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Visual Perception of the Roof Shape of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine users' visual perceptions of the roof shape of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque, focusing on the similarity of the gonjong roof shape that reflects the cultural identity of Minangkabau. This study departs from the understanding that architecture not only presents physical functions but also contains symbolic meanings and cultural values that can build emotional bonds between users and buildings. The method used is descriptive qualitative with a phenomenological approach, so that the researcher attempts to understand the experiences, interpretations, and direct perceptions of users. The research question is how users perceive the roof shape of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque. Data collection techniques were carried out through field observations, visual documentation, and questionnaires administered to 141 respondents representing the community. The theory used was Rudolf Arnheim's visual perception theory, which emphasizes that shape, color, proportion, structure, and visual expression are important factors in the human process of understanding and interpreting architectural objects. The results of the study show that the majority of respondents were able to recognize the gonjong shape as a symbol of Minangkabau culture. In addition, the shape, color, scale, proportion, and visual expression of the mosque roof were considered harmonious, reflecting traditional values while remaining modern and relevant. This perception also confirms the spiritual meaning

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and visual balance, so that the mosque roof functions not only as an aesthetic element but also as a medium of cultural communication that strengthens local identity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque is one of the iconic architectural landmarks in West Sumatra, Indonesia, with a roof design that differs from most mosques in the region. The mosque's roof adopts the bagonjong shape, which is characteristic of traditional Minangkabau houses, but with a modern touch that is also designed to withstand earthquakes of up to 10 magnitudes. This roof shape is not only symbolic, but also functions as an evacuation site in the event of a natural disaster.

The mosque's architecture combines tradition and innovation, reinforcing the Minangkabau cultural identity by using Minangkabau hardwood as a decorative element. This design embodies the traditional philosophy of *adat basandi syara', syara' basandi kitabullah*, which signifies the close relationship between custom and religion. Overall, this mosque reflects the harmonious integration of Minangkabau culture and Islamic teachings.

Previously, research by Romadhon & Qomarun, (2024), Kahir et al. (2020), Saefudin et al. (2024), Hildayanti (2022), Sholihah & Syamsiyah (2021), Novita (2022), Nurainun Nisa (2020), Prili Diana Rosa Dan Gagih Pradini (2023), Harisah & Masiming (2008) dalam (Romadhon & Qomarun, 2024), serta Dailami et al. (2023) has discussed users' perceptions of mosque architectural elements, but their focus is more on aspects of comfort, solemnity of worship, open space, physical aspects of the mosque, qibla direction, cleanliness, facilities, spatial and orientation, security, and mosque interiors. This study is different, raising the theme of the bagonjong roof design at the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque and users' perceptions of its suitability as a symbol of Minangkabau culture.

This roof shape has sparked debate amid the trend of modern mosque designs that are more influenced by Middle Eastern styles. Therefore, this study aims to examine how users visually perceive the suitability of this mosque roof shape with the cultural identity of Minangkabau. This study is expected to contribute to the preservation of Minangkabau culture and suggest architectural design approaches that reinforce local values.

a. Perception

Visual perception is an active process involving the reception, organization, and interpretation of visual elements mentally, not merely a passive capture by the complex sense of sight. (Arnheim, 1976). An in-depth reflection on Arnheim's theory regarding visual engagement and the organization of perception in professional and lay individuals (Sorek et al., 2024). Visual perception sees shapes, while sensory perception encompasses physical experiences such as lighting, texture, temperature, and sound. (Afifah et al, 2024). Ecological perception understands stimulus patterns as direct environmental information. Gestalt is the perception of seeing a whole form. Mubarak (2023), not a separate part.

b. Roof

The roof supports its own weight, vertical loads on beams and covering materials, columns and foundations, and is also capable of withstanding high wind speeds. (Hartono, Sugiyarto, & Shapeka, 2019). Maceika et al., (2020) explains how AHP is applied to determine the best type of roof construction based on various criteria. With its characteristics, the roof protects the building and supports energy efficiency and sustainability. (Nasution et al., 2024). The dome circulates air through convection for natural ventilation, while the pyramid roof regulates room temperature through its pyramid shape and multiple openings. (Sugini et al., 2017). An Indonesian local study platform that shows how traditional ventilation contributes to thermal comfort versus

modern materials (Novita et al., 2023). Comparing mosques in Indonesia and Turkey, highlighting the differences between tropical and temperate climates and their impact on the performance of dome roofs and limasan roofs (Aryani et al., 2025)

c. Mosque

Mosques are the main places of worship for Muslims, not just symbols or words mentioned in prayers, but real spaces that have spiritual, social, and cultural functions in Muslim communities. As stated in the Qur'an, the word "masjid" is mentioned about twenty-eight times. In short, the word "masjid" comes from Arabic, meaning to prostrate, to worship. The mosque functions as a place to worship (Winarti & Al-Obaidi, 2024). Mosques initially served as a foundation for communication between the military, administration, and congregational prayers. Today, mosques have evolved into more flexible, inclusive institutions offering a variety of social programs that reflect the sociocultural changes within Muslim communities. (Asif et al., 2021)

Mosques in west sumatra:

1) Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque.

Located in Padang, this mosque combines Minangkabau and modern architecture. Its gonjong roof resembles a rumah gadang (traditional Minangkabau house), making it an icon of West Sumatra. It has a capacity of around 20,000 worshippers and is a center for religious activities (Alimin, 2017). The Grand Mosque of West Sumatra is the largest place of worship and a symbol of unity for Muslims in West Sumatra Province (Yuriski, A., Triana, E., Dan Yusri, 2023)

2) Tuo Kayu Jao Mosque.

Located in Solok, built in the 16th century, it is one of the oldest mosques in Indonesia. Made of wood without nails, it has a tiered gonjong roof made of palm fiber, symbolizing the Minangkabau philosophy of life (Harun et al., 2015). The shape of the gonjong roof not only serves as a visual marker, but also holds symbolic and philosophical value for the local community (Suwito & Sari, 2022). This design aims to revitalize the Tuo Kayu Jao Mosque by preserving the mosque's historical data and philosophy in digital media (Ridha et al., 2022)

3) Mosque Bingkudu.

Located in Agam, built in the 19th century. This mosque is characterized by its multi-level gonjong roof, made of wood and palm fiber without nails. The pointed roof symbolizes the community's spirit towards a better life (Adolph, 2016). The Bingkudu Mosque has a distinctive Minangkabau roof with three tiers, each tier becoming narrower towards the top. This reflects the local traditional philosophy of tigo tungku sajarangan, which refers to the three elements of leadership in Minangkabau society: grandparents, religious scholars, and intellectuals.

4) Mosque Raya Ganting.

This old mosque in Padang, dating back to the 1700s, was once a gathering place for independence figures. Its architectural style is a blend of Minangkabau and Middle Eastern influences, with a tiered gonjong roof that combines functionality and aesthetics (Putra & Fatimah, 2022).

5) Mosque Muhammadan.

Established in Padang in 1843 by the Indian Muslim community. Featuring Mughal architecture with magnificent domes and minarets. Representing the cultural diversity of

Padang, the roof is shaped like a typical Indian dome adapted to the local context (Utami et al., 2024).

d. Mosque Raya Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi.

The Grand Mosque of West Sumatra (Jawi: مسجد ماجترا بارت) is the largest mosque in the province of West Sumatra, located on Jalan Khatib Sulaiman, Padang Utara District, Padang City, with an area of 4,430 square meters. Construction began on December 21, 2007, with the laying of the first stone, and was completed on January 4, 2019, with a budget ranging from 282 to 2,285 billion rupiah, most of which came from the West Sumatra Regional Budget. Thanks to the provincial budget, the construction will be carried out in stages. The mosque consists of three floors, with the main hall on the top floor functioning as a prayer room, complete with a terrace facing the street. The square-shaped mosque with four corners symbolizes the cloth once spread by the four Quraish tribes in Mecca in their joint effort to bring the Black Stone. The pointed roof reflects the shape of the roof of the traditional Minangkabau house, known as the rumah gadang.

e. The roof of the Bagonjong Mosque Raya Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi.

According to Supriatna & Handayani (2021) Historically, bangunjung roofs were originally only used on rumah gadang buildings located in the highlands of Minangkabau. Over time, zinc began to replace palm fiber. Steep roofs accelerate rainwater runoff and drying, while reducing heat absorption. This design reflects the precision of Minangkabau ancestral architecture and inspires modern architecture. Its unique shape evokes visual admiration. The arrival of Islam in the 17th century brought about adjustments to the roof ornaments, namely the addition of a crescent moon and star as symbols of Islamic culture (Supriatna & Handayani, 2021). The facade of the mosque features carvings and gabled shapes inspired by the rumah gadang. The roof of the mosque resembles a gabled dome, becoming an iconic visual element. The wood carving motifs on the facade also adapt traditional Minangkabau ornaments. The roof structure forms an inverted triangle (mambasuik bumi), symbolizing a connection with nature. Although not identical, the gonjong shape has been modified to be simpler and more contextual to the function of the mosque (Wirman, 2016). The roof of this mosque is inspired by the gonjong of a gadang house, with wood carvings on the facade of the roof wall (Alimin, 2017). The shape of the roof follows a triangular pattern that widens upwards, symbolizing attachment to the earth. The mosque uses marble, aluminum, and granite materials, with a roof structure made of steel pipes and an interior made of concrete and ceramic. The shape of the roof follows a triangular pattern that widens upwards, symbolizing attachment to the earth. The mosque uses marble, aluminum, and granite materials, with a roof structure made of steel pipes and an interior made of concrete and ceramic.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a phenomenological approach, which aims to understand how users' visual perceptions of the roof shape of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque are formed through their direct experiences. This method was chosen because it is in line with the problem formulation, which focuses on the visual meaning captured by users, rather than just the physical form of the building. The researcher explored the deeper meaning of the bagonjong roof shape as a representation of Minangkabau culture through data collection techniques such as observation, documentation, and distribution of open-ended questionnaires. Rudolf Arnheim's theory was used as a framework for analysis to understand how visual elements such as shape, color, and

structure are captured holistically by the sense of sight, and how this shapes users' visual perceptions. By combining visual perception theory and a phenomenological approach, this study aims to reveal the cultural values and local identity represented through the shape of the mosque roof. The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which the bagonjong roof shape is visually perceived by users. The benefits of this research are as material for studying the importance of traditional visual elements in modern mosque design, as well as contributing to the preservation of local architectural culture amid the modernization of Islamic architecture.

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Population and Sample: The research population used the purposive method, covering individuals who had direct experience or understanding of the visual meaning of the roof of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque (Sugiyono, 2015). The questionnaire was distributed online at the research location. The population of visitors to the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque includes worshippers who come to maximize their worship, religious tourists, and local communities who are active in the mosque environment. Stratified sampling in these groups can help ensure a balanced representation of different demographics, beliefs, and experiences.

Selected respondents must also meet the following criteria:

- a. Based on visitors to grand mosques in West Sumatra.
- b. Local community
- c. Out-of-town visitors
- d. University students/school students

The following are the methods and stages of research implementation:

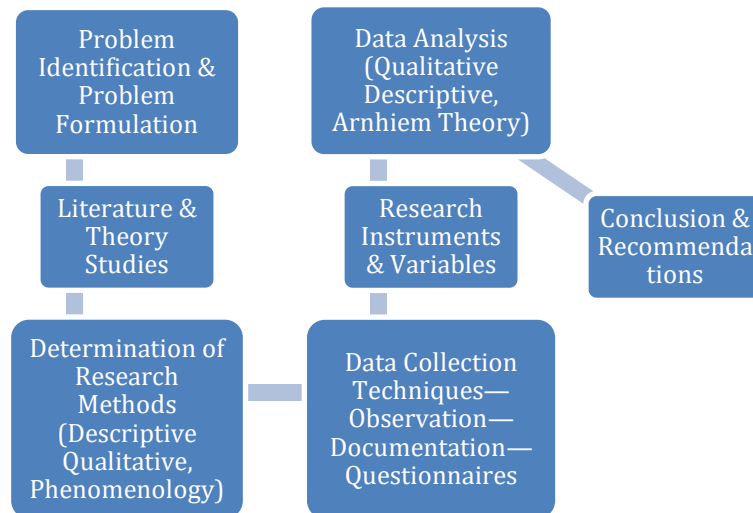


Figure 1 Research stages
(Source: author's analysis, 2025)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Obtained from data collection in the field, both through direct observation, questionnaires, and literature studies. The discussion in this chapter is descriptive and qualitative, linking field findings to the theory of visual perception proposed by Rudolf Arnheim. This approach is used to understand how architectural forms, particularly the roof of a mosque, are perceived by the community and the symbolic meanings attached to them. The object of research that is the focus of this study is the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque, an iconic building that reflects the meeting between religious values and the local Minangkabau culture.

A. Description of research object

The object of this study is the area of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque located on Jalan Khatib Shulaiman, Alai Parak Kopi, Padang Utara District, Padang City, West Sumatra. This Grand Mosque is evidence of the rich cultural heritage and architectural prowess of the Minangkabau people. The building has an iconic bagongjong roof design, which is a characteristic element of Minangkabau architecture. The roof consists of several layers of curved ridges resembling buffalo horns, symbolizing the strength, prosperity, and unity of the community. This Grand Mosque serves as a spiritual and cultural center for the predominantly Muslim population of West Sumatra. The mosque is named after Sheikh Ahmad Khatib, a religious figure of the Minangkabau community during the 18th century.



Figure 1 Location of Jalan Masjid Agung Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi
(Source: author's an, 2025)

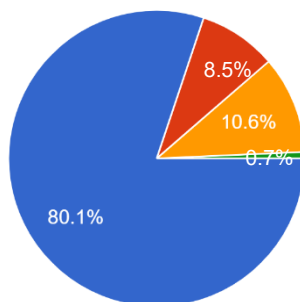
B. Shape Analysis

According to Arnheim's theory of visual perception (1976), form is one of the main visual elements that serves as the basis for describing an object aesthetically and functionally. Arnheim explains that form is not only a physical manifestation but also conveys emotions and feelings through the active visual perception of the observer.

1) Shape

The roof shape of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque was visually assessed by respondents at the research site to determine whether it resembled the roof shape of traditional Minangkabau houses, reflecting a strong local culture and reinforcing the identity of local cultural architecture.

• Visual Similarity



- A. I often see roof shapes like gonjong and immediately associate them with Minangkabau culture.
- B. I recognize the shape of a gonjong roof, but sometimes I have trouble distinguishing it from other roof shapes.
- C. I have seen the shape of a gonjong, but I do not know its meaning or origin.
- D. I had never realized that elements such as gonjong existed in modern mosque design.

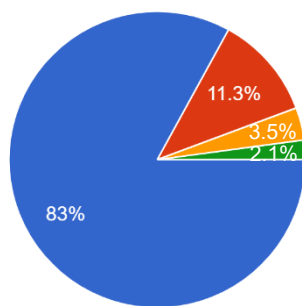
Diagram 1 Visual similarities
(Source: author's analysis, 2025)

Based on the survey results, 80.1% of respondents recognized the roof shape of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque as a gonjong element that reflects Minangkabau culture. This result is consistent with Arnheim's theory (1976), which states that visual perception is greatly influenced by the similarity of shapes to previously familiar objects. This allows visitors to quickly recognize the shape as a symbol of local culture. However, some respondents admitted to being confused about distinguishing or not knowing the origin of this roof shape, indicating that not everyone understands the cultural meaning behind the design.



Figure 2 Visual Form of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque
(Source: author's documentation, 2025)

- Harmony in Cultural Values



- A. The shape of the roof, which resembles a cone, is directly associated with Minangkabau culture.
- B. The shape of the roof is more visible as a variation of modern architecture without any specific cultural meaning.
- C. The shape of the roof serves only as an aesthetic element and has no cultural symbolic meaning.
- D. The shape of the roof on modern mosques is too abstract to be associated with a specific cultural identity.

Diagram 2 Cultural Value Alignment
(Source: Author's analysis, 2025)

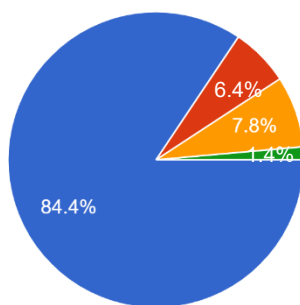
The survey results show that 83% of respondents see the gonjong roof shape as a strong symbol of Minangkabau culture. This indicates that for most visitors, the shape of the mosque roof is not only seen as an aesthetic element, but also as a symbol that conveys cultural identity. Arnheim's theory regarding the relationship between visual form and cultural meaning is reflected in these findings, in which the shape of the mosque roof becomes an effective tool for cultural communication.

However, a small number of respondents see this roof shape more as a variation of modern architecture without cultural meaning. This shows that there are differences in perception regarding the extent to which visual elements can describe cultural identity.



Figure 3 The Harmony of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque
(Sumber: dokumentasi penulis, 2025)

- Proportions and Scale



- A. Yes, the shape and size of the roof remain balanced with the structure of the building, as is the case with rumah gadang.
- B. No, the roof appears too small in comparison to the entire building.
- C. The roof tends to be too high, making it appear out of proportion with the building below.
- D. The roof scale has changed completely and no longer reflects the typical Minangkabau balance.

Diagram 3 Proportion and Scale
(Source: author's analysis, 2025)

Most respondents (84.4%) felt that the shape and size of the mosque roof was in balance with the structure of the building, similar to a rumah gadang. This shows that the mosque roof is still considered proportional and does not deviate from the harmonious impression found in traditional Minangkabau architecture. Arnheim's theory, which states that visual perception is not only about seeing but also assessing the harmony between visual elements, is proven to be relevant here.

However, some respondents felt that the shape of the roof was too small or too large for the building, indicating a discrepancy in the assessment of proportion and scale. This may reflect that even though the roof still looks balanced, some individuals feel that there is a disharmony between the elements of the building.

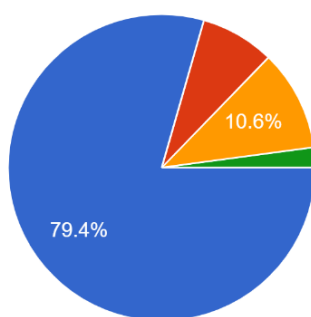


Figure 4 Balance shape of the Grand Mosque of Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi (Source: author's documentation,2025)

2) Form

According to Arnheim (1976), form (complete shape or appearance) is the totality of visual perception of an object composed of elements such as lines, colors, space, and size in an organized manner. In visual perception, humans do not only see parts of a form, but capture the overall meaning and character conveyed by the whole form of the object. This concept is very important in architecture, because the form of a building such as a mosque is not only seen, but interpreted visually and psychologically as a meaningful whole.

• Dominance and Proportion of Gonjong Roof Shapes



- A. The gabled roof is prominent and balanced, becoming the main focus without disrupting the harmony with other parts of the building.
- B. The gabled roof is too dominant, making other parts of the building appear neglected.
- C. The proportion of the gabled roof is too small, making it less prominent in the overall design of the building.
- D. The shape of the gabled roof and other buildings does not have a clear proportional relationship.

Diagram 4 Dominance and Proportion
(Source: author's analysis,2025)

The survey results show that 79.4% of respondents feel that the gabled roof shape is proportionally prominent and does not disrupt the overall harmony of the building. This reflects a harmonious relationship between architectural elements, which is in line with

Arnheim's theory of visual perception involving size, position, balance, and dominance between elements.

However, a small number of respondents felt that the roof shape was too dominant or too small in proportion. This shows that although most respondents see the roof as a striking and balanced element, there are differing views regarding the proportional relationship between the roof and the body of the building.



Figure 6 Proportions of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque
(Source: author's documentation, 2025)

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that the bagonjong roof shape of the Syekh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi Grand Mosque is clearly recognized by users and is considered to represent the cultural identity of Minangkabau. Visual elements such as similarity in shape, proportion, and scale are considered to be in harmony with cultural values. This shows that the application of traditional forms in mosque design has succeeded in creating a strong visual perception that is symbolically meaningful.

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