may become the reason for this phenomenon. Is this phenomenon based on parents interest to provide religious education for their children or is it because the improving situation in *madrasahs* that can transform and compete with other public school and respond the social changes. Thereof, this study aims to describe any endeavors made by *madrasahs* to respond social changes in

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<sup>3</sup> Baihaqi A.K. (1983), "Ulama dan Madrasah Aceh", in Taufik Abdullah, *Agama dan Perubahan Sosial*, Jakarta: Rajawali Press.

<sup>4</sup> Abasri, "Sejarah dan Dinamika", h. 294.

<sup>5</sup> Suwito dan Fauzan (2005), *Sejarah Sosial Pendidikan Islam*, Jakarta: Kencana. Abasri, "Sejarah dan Dinamika". Farish A. Noor, et al (eds.), "Behind the Walls". Maksum (1999), *Madrasah: Sejarah dan Perkembangannya*, Jakarta: Logos Wacana Ilmu.

<sup>6</sup> Alfian (1977), "Cendekiawan dan Ulama Masyarakat Aceh: Sebuah Pengamatan Permulaan", in Alfian, (ed.), *Segi-segi Sosial Budaya Masyarakat Aceh*, Jakarta: LP3ES. Ismuha (1983), "Ulama Aceh dalam Perspektif Sejarah", in Taufik Abdullah, (ed.), *Agama dan Perubahan Sosial*, Jakarta: Rajawali Press. Ismail Yakub (1980), "Gambaran Pendidikan di Aceh Sesudah Perang Aceh – Belanda Sampai Sekarang", in Ismail Suny, *Bunga Rampai tentang Aceh*, Jakarta: Aksara. and Alfian

Aceh society to find out any driving factors that may influence Aceh society to send their children to *madrasahs*.

This study uses qualitative approach. It combines literature research with field observation. Initial data and information about *madrasahs* and changes occurred in *madrasahs* out of current context are obtained through documentation study. To obtain information regarding *madrasahs* in contemporary context, field observation is conducted. Data are collected during observation, in-depth interview, and FGD in three regencies/municipalities; Banca Aceh, Aceh Besar and Aceh Tengah. These data is analyzed since its collection and continued through report making process using on going analysis. Collected data will be reduced into important and relevant parts based on research problem. These data is analyzed and then presented in narrative.

The scope of this article includes the history of *madrasahs* in Aceh and its nationalization process during post-independence into the Republic of Indonesia. This article will further analyze the development of *madrasahs* during the enforcement of special autonomy in Aceh. At its closing, this article will analyze any driving factors that may influence parents' interest to send their children to *madrasahs*.

## 2. Madrasahs Education System: Reformation Effort in Islamic Education

Early stage of 20<sup>th</sup> century is an important historical period for Islamic education in Indonesia in general and in Aceh specifically. As a response to Western education system brought by Netherland colonial government and the rising Islamic reformation movement, an Islamic education reform movement occurred in various areas in Indonesia during this period. As for Aceh, this Islamic education reform began with the establishment of *madrasahs* by several *ulemas* which then become its founders and leaders of *dayah* education. Prior to the establishment of *madrasahs*, *dayah* is a "traditional" Islamic education institution in Aceh society. Nonetheless, *dayah* learning system traditionally still uses *halakah* system without exam, does not recognize levels and its curriculum is highly dependent to its *Tengku*. Some *ulama* then consider the needs for reformation in Islamic education by establishing *madrasahs*. In its future development, a model of *dayah* that adopts and combines both *dayah* and *pesantren* is emerge and known as integrated *dayah*.

According to Azra, the establishment of *madrasahs* is not just a wind of change for education institution but also a development effort for society as a whole. If it's seen through comparative perspective, there's a significant differences between *dayah* and *madrasah*. As for *dayah*, scholars learn from *teungku* and use *kitab kuning* as the sole source of learning, while *madrasahs* recognize new textbooks with new methods in learning Islamic teachings. Aside from different output it creates, *dayah* also focused on producing *ulema*, while *madrasahs* aim to generate intellectual muslims which in turn produce intellectual *ulema*.<sup>7</sup>

The existence of *madrasahs* in Aceh also experiences ups and downs. At its first period, the establishment of *madrasahs* was well received by society. It's clearly evident from the increasing number of *madrasahs* in many regencies in Aceh annually. 1930 is particularly a year of progress for *madrasahs* in Aceh.<sup>8</sup> This increase also suggests an increasing society's interest to send their children to *madrasah* because it provides not only religion-related subjects as in *dayah* but also general sciences taught in other public schools.

The improvement of *madrasahs* before independence can be successfully achieved because its establishment is based on society's need of a modern education system which is also fundamentally practice religious values and local cultures. Besides that, outputs generated by *madrasahs* at that moment was directly participate in the development of its society. The founding fathers *ulemas* of these *madrasahs* has furthermore organize an association named Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh (Association of Scholars Throughtout Aceh) which is abbreviated into PUSA.<sup>9</sup> PUSA made several

<sup>7</sup> Azyumardi Azra dan Dina Afrianty, "Pesantren and Madrasa: Modernization of Indonesian Muslim Society", Paper Presented Workshop on Madrasa, Modernity and Islamic Education, Boston University, CURA, May 6-7, 2005, hal. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Uraian lebih lengkap tentang berdirinya madrasah-madrasah di Aceh dapat lihat A. Hasjmy, *Bunga Rampai Revolusi dari Tanah Aceh*, (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1978), hal. 95-99. Zakaria Ahmad, et al., *Sejarah Pendidikan Daerah Istimewa Aceh*, (Jakarta: Depdikbud, 1984), hal. 61-65.

<sup>9</sup> Organisasi PUSA (Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh) didirikan pada 5 Mei 1939 di Bireuen atas inisiatif Teungku Abdul Rahman Matang Glumpang Dua dan diketuai oleh Teungku Muhammad Daud Beureueh. Lihat Ismuha, et al., "Pengaruh PUSA terhadap Reformasi di

efforts to develop *madrasahs* in Aceh. PUSA also pioneered the establishment of Normal Islam Institute, a school for *madrasah's* teachers in the late 1939 in Bireuen. Two of its most important lecturers are Teungku M. Nur El-Ibrahimi, a graduate of Al Azhar University (Cairo) which acts as the Director and teaches religious-related subjects, arabic, and education, and also Mr. Muhamad, a graduate of a law school in Jakarta who teaches general subjects, Dutch and English.<sup>10</sup> PUSA has successfully integrate religion education system in *madrasahs* in Aceh. According to this system, many *madrasahs* under different names and leaders will have the same and equal 7 years-long curriculum.<sup>11</sup>

Despite of *madrasah's* rapid progress in Aceh, Netherland Indies colonial government has made considerable efforts to hamper the increasing number of *madrasahs* through their suppressing policy because of their fear regarding the emergence of militant and intellectual muslims. One of their policy to monitor Islamic education is the issuance of Teachers Ordinance. This policy obliges religion teachers to obtain permission from government to teach in education institutions.<sup>12</sup> This policy, which was then continued by Japanese invaders, is failed to obstruct the development of *madrasahs* in Aceh.

### 3. Madrasahs in Aceh: Changes and Indonesia's Government Policy

After Indonesia gain its independence, under the decision of Aceh Provincial Government in late 1946, almost all of 180 *madrasahs* in Aceh with 36000 pupils were submitted to Aceh Provincial Government through Aceh's Religious Officials as state-owned schools in an officials submission letter named "Qanun." The submission of religious schools to Aceh Provincial Government was signed at 1 November 1946.<sup>13</sup> This submission marks the transformation of *madrasahs* into state-owned Islamic schools. Teachers in these schools were therefore appointed as civil servant by Aceh Provincial Government.

This nationalization process went smoothly because during early stage of independence, Aceh was under the control of PUSA ulemas. These PUSA ulemas has control over regencies in Aceh so that every *madrasah* automatically turn into state-owned schools. Since then, the feature of *madrasah* turn into Sekolah Rendah Islam (Islamic Low Schools) known as SRI, Sekolah Guru Islam (School of Islamic Teachers) known as SGI, Sekolah Menengah Islam (Islamic Secondary School) known as SMI and Sekolah Menengah Islam Atas (Upper Secondary Islamic School) known as SMIA.<sup>14</sup>

The result of nationalization effort as a mean to attract more government attention toward *madrasahs* was not nearly as expected. *Madrasahs* were still marginalized from national education system. This fact has trigger an ill-favored perception in society about *madrasahs*. In public perception, *madrasahs* are associated with religious matters and poor science.<sup>15</sup> Its teachers are considered lacking of teaching ability, relatively poor facilities compared to state schools and its outputs are considered less contributing for the society.<sup>16</sup> Lack of government's attention, limited operational funding and lack of employment opportunities after graduation has led to marginalized position of *madrasahs* and students who came to study from villages/rural areas.

Despite the lack of government's attention for *madrasahs*, there are several attempts taken by government in order to strengthen the existence of *madrasahs* and equalize *madrasahs* with normal schools.<sup>17</sup> A joint decree (SKB) of three ministers (Minister of Religious Affairs, Minister of Education and Cultures, and the Minister of Home Affairs) at 24 March 1974 is a tangible attempt to revive the existence of *madrasah* in national education system. This policy brought significant changes for *madrasahs* because first, diplomas issued by *madrasahs* are therefore equal with other

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Aceh", dalam Baihaqi A.K., (ed.), *Agama, Perkembangan Fikiran dan Pembangunan*, (Jakarta: Ditbinperta, 1980), hal. 43-46. Lihat juga Hamdiah A. Latif, "Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh (PUSA): Its Contributions to Educational Reforms in Aceh", (Disertasi Master: Institute of Islamic Studies McGill University Montreal, 1992), hal. 36. Zakaria Ahmad, et al., *Sejarah Pendidikan*, hal. 66-67.

<sup>10</sup> Alfian, "Cendekiawan dan Ulama", hal. 214.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Eugene Morris, "Islam and Politics in Aceh: A Study of Center-Periphery Relations in Indonesia", (Ph.D. Thesis: Cornell University, "Islam and Politics in Aceh: A Study of Center-Periphery Relations in Indonesia", (Ph.D. Thesis: Cornell University, 1983), hal. 89. Zakaria Ahmad, et al., *Sejarah Pendidikan*, hal. 66.

<sup>12</sup> Maksun, *Madrasah: Sejarah*, hal. 115.

<sup>13</sup> Tim, *10 Tahun Darussalam dan Hari Pendidikan*, (Banda Aceh: Yayasan Pembina Darussalam, 1969), hal. 403.

<sup>14</sup> Baihaqi AK, "Ulama dan Madrasah Aceh", h. 154.

<sup>15</sup> Muhaimin (2004), *Wacana Pengembangan Pendidikan Islam*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, h. 176.

<sup>16</sup> Baihaqi AK, "Ulama dan Madrasah Aceh", h. 172-176.

<sup>17</sup> Untuk lebih jelasnya baca Maksun, *Madrasah: Sejarah*, h. 146-148.

same-level schools; second, its graduates may continue to higher level state schools; third, its students may move to another same-level schools.<sup>18</sup> The compensation of this equalization is that 70 % of subjects in *madrasahs* should consist of general subjects. Furthermore, *madrasahs* will have to accommodate fully 100 % curriculum from public schools.<sup>19</sup>

As a consequence, this equalization requires *madrasahs* to follow development patterns abide by state-owned schools. This effort has not yet been able to boost *madrasahs* reputation in society. Government's attention for *madrasahs* are still ruled out that its school building, competence of teachers, instructional media facilities and many other aspects are far from adequate. Its alumni were only capable of working in religious-related jobs.

Moreover, centralized policies during New Order era has led to a centralized education institution management. Government has a full authority for education management including management of schools/*madrasahs*, learning processes, also school uniform. As a result, education in *madrasahs* at that moment was detached from local cultural values and people's needs. Whereas from its establishments, tradition of Islamic education in Aceh is generally a society-based education. The founders of Islamic education institution usually have a full authority in its managements and it's adjustable into people's needs.

Changes made in *madrasahs* during New Order is mainly related to curriculum adjustments which refers to public schools. This step is taken because *madrasahs* has not yet obtain clear position in national education system. Besides that, New Order government policies that tend to be centralized has led inability of *madrasahs* to respond the changing paradigm occurred in Aceh society. As a result of government policy that set aside *madrasahs* aside, there's a changing appreciation in Aceh society for *madrasahs*. This fact can be seen from the increasing interest to send their children to public schools because of public schools provide better quality and generate better outputs compared to *madrasahs*. Society is undoubtedly has financially support *madrasahs* a lot but due to the lack of support from educational authority (government), *madrasahs* are still unable to create changes aside from government's policy.

#### 4. Madrasahs dan Local Autonomy

Reformation has led to significant changes in national education system. The implementation of Law No. 22/1999 about Local Autonomy has provide legitimacy for each local government to regulate and manage its local interest according to its own initiatives based on people's aspirations. Especially for Aceh, the central government has issued special autonomy policy as a conflict resolution effort in which in its clauses has agreed to provide opportunity for Aceh to implement its Islamic *sharia*. Following this changes, the conduct of education has also experience significant change where schools/*madrasahs* has authority to manage the conduct of education.

Through autonomy in education, it is expected that the conduct of education would be oriented toward quality, relevant to current global situation and adjusted to local needs. To attain these goals, government implements *madrasahs/schools*-based management concept (MBS). MBS can be defined as a management model that provides bigger autonomy for schools and stimulates participative decision making that involves everyone in school community to improve its quality. This concept is implemented to promote people's participation in school matters. People's participation in education institution is delivered through establishment of Education Board and School/*Madrasahs* Committee which in turn is expected to create betterment of quality, equality and efficiency of education management. This fact suggests that *madrasahs* during reformation era has made changes generated from government's policy and also obtain a bigger chances to respond changes occurred in society.

The implementation of MBS has provide opportunities for *madrasahs* to improve and offer various featured programs adjusted to local needs. For example, a featured program is conducted by *madrasahs* in Takengon to exhibit their eminence in teaching students to be able to boost their competence in religious matters e.g. giving lectures. These students will be sent to several mosques/*meunasahs* during Ramadhan to give lectures during *Isya* and *Tarawih* prayers. Before

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<sup>18</sup> Abasri, "Sejarah dan Dinamika", h. 294.

<sup>19</sup> Muzhoffar Akhwan, "Pengembangan Madrasah sebagai Pendidikan untuk Semua", *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam El-Tarbawi*, No. 1, Vol. 1, 2008, hal. 43.

starting lectures, they will have to introduce themselves as a student from *madrasahs* in Takengon. This program gave its participant a skill needed by local residents and on the other hand is an effective media for *madrasahs* to promote its reputation and attract parents to send their children to the aforementioned *madrasahs*.

Similar things has also been expressed by headmaster of *Madrasah* 'Aliyah Negeri (State Islamic High School) or commonly known as MAN, in Rukoh and MAN Darusalam. It's said that society's interest to send their children to *madrasahs* is influenced by featured program offered by *madrasahs* for its students. Besides that, their interest is also a result of improvement in school's management, both in learning process, learning media, human resources, discipline and *madrasah*'s administration.

*Public will be attracted to send their children to madrasahs if that madrasah has a certain achievements or eminence. Therefore, I'm currently attempting to guide five students in each class to turn them into pilot projects... besides that, now we're commencing a dish wash product in order to become a featured program of MAN Darusalam... (Interview with headmaster of MAN Darussalam, 20 Oktober 2011)*

*To observe it, the increasing people's interest to send their children to madrasahs is related to school's program, if the madrasah has an innovation and improvement process, based on my experience as a head of madrasah, there will be an increasing number of student... Kalau dilihat peningkatan minat masyarakat untuk menyekolahkan anaknya ke madrasah kaitannya dengan program sekolah, jikalau madrasahnya memiliki sebuah inovasi dan perbaikan proses, berdasarkan pengalaman saya selama menjabat kepala madrasah maka akan mengalami peningkatan jumlah siswa... (Interview with Headmaster of MAN Rukoh, 25 Oktober 2011)*

Besides that, *madrasahs* are now keep on improving by upgrading competence of its teachers through various trainings to support learning process in *madrasahs*. *Madrasahs* has also attempted to complete its learning facility such as library, laboratory for natural sciences, language laboratory, and computer laboratory. *Madrasahs* has also provide facilities for extracurricular activities such as for sport like volleyball court, basketball court, table tennis equipment, etc. There are also facilities and equipments for art performances like music, dance, theatrical, calligraphy and many others.

*Madrasahs'* succesful attempts at improving and initiating featured programs is affected by the capability of the headmaster. A headmaster is required to be capable of managerial stuff, should be someone with creative mind and highly innovative in order to bring *madrasahs* equal to other public schools. Although these featured programs involve sizable funding, this problem can be tackled together with *madrasah*'s committee.

A proper cooperation among everyone in school community is a must to overcome problems related to learning facilities. In order to improve facilities and physical infrastructure, these *madrasahs* are really proactive. For example, MAN 1 Takengon obtained these facilities not only from government's budget through Ministry of Religious Affair which came from state budget. They receive assistance funding to build laboratory for natural sciences from Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi (Board of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Post-Tsunami Aceh and Nias). The headmaster also refers to a statement made by a team from Mathematics and Natural Science Faculty, Unsyiah that this laboratory is the best high-school scale laboratory in Aceh Tengah. From donations taken from parents, this *madrasahs* also build a separate restrooms for ladies and gents. There's also a grant from local government but it's relatively limited. Its complete facilities suggests that this *madrasah* is far from left behind compared to other schools.

Its proactive attitude to improve educational quality is not limited only in improving its learning facilities but also the competence of its teachers and administrative staffs. During the interview, headmaster of MAN Rukoh explains that the *madrasah* has established a cooperation with a Medan Training Center. MAN Rukoh will have the opportunity to join every training program offered by Training Center in Medan.

Despite these facts, there are several problems faced by *madrasahs* in Aceh such as the one related to school's operational funding. *Madrasah's* operational funding came from central government and not local government. This thing become problematic because *madrasahs* do not gain full autonomy since its funding came from central government. Therefore, local government has no obligation to allocate its funding for *madrasahs* unless it's a grant.<sup>20</sup> It's a common problem for some *madrasahs* especially those which students came from lower income family, but plans to start a featured program that requires large funding. It's ironic, since Aceh is a special autonomy region established based on its religious concern but its government still pays little attention to *madrasahs*. Therefore, there should be a policy which aims to improve Islamic education quality both in *dayah* and *madrasah*, albeit its not part of provincial government's responsibilities. Aceh has implement Islamic *sharia* and it should be natural for the provincial government to pay more attention to education in *madrasahs*.

## 5. Aceh Society's Interest to Send Their Children to Madrasahs.

With the improving quality of learning in general subjects in *madrasahs* such as mathematics and natural sciences, *madrasahs* nowadays are no longer considered as a second-rate education institution. People has seen that *madrasahs* and other public schools are equal in its teaching method for general subjects. This equal quality to provide general subjects is furthermore strengthened by the fact that *madrasahs* also provide religious subjects for students. These religious subjects is an added value absence in any other public school.

This research reveals the enormous interest coming from parents to provide their children with religious knowledge. They find that religious knowledge, besides general sciences, should also be provided for their children during childhood and adolescence. As the quality of learning for general subjects equals to public schools, *madrasahs* became parents' favourite place to send their children to school because *madrasahs* can provide what the parents also expect, that is, religious knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

Similar things is expressed by headmaster of MAN 1 Takengon regarding the increasing society's interest and motivation for *madrasahs* every year. This phenomenon occurred because of parents' anxiety regarding modernization and globalization that affects their children. In this case, parents believe that *madrasahs* will provide favorable religious knowledge for their children as a shield to face the rapid modernization and globalization. That's why, MAN 1 as an eminent *madrasah* in Takengon became people's favorite for education. Besides that, its riping curriculum and education system is also equipped with facilities such as natural science laboratory and computer laboratory.<sup>22</sup>

In Aceh Tengah, bargaining position of *madrasahs* became higher, because there are only a few *dayah/pesantren*. In Coastal Aceh, the parents' need for religious subject can be fulfilled by registering their children to *dayahs* spread in many places. Differently in Aceh Tengah, *madrasahs* became parents' favorite to provide religious education for their children.

The main factor affecting people to send their children to MAN is to improve and deepen their religious knowledge so that in the future it will become a shield and foundation for their children, because there's no integrated *pesantren* in Aceh Tengah as exists in other regencies. Therefore, *madrasahs* are the only choice to disseminate religious knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, this increasing interest to send their children to *madrasahs* does not mean increasing interest to continue their study in IAIN after graduating from *madrasah* aliyah. While the needs for religious knowledge drives parents to send their children to school, the most influential factors that affects parents to send their children to college is a pragmatic reasons such as the availability of employment opportunities and possible size of income their children will gain after graduation. Besides that, area of studies chosen for their children are generally according to their

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Head of Mapenda of Ministry of Religious Affair of RI on October 20, 2010 and Interview with the principal of MAN Darussalam on October 20, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mrs. Maisarah, student's parent of MAN I Takengon.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with the principal of MAN I Takengon, Oktober 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Mrs. Fashyah, a teacher at MAN I Takengon.

children's interest and ability. For them, religious knowledge obtained from *madrasahs* is more than enough for their children to be able to conform into the society.

Unfortunately, parents' enormous interest to send their children to *madrasahs* can not be fulfilled as the number of *madrasahs* is limited, especially Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI). Number of madrasah ibtidaiyah in Aceh is still very few compared to Sekolah Dasar (elementary school) or SD. Consequently, parents can hardly find an MI nearby. Parents will have no other choice but to send their children to SD. The overflowing number of parents who wants to register their children into MI during the beginning of school year suggests a huge interest for MI. On the other hand, many SD experience difficulties in finding students. To overcome this problem, some SD offer a wider scope of religious education. This interesting finding can be found in research location in Aceh Tengah. As explained by local resident, due to small number of students and parents' lack of interest to send their children to SD, every morning in school's schedule, these SD begins its classes with prayers through loudspeakers to show public that religious education has its place in that particular SD.<sup>24</sup>

While from the students perspective, their interests are in line with their parents. They're interested to study in bigger *madrasahs* because its quality that includes general sciences such as mathematics and natural sciences is comparable to public schools. Moreover, students will also be provided with religious subjects commonly not available in public schools. Their interest to continue study in IAIN is inversely proportional to their interest to study in *madrasahs*. While their interest to study in *madrasah* is affected by the availability of adequate religious education, their interest to study in college has nothing to do with religious education. Their interest to study in college is mainly affected by the type of professions and jobs they want to obtain after graduating from college. In this case, public college offers many more programs preferable for *madrasahs* students compared to programs offered by IAIN.<sup>25</sup>

From gender perspective, enrollment of female students in *madrasahs* is higher than male students. Headmaster of MAN Rukoh claims that since the first time he was appointed as *madrasah* teacher in 1994 until now, the number of female students studying in *madrasahs* is always bigger than its male students. Its female to male ratio is about 60 %: 40 %. Moreover, their goals which drive them to study in *madrasahs* are also changing from its previous role as girls who want to become a good mother for their children, now they choose *madrasahs* because this Islamic education institution has equal quality with other public schools. Furthermore, *madrasahs* has some more added value compared to other public schools because of its religion-related subjects.

## 6. Closing

Changes occurred within the early stages of *madrasahs* in Aceh are mostly related to its socio political and religious circumstances. During the next period especially post-Independence era, the dynamic of *madrasahs* is affected by government's policy.

In its development, contemporary changes in *madrasahs* occurred due to the enforcement of regional autonomy and the implementation of Islamic *sharia* in Aceh which in turn creates positive impact by directly and indirectly increasing parents' interest to send their children to *madrasahs*. On the other hand, *madrasahs* has also started to update and conduct several relevant changes to become prominent education institution. At the same time, as the impact of regional autonomy, public schools from elementary level started to characterize themselves as *madrasahs* at least in its curriculum. As for Aceh, both realities and field data indicate an altering paradigm in Aceh society to see *madrasahs* from its marginalized form previously into a more interesting choice for schooling. Changes in *madrasahs* system by transforming itself into a high quality education institution is not merely to respond demand from parents/society but also as a response toward social changes.

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Mrs. Khadijah Ali from Takengon.

<sup>25</sup> Forum Group Discussion with students at MAN 1 Takengon.



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