Integrated space in the traditional Pondok school education system - A case study in Pattani, Thailand.

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Abstract. The pondok school system was the earliest in the Malay Archipelago that focused on Islamic studies. The teaching method which stressed on group communication was said to have given rise to integrated space within a building thereby influencing its architecture and spatial design. Two of such schools, almost a century old in Pattani, Thailand, have been used as case studies to measure the influence of communication and integrated space on the interior layout. Data from interviews congruent with floor plans is the crucial reference as to the significance of integrated space. Studies have shown that emphasis on communication in the pedagogy of the traditional pondok school is the main creator of the integrated space, and this gave priority to the positioning and size, and subsequently influencing the overall floor plan.

Keywords; pondok institution, integrated space, communication

1. Introduction
The pondok school adopts a traditional methodology that accentuates communication to achieve its goal, that is, to mould the human attitude, apart from its delivery of education contents based on Islamic principles (Shuhaimi, 2013). Inevitably, this gave rise to the design of the premises’ spatial layout with integrated space that functioned as a common area for various activities and involved its usage for groups within one place (Shatha, 2017).

The pedagogy method that practises communication between teacher-and-pupil and pupil-to-pupil is a primary emphasis for integrated space in the floor plans of pondok schools (Arslan, 2017; Yusuf, 2015). With the main building connected to other spaces in the two case studies of Pattani, Thailand, the relationship between communication and integrated space is a yardstick to its influence in the design of the interior. It also discloses the overall design of floor plans in both schools.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Pondok education institution
Generally, traditional Islamic education in the Malay Archipelago falls into two categories: the madrassa, which has study activities during the day, and the pondok which is a boarding school with full day-long studies (Nilan, 2009). ‘Pondok’ is derived from the Arabic fundug which means a hostel or hotel (Shuhaimi, 2013). The pondok institution is the region’s system of schooling that focuses on the
Quran and prayers based on the classical textbook (Eka, 2007). Other subjects such as science, *fiqh*, theology and Sufism are also taught (Bradley, 2013). As such, the *pondok* is considered a traditional education system complete with boarding facilities created centuries ago (Eka, 2007).

Islamic education is not just about knowledge but encompasses cultivating the attitude and human spirit (Shuhaimi, 2013). Thus, it needs to comprehend the teaching methods and provide suitable spaces based on this. Studying in the *pondok* is a full-time affair which also includes praying with the brethren. This practice is not confined just to the study place like the main hall or class, but also include other spaces like the kitchen, dormitory, prayer hall and so on (Yusuf, 2015). Therefore, Islamic education encompasses the formal which are scheduled lessons and evaluations and informal which refers to practice and lifestyle through perception, behaviour and life’s lessons.

In Malaysia, Islamic lessons begin in the teacher’s house and progress to the mosque and *suraup* (minor mosque) when there is increased capacity. In Indonesia, the institution was called *pesantren*, noted to have emerged in the 13th Century (Eka, 2007). The *pondok* came into being from a combination of the hut (*pondok*) linked to the teacher or religious scholar’s house and drew pupils from the villages and later from elsewhere, as well as other countries. The full-time studies necessitated pupils to build hut-accommodation around the scholar’s house which became the main building in the complex (Shuhaimi, 2013).

The ministry of education in Thailand has defined the *pondok* as a ‘private school with Islam instruction’ (Chidechanok, 2016), and in the modern context is classified as informal education (Thithimadee, 2018). It emerged in the 14th Century during the Pattani Malay kingdom, and after the latter’s fall to Siam (old Thailand) in 1786, the role of the mosque and *pondok* became increasingly important in uniting and spreading the relevant knowledge to the Pattani community (Bradley, 2013).

External factors such as economy, politics, culture and society also affected the study environment in its education (Ucan, 2018), and these determined the features of the region’s *pondok* institution which have evolved since its emergence. Nevertheless, it has met the contemporary criteria which include the pedagogy method through human interaction, teacher integrity and the development of the human spirit. This is because the *pondok* school focuses on behaviour and daily practices which shape a person’s lifestyle later in life (Yusuf, 2015).

2.2 Integrated space

Integrated space is defined as a shared space for specific activities, whether of the same or different nature (Chan, 2018). It can undertake a variety of such and is an open and flexible space (Arslan, 2017; Skogland, 2017). The sharing of it can bring about reciprocatively behaviour and practice, subsequently creating a social bond even though it may have been initially among strangers.

Space-sharing can create a sense of belonging (Skogland, 2017; Jarvis, 2011) and improve the exchange of knowledge, non-verbal communication and awareness (Gray, 2018). Such places are equated to social spaces where interaction take place, thus bringing about social by-products (Sara, 2017). It shows the formation of the student’s social consciousness which is the aim of the studies and thus leads to the influence of the space design including the physical movement in the buildings (Montgomery, 2008).

Skogland (2017) also emphasised that the space design was crucial as it was to serve the specific activity as planned beforehand; hence, a direct relationship between space and function. Indeed, the design can affect the user in terms of interaction, movement and behaviour. In space planning, integrated space is the most important, primary and largest amongst other spaces that exist together with it (Shatha, 2017).
Its multi-purpose function also helps to reduce the number and size of other spaces designated in a building.

The study space is a joint premise for teaching and learning. The teaching area refers to the space planned for periodic meetings between teacher and pupil while the learning space is allocated for individual or group study activity (Beckers, 2016). Education is also geared towards building social skills through group study and informal interaction (Montgomery, 2008). Learning through engagement within a group justifies an individual’s presence and projects his personality in the surroundings and space he is in (Pipitone, 2017). In a space, exchange of knowledge is through interaction, and so, influences its design. Knowledge-transfer is via two main channels, explicit and tacit, the latter being motions and gestures. Both require face-to-face meetings (Meulenbroek, 2017).

This is in line with Islamic education which often emphasises face-to-face meetings (Maimun, 2010), and the *pondok* adopts this traditional pedagogy where a teacher sits in front with the pupil facing him in a semi-circle. Learning this way influences the shape and size of the space by incorporating some references in the space planning of the overall building such as land location, the main entrance in relation to the road, including orientation such as facing towards Mecca for the building with a prayer area (*musolla*/*madrassa*). Given that the *musolla* is linked to the study space, the optimum would be square-shaped according to Islamic teachings whereby the brethren can pray together.

As such, the integrated space exists as a result of shared activities and at the same time being aware of the importance of communication in learning. The *pondok* school blends this area to achieve its goal during lesson time. The relationship between the importance of the integrated space and communication is gauged through location and space allocation as compared to other areas in the floor plan of the interior of the school’s main building.

This research has used two *pondok* schools as its case study: Pondok Hj. Ismail bin Ahmad situated at Semela Village (in Kerisik, Pattani) built in the 1940s, and Pondok Hj. Ismail bin Hj. Idris at Bendang Badam, Yarrang District (Pattani, Thailand) built in 1947. Via interviews with the owners of the building and former pupils, information was obtained regarding the original function and features of each space. Measurements were carried out to derive physical data as to the position and size of the spaces in the main building of both schools. The data was used to show the level of significance of integrated space and compared to interview data to reflect communication activity while lessons were conducted.

**Figure 1.** Pondok Haji Ismail bin Ahmad, Kampung Semela, Kerisik, Pattani.

**Figure 2.** Pondok Hj. Ismail Bin Hj. Idris, Kampung Bendang Badam, Daerah Yarrang, Pattani, Thailand.
3. Analysis & Findings

Figure 3. Floor Plan Pondok Hj. Ismail Bin Hj. Idris
From the interviews it was found that the Prayer and Multipurpose halls as well as the Living Area, were integrated spaces and reflected the features and function of the schooling system in both schools; the Balcony, although an interaction area, was merely for conversation and rest. Other spaces such as the
Kitchen were considered a semi-private area and mostly used by female students, while the bedroom was for the teacher and his family - in this context the house owner. Based on data collected, both schools gave top priority to the integrated space in Pondok Hj. Ismail bin Hj. Idris (Bendang Badam) the Prayer and Multipurpose halls together had 33.2% of total space area - the largest. Besides prayers, space was also the main venue for lectures, lessons for big groups, and for pupils to discuss and converse. It also served as a reception place for guests. At 28.3% of total space, the Living Area was second largest. Differing from the traditional Malay house where guests were usually entertained in the Living Area, in the pondok it was an interaction space and for small group studies. It was also there that seniors, as instructed by the teachers, usually taught the junior pupils in small groups. Combined, the Prayer, Multipurpose halls and Living Area, the integrated space of this pondok school has 61.5% of the overall area. The same can be seen at Pondok Hj. Ismail Ahmad at Semela where the three pertinent spaces catering to similar activities and functions encompassed an area of 61.5% also.

The integrated space is centrally located at the front. It is in the path and main circulation of the users in the building, thus clearly justifying its vital importance in floor plans. The Prayer and Multipurpose halls, for example, are situated forefront at the main entrance/door facing the road, guided by its function as an assembly area for pupils from the surrounding pondoks who enter the main building. It is also the area to receive visitors from villages and elsewhere that come at specific times to attend religious talks, thrusting the need for a large space at the front. Therefore, the priority given to integrated space is evident in the two pondok schools mentioned which stressed on communication in pedagogy. It is in line with Islamic education which makes communication and interaction a main learning process mechanism, be it between teacher and pupil, or pupil and pupil, or with that of visitors. As such, the parallel relationship of integrated space with communication of the users of the building can be seen in the floor plans of the pondok school which espouses the traditional teaching and learning methodology.

4. Conclusion
It is concluded that integrated space runs in tandem with communication and determines its size and positioning in floor plans. For the two schools cited here the position at front and centre coupled with the fact that this space was the largest suggests that it is the most significance feature, hence proving that communication and interaction play a vital role in the design of the area.

Interaction and communication have been the determining factors in the floor plan design of the pondok school where the function of the integrated space is described in the literature review. To this, emphasis on communication and interaction in traditional Islamic education is clearly evident and practised in both schools under study here. Without a doubt, the pondok schools in Pattani adopt a systematic pedagogy that fulfil the education theory as well as having a well-planned interior layout that aid scholastic achievement in Islamic studies, and that is, the shaping of the student’s knowledge and social consciousness.

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