

Historiography of Quranic Memorization from the Early Years of Islam until Today

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Abstract

The position of those who memorize the Quran is special beside Allah SWT. Many prominent scholars are among those who are mastering the Quran and the Sunnah. Indeed, Muslims are the people who are responsible for maintaining the sanctity of the Quran. Therefore, this paper aims to give understanding on the history of education of Quranic memorization that has been implemented from the time of the Prophet until this contemporary era specifically in Malaysia. The process of memorizing the Quran has started since the first revelation revealed to Prophet Muhammad SAW, until he was called as "Sayyid al-Huffaz" and "Awwal Jumma" or the first man to memorize the Quran. This has facilitated many of his companions to follow his steps in memorizing the Quran. This process continues during the time of the tabi' tabiin until now with the establishment of various institutions of tahfiz Quran.

Keywords: Memorizing Quran, history, the Quran.

1. Introduction

Allah SWT has revealed the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad SAW as a source of Islamic legislation and guidelines (Muhaidi, Mohd Al'ikhsan & Siti Salwa, 2015a, Ghazali, Md. Sawari, Yusof, 2015). Al-Quran contains a wide range of knowledge that is very useful for this world and the Hereafter. Allah has called for Muslims to appreciate the contents of the Quran. Allah says in Surah Muhammad (47): 24, which mean: *"Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Quran, or are their hearts locked up by them?"*

Allah SWT says in another verse in Surah al-Sad (38): 29, which mean: "This is a Book which We have sent down unto you, full of blessings, that they may mediate on its Signs, and that men of understanding may receive admonition."

Indeed, Muslims are the people who are responsible for maintaining the sanctity of the Quran (Muhaidi, Mohd Al'ikhsan & Siti Salwa, 2015b). Therefore, many efforts have been taken to protect the Quran word by word and letter by letter (Syaykh Muhammad al-Habasyi (1987). It is one of the efforts to ensure the implementation of some Sunnah of the Prophet and it could not be done without the process of memorizing the Quran (Abu Najihat al-Hafiz, n.d) (Abu Najihat al-Hafiz, n.d).

2. Literature

2.1 The Qur'anic Memorization And Its Importance

Without a doubt, memorization is an honour practice. Allah SWT will give special position to those who memorize the Quran and indeed, many prominent scholars are those who master the Quran and the Sunnah. This is their secret as a great Muslim (Zulkifli Ali, 2003).

Memorizing the entire Quran is not a compulsory (fard ayn) to every Muslim (Abu Najihat al-Hafizz, n.d). Nevertheless, the scholars have issued a fiqh ruling in which memorizing the Quran is a collective responsibility or fard kifayah to preserve the authenticity and sanctity of the Quran. This has become a necessity for Muslims throughout the ages (Zulkifli Ali, 2003).

This legal rule is also strengthened by Imam Abbas bin Muhammad al-Jurjani, while Imam al-Shaykh Muhammad Makki Nasir also has the same opinion by stating: *Indeed, memorizing the Quran by heart is fard kifayah.*

It is strengthened by an explanation from al-Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti that *"the Quran is the words of Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad SAW to weaken those who oppose it, even with short chapters, reading the Quran is considered as ibadah"* (Jaala al- din al- Suyuti, n.d). The basis for those who wish to memorize the Quran can be summarized as follows: The Quran is revealed in a verse form, in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and implementing the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, for the interests of all Muslims and to safeguard the Quran from printing errors or counterfeit (Muhaidi, Mohd Al'ikhsan & Siti Salwa, 2015b).

3. The History of Memorization and Collection of the Quran

The collection of the Quran has two different meanings and composed in a word called *jam'ah* (Muhammad Salim Abidat, 1990) This word has been mentioned in the word of Allah in Surah al-Qiyamah (75): 17, which mean: *"It is for Us to collect it and to recite it."*

The first meaning is the collection in the form of memorization, while the second meaning is the collection in the form of writing. The collection of the Quran in the form of memorization is through saving and remembering memorized verses strongly in heart. This collection form was bestowed by Allah SWT to Prophet Muhammad before other human beings. He was known as *"Sayyid al-Huffaz"* and *"Awwal Jumma"* or the first man to memorize the Quran. This has facilitated many of his companions to follow his steps to memorize the Quran (Subhi al- Salih, 1981). Allah says in Surah al- Jum'ah (62): 2 which mean: *It is He who has sent amongst the Unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom- although they had been, before, in manifest error."*

Hence, every time the Prophet SAW received the revelation, he will memorize it and then transmit it to his companions and told them to memorize and practice it (Ahmad Von Denffer, 1998). The process of the Quranic revelation in stages is very helpful and it facilitates the Prophet SAW to transmit it to his companions to understand the contents of the Quran (Abu Najihat al-Hafiz, n.d).

Memorizing the Quranic verses was not a big problem to the Arabs at that time. Allah SWT has given them strong memory to be able to remember all the things like poetry, family history and daily life events (Muhammad Ali al- Sabuni, n.d). All these things will be recorded in their memory, and this is one of their culture and practice.

The Prophet SAW also recommended his companions to memorize the Quran constantly and read it either in or outside prayer (Ahmad Von Denffer, 1998). He also recommended them to repeat the Quranic verses continuously until they could learn by their heart and spread to other companions and successors (Abu Najihat al-Hafiz, n.d). Thus, the number of people who memorized the Quran has increased and the Quran will be preserved by this method.

The Prophet SAW did not only focus on the preservation of the Quran through memorization alone but he also directed some of his companions to write the memorized verses on the palms, stones, animal skins, pieces of woods and so on. Among the chosen companions to write the revelation were Ali Karamallahu wajhah, Mu'awiya, Ubay ibn Ka'b and Zayd ibn Thabit. Their role is to write and show the verses of the surah. Thus, these writings helped them to memorize the Quran (Manaa' al-Qattan, n.d).

The Prophet SAW has succeeded in teaching some of his companions until they were able to memorize the Quran like him. Among prominent companions during that time described by the Prophet SAW through his saying which mean: Take the Qur'an from four people: 'Abdullah bin Mas'ud, Muslim, Mu'az and Ubay ibn Ka'b (al-Bukhari, n.d).

Abu Ubayd in his book *al-Qiraat* stated that the Quranic memorizers during the time of the Prophet SAW consisted of groups of emigrants or *Muhajirin* who were the four Caliphs, Talhah, Sa'ad, Ibn Mas'ud, Huzaifah, Salim, Abu Hurairah, 'Abdullah al-Sa'ib, 'Abdullah bin Zubair, Aisyah, Hafsa and Ummu Salamah while *Ansar* consisted of Ubadah bin al-Samit, Mu'az who was called as Aba Halimah, Majma 'bin Jaryah, Abu Fudalah Ubayd and Maslamah bin Mukhallid (Jalal al-din al- Suyuti, 1996). Besides that, the prominent memorizers of the Quran during the time of the Companions comprised seven people who were 'Uthman,' Umar, Ubay, Zayd bin Thabit, Ibn Mas'ud, Abu Darda 'and Abu Musa al-Asy'ari (Manaa' al-Qattan, n.d).

3.1 The Process of Memorization and Collection Of The Quran During The Period Of Abu Bakr R.A

Caliph Abu Bakr r.a was appointed as a Caliph after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad SAW to continue his duties. At that time, there has been a war between the Prophet's followers who were still loyal to him and apostates led by Musaylamah al-Kadhdhab. This war was known as the Battle of Yamamah (Bakri Syaykh Amin, 1979). The Muslims

army who followed this war were mostly the companions and the memorizers of the Quran. In this war, 70 of the Quran memorizers were martyred, almost similar in number during the Prophet's SAW time in a battle in *Bi'r al-Ma'unah* near the city of Medina (Muhammad Ali al- Sabuni, n.d).

Sayyidina 'Umar was concerned with the situation at that time, if there were countless wars happened and killed many *Qari*, it could cause the Quran to lose and destroy. Therefore, he has raised the matter to Caliph Abu Bakr and recommended the Quran to be collected and compiled into one *mashaf*.

However, Abu Bakr initially disagreed and doubted on the proposal of Saidina Umar r.a, and finally agreed after considering the benefits and receiving the guidance from Allah SWT. They have appointed Zayd ibn Thabit to collect all writings scattered in many places until he managed to gather and compile the Quran into sheets that have been used until the time of Caliph Uthman (Bakri Syekh Amin, 1979).

3.2 The Process Of Memorization And Collection Of The Quran During The Period Of Uthman R.A

During the time of Caliph Uthman, the Islamic state expanded and many other states have been conquered. The companions were sent to the conquered states to preach and teach them how to read the Quran in their own reading style (Manaa' al-Qatan, n.d). Consequently, it led to inconsistencies in reading between people from different states. As a result, there were fights and disputes among themselves due to the difference in reading (Muhammad Ali al- Sabuni, n.d).

The Quran memorizers from the Successors also were taught by the companions in Medina. Among them were Ibn al-Musayyab, 'Urwah, Salim,' Umar bin 'Abd al-Aziz, Sulayman,' Ata ', Ammar, Mu'az bin al Haris, Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, Muslim bin Jundub, Abdul Rahman bin Hurmuz, Muaz bin Harith and Zaid bin Aslam and others. While in Mecca were 'Abid bin Amir,' Ata' bin Abi Rabah, Tawus, Mujahid,' Akramah, Ubaid bin Umar, and Ibn Abi Malikah (Jalal al-din al-Suyuti, 1996). In Basrah, the *huffaz* were Amir bin Abdul Qais, Abu al-Alyah, Nasr bin 'Asim, Yahya bin Ya'mar and others. The *huffaz* who live in Kufah were Rubai' bin Khaitam, Haris bin Qais, Umar bin Syurahbil, Amar bin Maimun, Abdul Rahman al-Silmi, Ubaid Ibn Fadhlah, Abu Mur'ah and so on.

During the second and third century of Hijrah, Islam began to expand to the rest of the world. Therefore, the expansion of power has occurred which led to the dispute in terms of reading style among the Muslims. This has led scholars particularly who memorized the Quran to try to maintain the sanctity of Islam. The methods used were by having *sohif sanad*, the reading style is suitable with *rasm Usmani* or calligraphy and fit the Arabic grammar (Abu Najihat al-Hafiz, n.d).

3.3 Tahfiz Al-Quran In Malaysia

The preservation of the Quran continues until today. The main thing is that the Quran is preserved by heart by the *huffaz* who are sincere, pious and ascetic. Their role is crucial as history has proven that those who memorized and appreciated the contents of the Quran were able to create a great civilization (Abdul Mutalib Hussain (2002/2003).

The efforts to increase the Quran generation are well received by the community. Currently, the Tahfiz al-Quran institutions and *tahfiz* classes are everywhere whether in the Arab world or *A'jam* or in Malaysia. Malaysia is known for its enthusiasm to hold a Quranic recitation at an international level since 34 years ago. Simultaneously with the opening of this program, the first Prime Minister has suggested for the establishment of the Quranic memorization courses. In 1966, the suggestion from Tunku Abdul Rahman has been realized at the National Mosque (Ismail Masyhuri al-Hafiz, n.d). This idea was also made as a result from the visit of the Rector of the University of al-Azhar, Sheikh Mahmud Syallut at the opening of the National Mosque.

This Quranic Studies class was conducted for the first time with a total of eight students. They were among those who successfully meet the requirements set by Haji Mohd Nor with scholarship from their respective state governments (Maimun, 1992).

This *Tahfiz* class has flourished from time to time and received an encouraging response from the Muslim community. In 1986, this class has been placed in Malaysia Islamic Center which was equipped with classrooms, administration rooms and lecturer rooms. Students who enrolled in this class were provided with accommodations and expenses supported by the central government.

Until 1991, the Tahfiz al-Quran institution in the Islamic Centre has produced 117 diploma holders in Malaysia and Thailand. In addition, several state governments have also established Tahfiz al-Quran institutions in their respective states. Among them are:

1. Maahad Tahfiz al-Quran Johor Islamic Council.-1966
2. Maahad Tahfiz al-Quran Terengganu State.-1984

3. Maahad Tahfiz al-Quran Kedah State.
4. Maahad Tahfiz al-Quran Sultan Idris Syah II Mosque, Ipoh, Perak.-1986
5. Maahad Tahfiz al-Quran Melaka State.-1987
6. Maahad Tahfiz al-Quran Islamic Foundation, Kangar, Perlis.-1989
7. Maahad Tahfiz al-Quran Selangor State Council-1990 (Ismail Masyhuri al-Hafiz, n.d).

Most of the teachers and principals of *tahfiz* institutions in every state are graduates of the institute of al-Quran Islamic Centre, Kuala Lumpur. Besides that, there are also private classes for Quranic memorization established by individuals or particular organizations because there is a demand from parents and local community. These classes usually use *pondok* system.

The expenditures of private *tahfiz* classes are supported by parents, Muslim community and philanthropists. This has proven that the attention of Muslims in Malaysia towards the development of the Quranic memorization is very large (Ismail Masyhuri al-Hafiz, n.d).

4. Conclusion

The Quran is the source of Islamic law which is very useful in life. It is always preserved by Allah SWT without any changes, one of the ways to maintain its sanctity is through memorization. It becomes a collective responsibility (*faridu kifayah*) on every Muslim and there are a lot of advantages in reading, memorizing and understanding its contents. The Prophet was the first man to memorize the Quran and was continued by the Companions, Successors and now maintained by *hamlatul Quran* or known as *huffaz* in this Malay Archipelago. The formation of *Tahfiz* institution in today's Muslim world has abled to produce more *huffaz*, including in Malaysia. The positive development happened both, through *tahfiz* institution built by the government and the private sectors

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