



الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA
بِوَسِيْلَةِ سُنَّتِي اِسْلَامِيَّةٍ اَنْبَارًا رَجِيًّا مِلْدِيًّا

**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL PHYSICAL
ENVIRONMENT IN SELECTED SCHOOLS
OF SEREMBAN**

**BY
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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION**

**KULIYYAH OF ISLAMIC REVEALED KNOWLEDGE
AND HUMAN SCIENCES
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the form four students' perceptions of existing conditions of their school's physical environment. The focus is on both the classroom and out-classroom physical components of school environment in terms of their importance and students' satisfaction. The students' perceptions of school physical environment in different types of schools are also considered in this study.

The instrument of the study, a three-part questionnaire, was administered to 498 form four students selected randomly from four types of schools in Seremban. The data analysis involved the percentage counts and the employment of Wilcoxon Z.

The results reveal that the perceived importance of selected components of school physical environment is higher than the level of satisfaction. Statistically significant differences exist between the degree of importance and the degree of satisfaction. The participants' perceived behaviour is also affected by the conditions of the school physical environment. The students' perceptions of school physical environment vary according to types of schools. However, the difference is trivial.

كان الهدف الرئيس لهذه الدراسة تقصي إدراكات طلاب الصف الرابع الثانوي لظروف البيئة المادية السائدة في مدارسهم. وتركز البحث على بعض عناصر البيئة الصفية وغير الصفية من حيث أهميتها ورضا الطلاب عنها. واهتمت الدراسة أيضا بإدراكات الطلاب لظروف البيئة المدرسية تبعا لنوع المدرسة.

الأداة المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة هي استبانة من ثلاثة أقسام تم تطبيقها على 498 من طلاب الصف الرابع الثانوي تم اختيارهم عشوائيا من أربع أنواع مختلفة من المدارس في "سيرمبان". وقد استخدمت النسب المئوية والإحصائي "ولكوكسون ز"، لتحليل البيانات.

أظهرت النتائج أن أهمية عناصر البيئة المدرسية، حسب إدراك أفراد العينة لها تفوق معدل رضاهم عنها. أي أنه كان هناك فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين درجة الأهمية ودرجة الرضا. كذلك تبين أن ظروف البيئة المدرسية المادية تؤثر على سلوك التلاميذ. هذا وقد تأثرت إجابات التلاميذ بنوع المدرسة. ولكن الفروق كان ضئيلا.

ABSTRAK

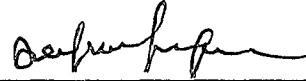
Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji persepsi pelajar-pelajar tingkatan empat terhadap situasi persekitaran fizikal sekolah masa kini. Fokus sebenarnya ditumpukan kepada kedua-dua komponen fizikal di dalam dan di luar bilik darjah dilihat dari sudut kepentingannya dan kepuasan pelajar terhadapnya. Persepsi pelajar terhadap persekitaran fizikal di sekolah-sekolah yang berlainan jenis juga diambil kira di dalam kajian ini.

Soal selidik yang mengandungi tiga bahagian ini telah diedarkan kepada 498 pelajar tingkatan empat yang dipilih secara rawak dari empat jenis sekolah di Seremban. Manakala data analisis kajian ini melibatkan kiraan peratusan dan penggunaan ujian Wilcoxon Z.

Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa peratus darjah kepentingan didapati lebih tinggi dari peratus bagi darjah kepuasan pelajar. Secara statistiknya, terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan di antara darjah kepentingan dan darjah kepuasan. Keadaan persekitaran fizikal sekolah didapati mempengaruhi tingkah laku pelajar. Persepsi pelajar terhadap persekitaraan fizikal sekolah didapati berbeza mengikut jenis sekolah. Walau bagaimanapun perbezaan ini tidak begitu ketara.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Education.



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Examiner

Date: 2/6/99

This thesis was submitted to the Department of Education and is accepted as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.



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Date: 2/6/99

This thesis was submitted to the Kuliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences and is accepted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.



Abdullah Hassan

Dean, Kuliyyah of Islamic Revealed
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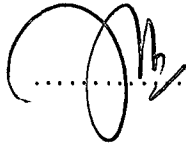
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

Name: Jamaliah binti Hashim

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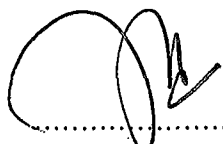
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Students' Perceptions of School Physical Environment in Selected Schools of Seremban

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**DEDICATED TO
MY HUSBAND,
IDRUS BIN ABD. KADIR**

Who provides me with the immeasurable and unforgettable support

AND

**MY CHILDREN,
MUHAMMAD YASEER BIN IDRUS,
RAHIL BINTI IDRUS,
MAISARAH BINTI IDRUS.**

With the message,

“SUCCESS IS AN OPTION, BARRIER IS AN ILLUSION”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious and the Most Merciful

I owe an enormous debt to my supervisor, Dr. Aref T.M.A. Al-Atari who painstakingly invested time and effort to make this endeavour a success. His meticulous supervision, constructive comments and suggestions as well as his sincere encouragement and support deserve more than what words can express.

This venture would not have been possible without the cooperation of my sister Shamsinah, her husband and her colleagues at MPRM who openly and willingly shared their experiences and knowledge with me. My deeply felt thanks go to my friends Zariani, Riswani, Kwan, Fifin, Ida, Kamisah, Salwa, Wirba, Naga, Ali, Varfee, Saleem, Abdullahi, Abdul Mutalib and all the others who shared the agony of writing and completing this thesis.

I must offer my affectionate appreciation to my beloved mother-in-law, Ramlah Abd. Wahab and sisters-in-law Latifah and Azizah who tenderly and patiently took care of my precious siblings during my absence from home. The constant and silent prayers of my dear parents, Hj. Hashim Abd. Rahman and Hjh. Shamsiah bt. Daud and the rest of my family must have made this work very valuable and memorable to me.

Throughout the preparation of this thesis, I have benefited a lot from comments and suggestions of the PGC members especially Prof. Dr. Abdul Rashid Moten

and all the faculty members of the Education Department, especially Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rosnani Hashim. I would also like to express my humble thanks to sister Norizah, sister Baini, brother Ali and brother Azad for their special support.

Last but not least, an infinite debt is owed to my husband, who inspired me to take up this Master of Education course despite its bearings on our family life. His moral support had finally made this writing a worthwhile effort. To all my dear children, this writing is my token of love and inspiration for you to grow up knowledgeably.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EPRD	Educatioanal Planning and Research Division
IIUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
JPNS	Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Sembilan
MPRM	Maktab Perguruan Raja Melewar
NST	New Straits Times
OHP	Overhead Projector
PGC	Postgraduate Committee
PTC	Proposal and Thesis Committee
PEB	Programme on Educational Building
Viz.	Namely
Vs	Versus

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Physical environment provides means by which students' behaviour could be analysed, interpreted and managed. Most schools are still learning how best to manage the physical conditions in classrooms and school facilities so as to provide students with a healthy learning atmosphere. Alkin (1992) referred to the studies done by Weinstein (1977) and Prescott (1987) which showed that the physical setting in schools could improve students' behaviour and learning. Learning and teaching are most effective in healthy environment and principals are required to invest much time and allocate necessary resources for safety and security as they do for education.

Principals are responsible for operating and maintaining facilities that are aesthetically pleasing, cost efficient, easy to maintain, functional and safe. School environment affects children who are more vulnerable than adult. A physical environment is regarded as part of the school's internal environment, and as such it plays a significant role in moulding students' attitudes and behaviour (Strike and Ternasky, 1993).

The classrooms could become the precursor of the 21st century environment that can help orient students. Educational plants such as schools are called upon to shed the factory format and emerge in new forms which in addition to its traditional roles, function as the centre of delivery system for educational packages. The prospective school is envisaged as a physical structure that opens

its walls to become part of the library, museum, science center, planetarium, laboratory and corporation that is plugged into it (Pesaneli, 1993).

In Malaysia, the government through the Ministry of Education is responsible for providing physical facilities to all educational institutions including fully-aided primary and secondary schools. The physical facilities normally provided by the government to primary and secondary schools include: classrooms, science laboratory, industrial art workshop, home science room, canteen, hall, library, educational television room, toilet, playground, furniture, fence as well as water and electricity supply.

In 1985, the Cabinet Committee did a review of the implementation of the educational policy. A report was released and some interesting findings pertaining to educational facilities were highlighted. The findings may be paraphrased as follows:

- a) Classrooms and facilities were inadequate to accommodate the tremendous increase in pupil enrolment.
- b) Allocation of additional facilities such as halls, playing fields and courts benefited only big schools resulting in small schools being left even further behind in terms of the distribution of facilities.
- c) The building of schools was rigidly based on standard plans. As a result, effective teaching-learning approaches cannot be facilitated.
- d) Due to the inadequacy of physical facilities, many schools resorted to having double sessions. This in turn led to two major problems:
 - (i) difficulty in coordinating administration between the two sessions

- (ii) long hours of schooling for pupils from remote areas, as they have to leave for school very early and reach home after school only at night. This situation has given rise to a number of disciplinary problems (Report of the Cabinet Committee, 1985:123-125)

The situation worsened because of the unfavourable teacher-student ratio. The Report of Cabinet Committee, 1985 pointed out that the number of students per class at school levels were as follows:

- a) Primary school – 50 students per class
- b) Secondary school – 45 students per class (Report of the Cabinet Committee, 1985:76).

In another report submitted to the Ministry of Education, the writers recommended that, steps should be taken to control the supply of quality furniture and equipment to schools. The report also stated that the monopoly rights given to the government organized contractors should be supervised and monitored so as to avoid the red-tape process of sending inferior equipment and 'wafer furniture' to various government-aided schools in Malaysia (Nazaruddin et. al., 1989:23).

The above two reports were prepared many years back during which the country witnessed a lot of development. Today, Malaysia is on her way towards equipping schools with high technology. Attempts have been made to initiate pilot projects such as the smart schools aiming at facilitating learning by using computers. But the question is, could the ambitious educational plans of

Malaysia be achieved when the situation of physical building leaves much to be desired as appears from the above reports?

Statement of the Problem

In recent years a consensus has emerged that school environment can affect attitudes and behaviors. High levels of density in classrooms have resulted in dissatisfaction, decreased social interaction, and increased aggression. 'Soft' environment has been associated with better attendance, greater participation, and more positive attitudes towards the school, the instructors and the classmates. On the other hand, it has been realised that users of classroom environment (particularly students and teachers) can serve as valuable sources of information in providing appropriate learning outcomes (Dorman et. al., 1995).

This research studies the views of form four students toward physical environment in randomly selected schools of Seremban. It relates this to the students' perceived behaviour. Finally, it explores some implications for school administration. The researcher hopes to provide readers with useful empirical data pertaining to the topic concerned since to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has been undertaken since the year 1989.

Thus the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How important are the different components of physical environment to students?
2. To what extent are students satisfied with their school physical environment?

3. Is there any significant difference between the level of importance and the level of satisfaction?
4. To what extent do the participants feel that the physical environment affects their behaviour?
5. Do the students' perceptions vary according to the type of school?

Significance of the study

In Malaysia, efforts have been made to enhance technological awareness among students. While waiting for future construction of smart schools and the redesigning of high-tech facilities, it is important for the educationalists to look at the present state of existing basic facilities in schools. The present conditions of basic facilities such as classrooms, toilet, fans, lights, water, canteen, halls, fields and many others need to be examined with the view to be upgraded and prepared for the future challenges.

Thus, it is hoped that the study will furnish school administrators with helpful insights into the existing situation. The study also acquires its importance from the dearth of research in this specific area since as mentioned earlier no similar study has been conducted since 1989.

Definition of Terms

Perception

Perception has been defined in different ways. According to Shafritz et al. (1988) 'perceiving' is the way in which a person views his or her environment based on

the senses, past experiences, attitudes, current information, and other personal variables. Page et al. (1978) hold that 'perceiving' is the process by which the individual organizes and makes sense of his/her sensory experience. Watson (1989) interprets the meaning of "perception" philosophically as the knowledge of the worldly material things in which we live. The nature of one's experience is examined and questions are raised. For the purposes of this study the researcher adopts Allen's definition of perception as the process whereby information about one's environment is received by the senses, organized and interpreted so that it becomes meaningful (Allen, 1994).

Physical Environment

Physical environment of schools refers to the surrounding in which students learn (Stuckard and Mayberry, 1992). However, this study focuses on selected components of physical environment, which are considered the most important facilities that exist in the target schools, inter alia: classroom and its surrounding, such as desks, chairs, tables, cupboards, walls, windows, fans, lights, markers/chalks, and blackboards. Selected components, which lie outside the classroom surrounding, include the school toilet, canteen, library, hall, field, sports equipment, taps and fountains/water-coolers.

Behaviour

Behaviour is sometimes used in a wide sense to cover all purposive activities. It may refer to the individual's response to his social environment (Watson, 1989). It could be any observable act or a response to a stimulus. It also means an

outcome of a course of instruction or the placement of an individual in a learning environment (Page et. al., 1979).

In this study, behaviour is defined as students' responses towards the conditions of their school physical environment. This study does not aim at measuring behaviour but to investigate how students feel their behaviour is affected by their schools' physical behaviour.

Delimitations of the study.

The study focuses on certain selected components of the school environment. It also limits itself to the form four students of the selected schools since they are mature enough to give accurate views. They are also chosen because they are not involved in any major examinations and therefore can spare more time to answer questionnaires as thoughtful as possible. Despite these limitations, the data obtained is considered important to school administrators and educationalists who are responsible and accountable for the welfare of their students.