MASJID'S ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTION ON CHILDREN AT MASJID IN MALAYSIA – SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL ASPECTS

Aniza Abu Bakar[1] & Zur Atiqa Zulkifely[2]

[1,2]*Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design*
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

Abstract

Masjid is the symbol of the greatness of Islam. It is the focal point of the life of every muslim. As such, the administration of masjid acts as its backbone and plays a vital role in ensuring the purpose of the masjid is holistic and comprehensive in reaching the community, including the interest of children. Their needs must be fulfilled spiritually, physically, and socially. This study aims to identify the perceptions of the masjid's administrator on children at the masjid. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview. Nine representatives from nine masjids in the Peninsular Malaysia (7 in Kuala Lumpur, 1 in Selangor and 1 in Pahang) were interviewed. The NVivo software was used to analyse the in-depth interview data to explore and understand the issues and challenges of handling the masjid's community socially and physically when it comes to having children at the masjid, as well as initiatives taken by the masjid's administration in accommodating children at the masjid. The findings suggest that the masjid's administrators are optimistic towards the presence of children in the masjid but faced some challenges - physically and socially. Some of the masjids are in the process of realising the children-friendly masjid aspirations. They provide spaces and activities/programmes for children in the masjid. The perception of masjid's administrator is important to be understood as these are the people responsible in managing and engaging the people with masjid.

Keywords: children-friendly masjid, masjid's administrator, semi-structured interview

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[1] Assistant Professor at International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: aaniza@iium.edu.my

INTRODUCTION

Masjid has been representing the greatness of Islam since the era of the Prophet Muhammad (saw). Islam is manifested to be a complete code of practice, and masjid plays a vital role to signify it (Imam, 2000). The role of the masjid is diverse as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad (saw) since his (saw) migration from Makkah to the city of Medina (Movahed, 2014). According to Omer (2010), the *Al-Masjid An-Nabawiy* was the nucleus in various affairs of the expanding muslim community in Madinah, and this has been the epitome of muslim and Islam. The masjid seemed to be accommodative of every beneficial activity concerning worship, education, politics, economy, and social relations which enabled the society to move forward. Therefore, the way the Prophet Muhammad (saw) administered masjid is the most excellent example of how a masjid should be in accommodating various walks of life.

Masjids nowadays are often affiliated with adults while children rather seem to be left behind in certain aspects. Some masjid may seem to be "exclusive" for adults that children and families with young children may appear to shy away. In December 2019, a ten-year-old boy sent a letter to a masjid's administrator, and it went viral (Abdul Lajis, 2019). He inquired the authority to explain the ruling of children to be in the same *saf* (prayer row) with the adult. This is because he was instructed by other *jamaah* to move from the first row of the *saf* simply because he was a child. This is an example of how children tend to be treated in a masjid. This might have happened because of lack of understanding on the rulings of children's *saf.* This incident attracted the attention of the *Mufti* (a Muslim legal expert who is empowered to give rulings on religious matters) of Wilayah Persekutuan and the Minister of Islamic Affairs to respond on the incident. The Mufti himself wrote a lengthy explanation on this issue and its rulings in Islam in his official website (Mohamad Al-Bakri, 2016). At the same time, the Minister advised for every masjid to set up a special committee to treat children with a prudent approach while they are at the masjid (Wan Salleh, 2019). Therefore, masjid's administrator must play the role as a mediator in delivering such ruling to its *jamaah* so that the practice is in line with Islamic teaching.

Some parents have been sharing on social media and blogs on the downside experiences of theirs and their children at masjid (Shameem, 2012; Ghafar, 2018 and Azmi, 2019). Hence, the feeling of unwelcome at certain masjids seems to exist among children and their families. These are among the challenges faced by the masjid's administrator in balancing their judgement, and treatment in order to accommodate the *jamaah* including children.

Thus, this study aims to explore and understand the issues and challenges of handling the masjid's community socially and physically when it comes to having children at the masjid, as well as initiatives taken by the masjid's administration in accommodating children at the masjid. Understanding and identifying the root

of the issues may help towards improving the situation in the future so that masjid can be the place for all.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Masjid plays a vital role in the muslim community as Islam is a complete code of practice (Imam, 2000). As a centre of spiritual contents, masjid's functions seem to be expanded as a platform of communication to develop solidarity among the muslim communities. The main role of masjid in facilitating congregational prayer has grown to many other activities in favours of the daily life of the muslim community such as educational activities, marriage activities, recreational activities and many more. Hence, the changes of time and expanded functions of masjid make the role of masjid's administration increasingly challenging with the number of masjids is increasing (Mustari & Jasmi, 2008).

Masjid administration in Malaysia

Masjid in Malaysia is governed by the State Islamic Religious Department (Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri-JAIN) of every state under the division of masjid's management (Bahagian Pengurusan Masjid-BPM). Generally, this division functions as the coordinator by providing guidelines, advice, and sustaining the management of masjid. The overview of the functions of the BPM is outlined in Table 1 by taking the examples from the Jabatan Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan (JAWI), Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor (JAIS), and Jabatan Agama Islam Pahang (JAIP) as these three states are included in the study.

Table 1: The example of the functions of BPM

JAWI (source: http://www.jawi.gov.my/index.php/my/bahagian-jawi-3/pengurusan-masjid)	JAIS (source: https://www.jais.gov.my/v2/page.php?s=pengurusan-masjid)	JAIP (source: http://jaip.pahang.gov.my/index.php/bahagian/pengurusan-masjid-surau)
Creating an effective organizational structure in the administration of masjids and surau	Making the masjid as a safe zone, free political involvement, conducive, and congregational friendly.	Managing matters related to administration and management
Building a society that respects, appreciates, and loves masjids and surau	Improving the quality and professionalism of masjid management is always effective, efficient, dynamic and productive.	Supervising matters related to the upgrading of masjids and surau
Producing trained and informative officers and staff	Strengthen and update methods, rules, guidelines and procedures as the main reference of masjid management.	Monitoring the administration of the masjids and surau
Improving the level of cleanliness of masjids and surau	Enhancing the charm of the masjid through the organization of programs that are contemporary, holistic, and interactive.	Coordinating the programs and activities for masjids and surau

In the structural organisation of a masjid, there are a group of religious officers appointed by the religious department and also a group of committee members among the people residing within the area. The latter is also endorsed by the religious department. Altogether there are between ten to fifteen committee members. They work together in planning, managing, and organizing all the activities of the masjid. The State Islamic Religious Department provided them with allowance (Mazlan, Che Ani & Mohd Sarman, 2018).

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

In order to identify the perception of masjid administrators on children in the masjid, in-depth interview with prepared semi-structured questions is applied.

A semi-structured interview is a protocol with inquiries and follow-up questions. The researcher becomes a listener in the interview process and acts to reduce any researcher bias. According to Yin (2014), for a semi-structured interview predetermined questions is set towards certain degree to ensure the researcher covers all related questions. The nature of the interview conducted is more to a talk based. The recorded audio during the interview results in a verbatim transcript.

In getting the opinions of the administrator of the masjid, a semi-structured interview was conducted in the Malay language with the administration representative of nine selected masjids namely:

  i.   Masjid Al Akram (AA), Kg. Datuk Keramat, Kuala Lumpur
  ii. Masjid Ar Rahimah (AR), Kg. Pandan, Kuala Lumpur
  iii. Masjid Jamek Kampung Baru (KGB), Jalan Raja Alang, Kuala Lumpur
  iv. Masjid Abu Ubaidah al-Jarrah (AUJ), Taman Sri Rampai, Kuala Lumpur
  v.   Masjid Imam Al Ghazali (IAG), Bandar Menjalara, Kepong, Kuala Lumpur
  vi. Masjid Muadz bin Jabal (MMBJ), Taman Setiawangsa, Kuala Lumpur
  vii. Masjid Saidina Abu Bakar As-Siddiq, Bangsar (SAB), Kuala Lumpur
  viii. Masjid al Khairiyyah, Taman Sri Gombak (AK), Batu Caves, Selangor
  ix. Masjid Taman Temerloh Jaya (TTJ), Temerloh, Pahang

Initially, only eight masjids were planned for the study. However, the Masjid Taman Temerloh Jaya came into the picture as it became famous due to a high number of congregational *jamaah* especially during the fajr prayer, which includes children. Thus, it is deemed appropriate that this masjid is included in the study to identify their approach that leads to their success story in enlivening the masjid.

A set of major open-ended questions are prepared covering on topics such as noise by children, facilities, the behaviour of children and other *jamaah*, awareness in the importance of children going to the masjid, children's safety, and the roles of the masjid management concerning children at the masjid. These

topics are based on the findings from the literature review conducted. Respondents are encouraged to communicate their underlying attitudes, values, and beliefs to obtain a more detailed and rich understanding of children at the masjid. Through the nature of an in-depth interview, respondents are allowed to communicate more freely and to provide more detailed descriptions. Further questions are asked based on the response and development throughout the interview. The data from the interview can be regarded as qualitative. Hence, the NVivo software is used as the tool to analyse the data. The interviews were recorded using Sony IC Recorder (ICD-PX440)- refer figure 1. Later, the interviews were transcribed using https://otranscribe.com/.

Figure 1: Sony IC Recorder

Data Analysis
In order to analyse the qualitative data, the NVivo 12 software is used. It helps to organise, retrieve, and present data effectively and more systematically.

Analysis strategy
According to Gulati (2009), deductive analysis is an analysis from specific terms or themes to create some general ideas. Codes or themes are usually prepared in advance, and data collected will be sorted to the particular codes. Since the nature of the semi-structured is with predetermined questions, the deductive analysis approach can be applied. Figure 2 shows the summary of deductive analysis process involved in the study.
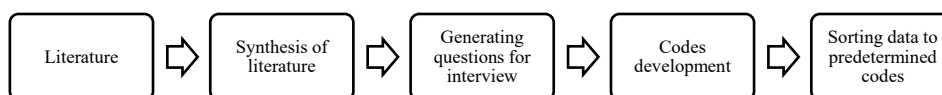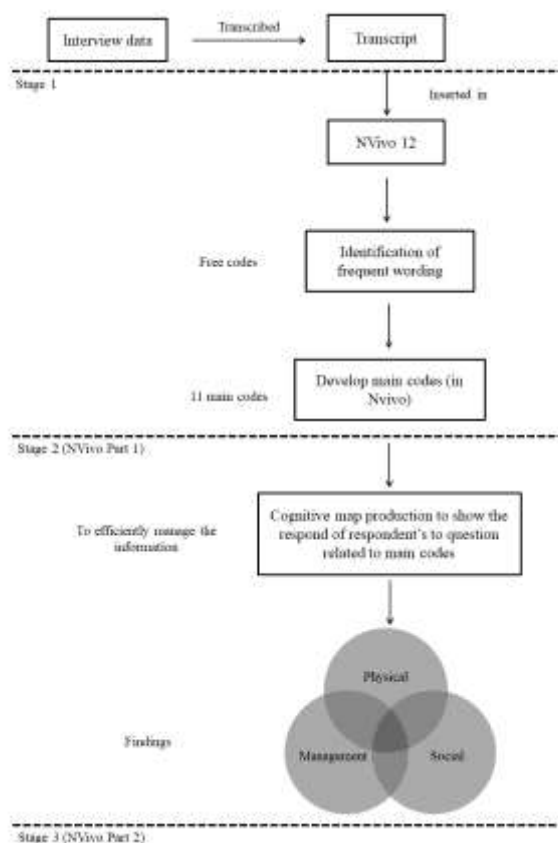

Figure 2: Deductive analysis process

Figure 3: Flow of analysis

Figure 3 demonstrates the flow of analysis. In stage 1, the interview transcripts were inserted in the NVivo 12. These were later listed as free codes before the related child codes (sub-nodes) were clustered to the main codes (main themes) in stage 2. Stage 3 involves the result of the analysis is then presented using cognitive mapping and diagram that served to identify the perceptions of masjid's administrator on children-friendly masjid.

Figure 4 is an example of the coding development used in the analysis process. The analysis of the content was done by filtering the transcript and to capture only significant statements (code) that represent the idea or information derived from the early literature review done (deductively).

Figure 4: Summary of codes development

Accordingly, the detail analysis method shown only for the main codes. There are **11 main codes** identified in the study which are:
1. Activities for children at masjid
2. Noise
3. Facility
4. Children's attendance
5. Awareness
6. Safety
7. Children friendly masjid
8. Masjid's development
9. Ramadhan
10. Islamic school (KAFA/SRA)
11. Behaviour (children, parents and other *jamaah*)

Figure 5 shows part of the analysing process for the code: Noise, and further developed under child code: Complaint of *Jamaah*.
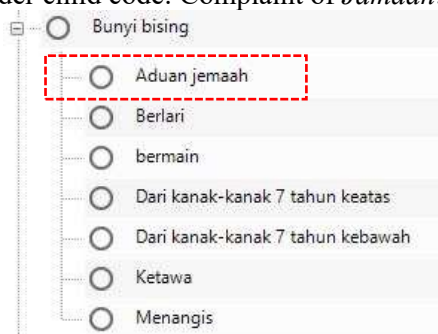
Figure 5: Sub codes (child codes) for Main code: Noise

Framework matrix is created to help the data to be summarised concisely. Table 2 shows part of the detail responds of each respondent under sub-code: Complaint of *jamaah.*

Table 2: Example of framework-matrix for child code: Complaint from *jamaah*

	A : Aduan jemaah
1 : AJK ABU UBAIDAH AL JARRAH	Setakat ini pihak masjid tidak pernah mendapat aduan ataupun rungutan secara terang-terangan yang mana jemaah mengadu kanak-kanak berlari contohnya waktu solat.
2 : AJK AL KHAIRIYYAH	Komen-komen dan aduan daripada jemaah yang tidak berapa setuju dengan kanak-kanak yang berlari-lari, bising dimasjid.Memang itulah antara masalah yang kita belum boleh selesaikanlah setakat ini.
3 : AJK AL-AKRAM	Ada
4 : AJK AR RAHIMAH	Tiada aduan mungkin kesan daripada ibubapa yang menjaga dan mengawasi anak mereka dimasjid ini
5 : AJK IMAM AL GHAZALI	Sudah lima tahun saya menjadi ahli jawatankuasa dan tidak pernah lagi menerima aduan daripada jemaah berkaitan kanak-kanak bising

The framework matrix helps to outline each respondent's perceptions to be further compared and contrasted. Table 2 shows that some respondents provide specific details of the *jamaah's* complaint. This can assist in concluding the category or pattern of complaint received by the masjid's administrator. These processes involved in stage 2 of the analysis.

Cognitive mapping
According to Eden and Ackerman (1998), cognitive mapping is used as a method to structure disorganised or complex data as well as to structure ideas and relationship identifying. The detail analysis process of the interview data using the NVivo 12 resulted in the cognitive mapping structure. The structure is based on each code identified from this study. Figure 5 shows the example of cognitive mapping under the main code: Noise (*bunyi bising*).
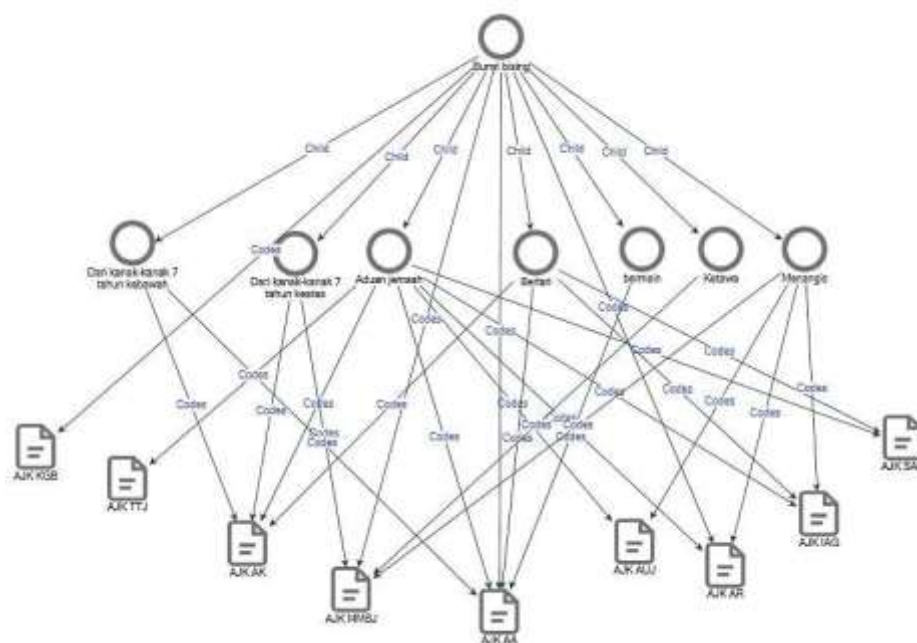
Figure 6: Cognitive map of main code: Noise
Note: altogether there are eleven cognitive maps

Figure 6 gives an overview of how each respondent responds to questions related to noise. It can be seen that some respondent's further explanation leads towards more specific types/source of the noise. As for this study, the particular noise is from activities such as running, playing, laughing, and crying. Some respondents even provided detail on children category of age who created the noise in the masjid. The majority of the respondents also mentioned about the complaint on noise by the *jamaah*.

FINDINGS
Based on the eleven cognitive maps generated from the interview analysis, the results are summarised. It leads towards identifying the administrator's perceptions of children at the masjid.

Based on the analysis, it is found that the development of the code can be categorized into three themes, which are physical attributes, management of masjid, and social elements. This categorisation resulted from the analysis in NVivo 12 based on the main codes and the child codes. These codes can be associated with one, two, or three themes. Figure 7 shows the result of the overlaying codes with the themes categories.
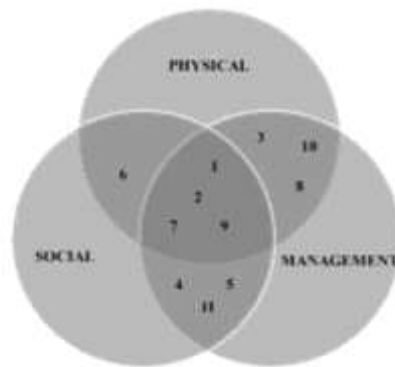
Figure 7: Summary of the 11 main codes categorization

From figure 7, it can be seen that code 1, 2, 7 and 9 are related to all the themes while code 4, 5 and 11 falls under the theme of social and management. Codes related to physical and management are 3, 8 and 10 while code 6 categorised under theme physical and social. None of the codes are found to be under ONLY one theme.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the primary concern and challenges faced by the masjid's administrator regarding children at masjid can be categorised into three themes or areas which are the physical aspect of the masjid, management of the masjid, and social aspect. These three themes are somehow related to a certain extent, which requires careful considerations in addressing the identified issues on children at the masjid. The findings indicate that in addressing the said issues, a holistic approach must be applied. For instance, code 2 (noise) must be looked from the effectiveness of the management in handling situations whereby specific physical space for children may help them to have social interactions among them and also with other *jamaah* in a more conducive environment. The findings also can be used to guide the management of masjid towards planning and administering the masjid physically and socially.

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