

ESTABLISHING ISSUES ON CHILDREN AT MASJID IN MALAYSIA THROUGH A DESKTOP STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Masjid is said to be the centre of a community but is often associated with adults when children are also part of the community. The image portrayed in society shows that children are often marginalised in the masjid. Children at masjid have been a continuous debate from time to time within the community, particularly during the month of Ramadhan (fasting month of the Muslim calendar) as the number of children attending masjids increase. This paper aims to establish the issues concerning children and masjid in Malaysia. For this purpose, a systematic desktop study is performed. Through the use of Google search engine, data are collected from several sources which are the Facebook post, YouTube video, articles from e-newspaper, blog posts, and e-magazine. The data is analysed using NVivo software to accumulate related keywords to identify and establish issues on children at the masjid. This study focuses on two main domains which are masjid and children. The findings suggest that the issues of children at masjid revolve around four established themes which are the children themselves, physical space, management of the masjid, and *jamaah* of the masjid.

Keyword: Children-friendly-masjid, issues of children at masjid, systematic desktop study.

INTRODUCTION

The hadith narrated by Al-Nasaa'i from 'Abd-Allaah ibn Shaddaad that his father said: *"The Messenger of Allah came out to us for one of the evening prayers, carrying Hasan or Husayn. The Messenger of Allah came forward, put the child down and said Takbeer ("Allaahu Akbar") to start the prayer. Then he prostrated during the prayer, and his prostration lasted for a long time. My father said: I raised my head and saw the child on the back of the Messenger of Allah, so I went back to my prostration. When the Messenger of Allah finished praying, the people said to him: 'O Messenger of Allah, during your prayer you prostrated, and it took a long time until we thought that something had happened, or that you were receiving Revelation.' He said, 'Nothing happened, but my grandson was riding on my back, and I did not want to hurry him up until he had had enough"* (Sahih al-Nasaa'i, 1903). This hadith is often referred particularly on how to react when young children 'interfere' while performing prayer/*solat*. The Prophet Muhammad PBUH demonstrated an excellent example of morale and respect towards children even during performing the primary obligatory duty in Islam that is *solat*. The hadith also shows that children are celebrated from childhood (Zainul, 2015). It is considered as a "normalisation process" since tender years (young age) to nurture a better individual.

It can be observed that the presence of children in masjid seems to have raised several issues as they are often affiliated with noise, dirt, disturbance, and so on. Many unpleasant stories regarding how adult act towards children in the masjid and the feeling of uneasiness of adults towards children have been heard from time to time. With the current technology, it enables members of the society to share such experience of theirs online – be it in a blog post or social media. The

mainstream media also reported on such issues. The concern of parents on their children that may disturb other *jamaah* during the *tarawih* prayer was reported in the BH Online (Arifin, 2016). For the case of Malaysia, there are academic reporting on children and masjid, for example, a study on physical layout, and perspective of children and families (Abu Bakar, Mohd Bohori & Azmi, 2019), a survey on user's perception on children at masjid (Abu Bakar et al., 2019), and a study on how children use and view their mosque - the case study of Masjid Al-Taqwa, Taman Kota Masai, Johor (Marsin et al., 2017). However, none had established the issues and problems/challenges of children in the masjid, although the issues of children at masjid have been going on for quite some time. Due to the lack of study or no specific research on it, the issues may not be given serious attention with proper actions to follow suit in addressing it.

Thus, it is deemed essential to do this desktop study to establish the issues concerning the presence of children in the masjid. Identification of issues and problems of children in masjid may allow specific actions to be planned and taken objectively to overcome these issues in the near future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several hadiths indicate the importance of masjid in Islam and among the muslims. From Abu Hurairah RA, the Prophet Muhammad PBUH said: "*The parts of land dearest to Allah are its mosques, and the parts most hateful to Allah are markets*" (Sahih Muslim, 671). Another hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah RA: The Prophet PBUH said, "*He who goes to the masjid in the morning or the evening, Allah prepares for him a place in Jannah whenever he goes to the masjid in the morning and returns from it in the evening*" (Sahih Bukhari, 631 & Muslim, 669). Prophet Muhammad PBUH stresses out the importance and benefits of attending masjid in muslim's life. From these *Hadiths*, it can be seen that masjid is sacred and hold a particular position in Islam. Thus, masjid should be the priority in their daily lives, and this should be started at a young age.

Masjid – The Place for the Community

The history of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and the companion's era shows masjid is the centre for almost everything and not only for prayer. Many studies have shown that masjid has served many functions such as the centre for the community, educational institution, the economic hub, healthcare institution and accommodation centre for the muslim community (Laugu, 2007). It developed the spirit of brotherhood among the muslim communities. Nowadays, due to the development of specialised functions in the government administration where ministries have taken specific roles, the function of masjid has been reduced. Thus, the primary function of masjid had been focused on specific religious activities such as the obligatory prayer, celebration of *eid*, and others. Currently, it can be observed that efforts have taken place towards enlivening (*imarah*) masjids in Malaysia. A lot of social events are taking place in masjids, such as carnivals, camps and seminars (Mohd Nor, 2019). Besides, there is a new effort from masjid in Malaysia to fulfil social welfare, such as introducing ATM Machine exclusively for rice (Bernama, 2019). Masjid in Malaysia also started to become centre for the community as many masjids begin to offer other services apart from prayers such as hall reservation for a wedding ceremony, futsal court for the community to play, and more. Hence, the design of masjid should follow the evolution of its functions.

Typically, masjids in Malaysia have a spacious compound. It can also be observed that the compound of the masjid is often designated for parking. According to Mohd Rasdi (2007), the

compound can be better utilised to cater for social events rather than a parking area. This is somehow in line with the current functions and needs of masjid in attracting the community to the masjid, including children. For urban area particularly, where open spaces are limited, masjid could become the alternative place for children to come and play while observing the five obligatory prayers. According to Idrus (2019), children are welcome to play at the masjid as this is their nature.

Children and masjid – issues and challenges

The members of society and expert have been discussed the pros and cons of the presence of children in the masjid at official and unofficial platforms. Despite the awareness of the importance of masjid in a muslim life, including children, some quarter of the society may not be comfortable having children at the masjid. Much has been said on them including noise, uncleanliness, *saf* position, and so on. The unsuitability of the children's presence at the masjid and their activities are said to disturb others. These led to a dispute as well as actions by certain people. It is reported that young children are being prevented from entering the main prayer hall of the masjid (Jupiter, 2019). Some signage indicates that children are prevented from certain areas within the masjid, and worst - they are discouraged even to enter the masjid (Figure 1).



a) General reminder for children entering the masjid b)General reminder for children below 5 years c) Reminder to prevent children who are yet to be circumcised to enter masjid's prayer hall

Fig. 1 Signages preventing children from entering the masjid and/or the area within the masjid
(Source: Google Images-Online)

Islamic scholars have discussed the ruling of children's *saf* in the masjid. Children can be positioned between adults as there is no issue of an unclean child just because he is yet to be circumcised as explained by the former Mufti of Wilayah Persekutuan through his article entitled "*Masjid dan Kanak-Kanak*" in *Bayyan Linnas* number 63 (Mohamad Al-Bakri, 2016). However, not everyone is aware of this. Thus, such issues keep on being raised from time to time among the *jamaah* (TVSunnah, 2013; Lentera Islam, 2016; Cahaya Islam, 2018 and Al Bahjah TV, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

In order to establish the issues of children at masjid from the secondary sources, a systematic desk study approach is applied. As the data from the secondary sources can be regarded as qualitative, the NVivo software is used as the tool to analyse the data.

Systematic Desk Study

To gain a broad understanding of the area of study, a desk study can be carried out by reviewing previous research (Travis, 2016). It can also act as a preparatory for further research in the related area of the research's domain. To conduct the systematic desk study, the approach is shown in the following Figure 2.

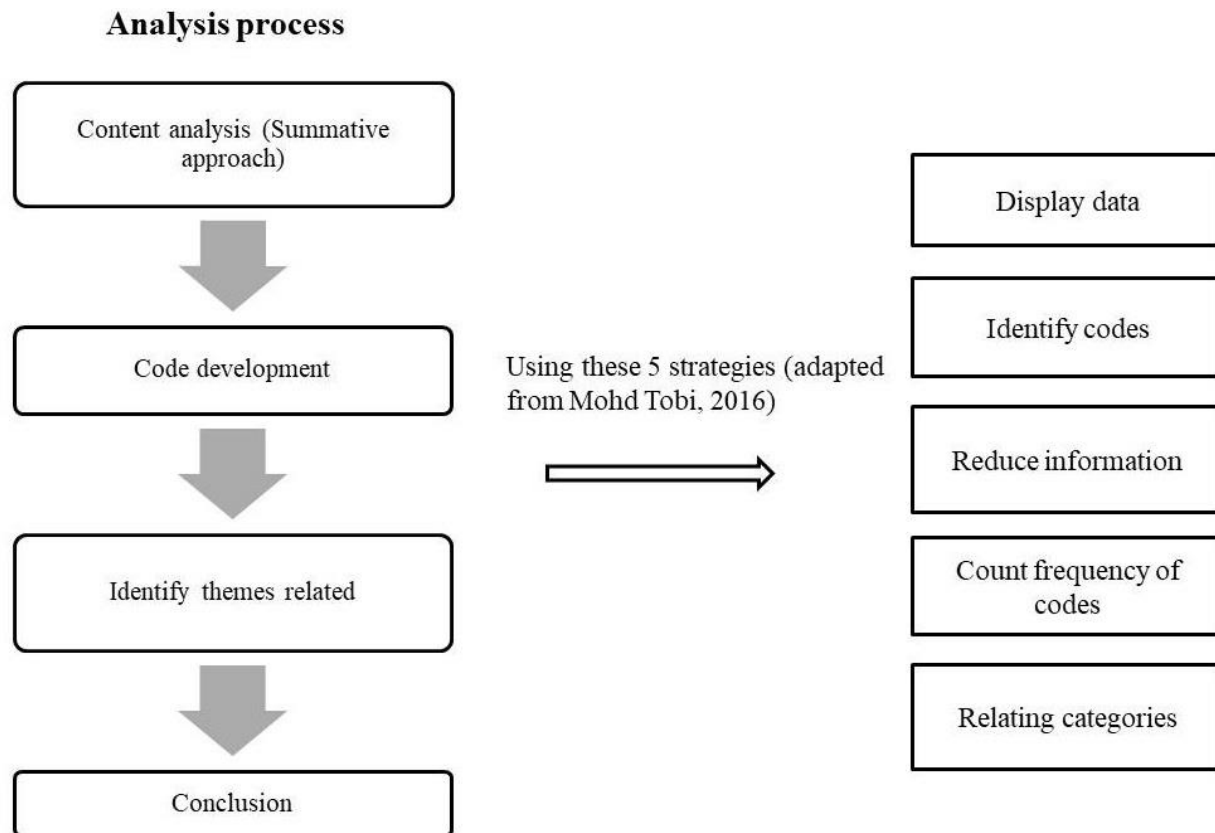


Fig. 2 Systematic approaches to desktop research on children at the masjid
 (Adapted from Rolfe, 2014)

There are two domains of the online search, i.e. the non-academic domain such as the e-newspaper, Facebook, YouTube, and blog post. In contrast, for the academic domain, the sources are based on journals, e-magazines, and books. The data from audio-videos are verbatimly transcribed to be analysed. In summary, the use of technology makes the research easier as data are easily obtained in the world without boundaries. As we are in the era of the world at your fingertips, this study uses the internet as the tools to collect the data.

A study from the Florida Center for Instructional Technology (2013) said that the internet could be a researcher's perfect setting as one can get limitless information by browsing the internet. The searching is conducted throughout the internet using the Google search engine. According to Inspire, a digital agency, Google is the best search engines in the world as it ranked first in the top 12 search engine (Dwyer, 2016). This is supported by Shaw (2020), as he stated that Google provides a better result and considered a trustworthy resource. Figure 3 shows the example of the searching process using Boolean logic such as "children AND masjid" in both Google and Google scholar search engines.

Google search results for "children and masjid". The search bar shows "children and masjid" with a search icon. The results list several articles:

- [www.soundvision.com › article › children-in-the-masji...](#)
Children in the Masjid, Making Space for Our Future.
No information is available for this page.
[Learn why](#)
- [www.missionislam.com › family › childrenmasjid](#)
Children in the Masjid - Mission Islam
Children in the Masjid. By Um Walid. Nowadays, it is unfortunate that in many masjids both brothers and sisters are annoyed at the presence of children.
- [www.planningmalaysia.org › view](#) Translate this page
USERS' PERCEPTION ON CHILDREN AT MASJID ...
Masjid is an important institution to know Allah SWT, empower, and unite society. Early exposure of children to masjid is crucial as nurturing them to love masjid ...
by AA Bakar · 2019 · [Related articles](#)
- [www.fatwaislam.com › ... › Masjid Rulings](#)
The ruling on bringing Children to the Masjid - Fatwaislam.Com
Hence, moving the children away from their places in the row contains: (1)Disregard of their right, because whoever comes to something first-that no one of the ...
- [muslingirl.com › discouraging-children-attending-masjid](#)
Are We Discouraging Our Children From Attending the Masjid?
Jun 28, 2016 — If our youth grow up distanced from the mosque, it's because they were turned

(a)Google

Google Scholar search results for "children and masjid". The search bar shows "children and masjid" with a search icon. The results list several articles:

- USERS'PERCEPTION ON CHILDREN AT MASJID–PLANNING FOR CHILDREN FRIENDLY MASJID**
[AA Bakar, NHA Majid, MB Ibrahim - PLANNING MALAYSIA, 2019 - planningmalaysia.org](#)
Masjid is an important institution to know Allah SWT, empower, and unite society. Early exposure of children to masjid is crucial as nurturing them to love masjid is a process towards loving the creator, strengthening their faith, and improving akhlaq (behaviour) ...
☆ 99 Related articles All 6 versions 88
- CHILDREN FRIENDLY MASJID: A GLIMPSE ON JAMAAH'S PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS CHILDREN AT MASJID**
[AA Bakar - Journal of Architecture, Planning and Construction ..., 2020 - journals.iium.edu.my](#)
The role of the masjid was diverse during the era of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, and it continued for decades by his (SAW) companions and the following caliphs. The diverseness of masjid's role reflected the people that were being served by this institution and reflected ...
☆ 99 88
- CHILDREN FRIENDLY MASJID: PHYSICAL LAYOUT AND PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**
[AA Bakar - Journal of Architecture, Planning and Construction ..., 2019 - journals.iium.edu.my](#)
Children friendly masjid is a concept of masjid design that welcomes children and their families. Masjid is one of the important institutions to know and love Allah SWT, gain knowledge, empower, and unite the ummah. However, the current masjid design may have ...
☆ 99 88
- MASJID'S ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTION ON CHILDREN AT MASJID IN MALAYSIA–SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL ASPECTS**
[AA Bakar - Journal of Architecture, Planning and Construction ..., 2019 - journals.iium.edu.my](#)

(b)Google Scholar

Fig. 3 Example of result from the search engine
(Source: Google, Online)

The search results obtained were manually screen to be analysed later. The data related to the issues on children at masjid are found dated as early as 2007, and there are forty-one data collected, including both academic and non-academic data. The non-academic data gathered forms more than 80% than the academic data. This might be due to the development of the technology that enables people to 'self-report' or share their opinions and experience without having to wait for the conventional media to do on their behalf. However, the data which is not documented in digital form might be left out in this research.

Data Analysis

Content analysis

In qualitative research, content analysis is widely used. The simplest form of word count can be scoped to thematic analysis, or conceptual analysis is one of the approaches in content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). According to Hsieh & Shannon (2005), there are three applications in the content analysis, which are conventional, directed, and summative. These approaches are utilised to clarify meaning from the data collected. Table 1 shows the differences between these three approaches.

Table 1 Differences of conventional, directed and summative approach in Content Analysis
 (adapted from Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)

Approaches	Preliminary stage	Development of codes or keywords	Sources of codes or keywords
Conventional	Starts with observation	During data analysis	Derived from data
Directed	Starts with theory	Before and during data analysis	Derived from theory or relevant research findings
Summative	Starts with keywords	Before and during data analysis	Keywords are derived from interest of researchers or review of literature

From Table 1, it can be seen that the three approaches main distinction is the preliminary stage where all the approaches start with a different technique which is observation, theory, and keywords. This study uses the summative approaches in discovering the issues on children at masjid using the preliminary keywords related to "children" and "Masjid". Different codes are then developed during the analysis process. Referring to these approaches, it can be summarised that content analysis includes codes or keywords development throughout the process. Hence, the NVivo software is used as the tool to determine the codes related and theme. The data analysis framework can be referred to in Figure 4.

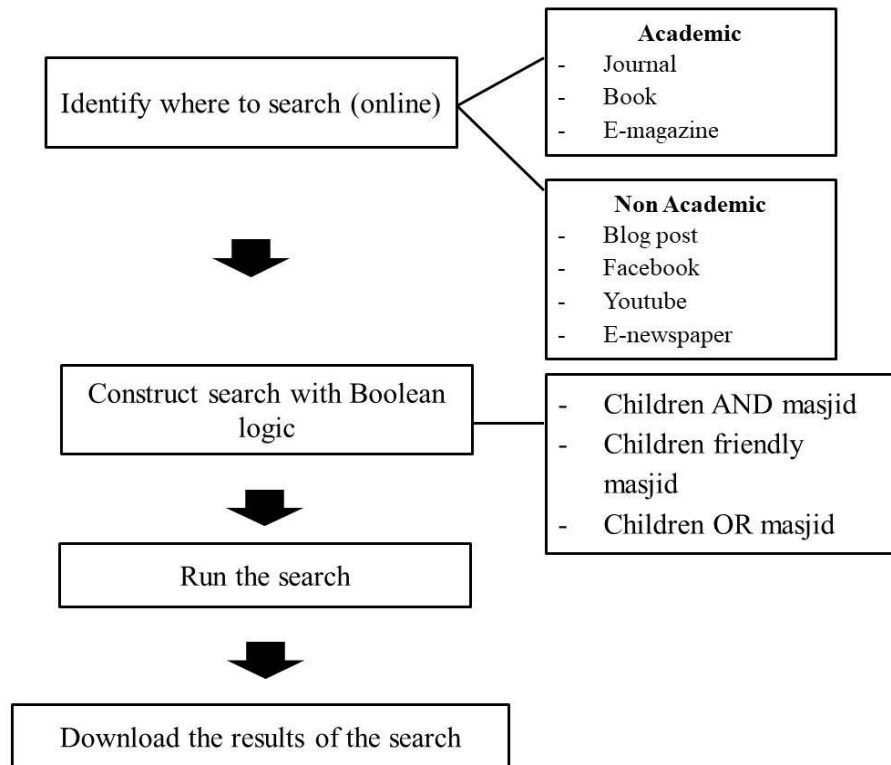


Fig. 4 The framework of the data analysis for establishing issues of children at masjid

The framework also shows the sequence of the analysis. This process helped the researcher to analyse the data and information gathered from the internet towards establishing patterns. These were later listed as open codes (free codes) before the related child codes (sub-nodes) were clustered to the main codes (main themes). The result of the development of codes was then presented using cognitive mapping diagram that served to identify the issues related to children friendly masjid. The desktop analysis was done using **five general data analysis strategies** - namely display data, identify code, reduce information, count frequency of codes, and relating categories (Mohd Tobi, 2016). This process helped to find the emerging pattern from the scrutinised data.

The NVivo 12 was used to analyse the data using these five strategies. The analysis of the study was done by filtering the data whereby only related statements that reflect the issues on children at masjid from the literature review were selected. This is crucial for code development. For this process, the approach and its detail analysis are shown only for Theme 1, which is on "Children" and its child codes (Figure 5). These were compiled issues surrounding children in the masjid. From Figure 5, it can be seen that among the issues that frequently surfaced within the society regarding children at masjid are the children's behaviour and their position in the *saf* (row of prayer).

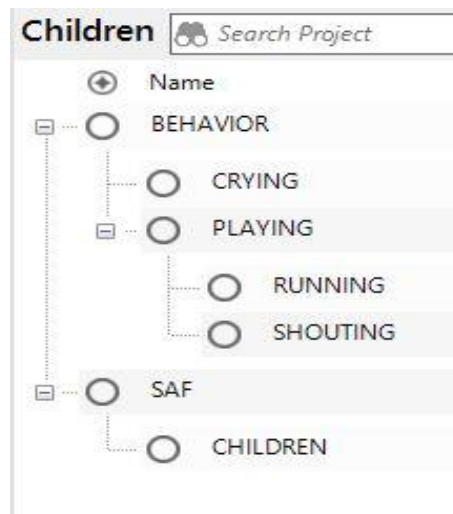


Fig. 5 Codes development in NVivo 12 under Theme 1: Children

Next, after the development of the code, themes are established. Altogether there are four themes established (Figure 6) after codes are developed using the NVivo 12. These codes are automatically generated according to the hierarchy under each theme (children, management of masjid, *jamaah* of masjid, and physical space). This is the visualisation of how free codes can be developed into sub-codes under the main theme. This process follows the five strategies mentioned before.

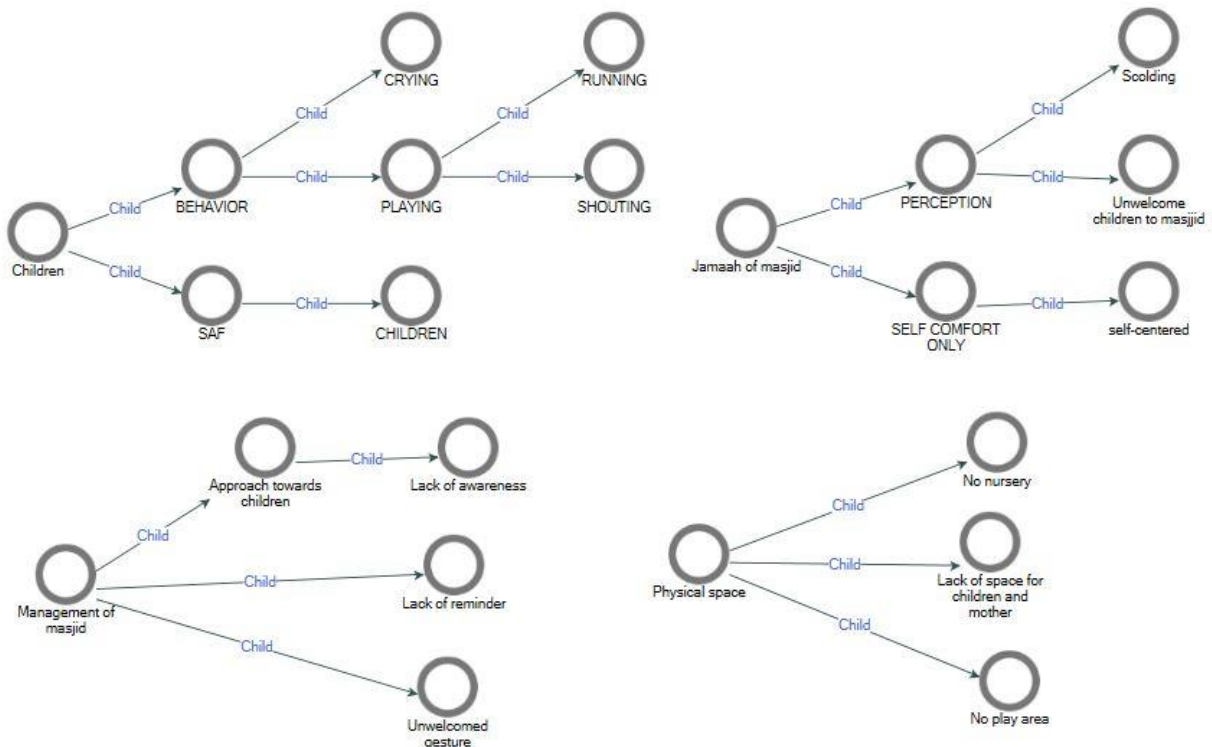


Fig. 6 Themes and codes development using the NVivo 12

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the forty-one data obtained from the online search and reviewed, and as mentioned before, there are four main themes identified related to the issues of children at the masjid which are children, physical space, masjid management, and *jamaah of masjid*.

Table 2 shows the Framework Matrices produced from the NVivo 12 after the themes and codes were generated. The themes help to establish the main component or categories of the issues concerning children at the masjid. This is important, particularly for those with authority such as the management of masjid to manage the issues accordingly. These issues may be related to one another. The classification of issues may help them to prioritise and be objective in overcoming them.

Under each theme, the various issues are outlined. The effects or consequences following the issues are also outlined. This makes it easy to see the cause and effect, as to understand the context of the issues. Knowing the root of a problem would help in problem-solving. Based on this study and analysis, it can be said that there are seven main issues concerning children at the masjid.

Table 2 Framework matrices to establish issues concerning children at masjid

Themes	Issues	Effects/Consequences
Children	Behavior: -Crying -Playing -Running	Noise that disturb other <i>jamaah</i>
	<i>Saf</i> -Separate <i>saf</i> -Same <i>saf</i> with other <i>jamaah</i>	Debates/disputes among community on the ruling of children's <i>saf</i>
	Unclean	Children are always linked to dirt especially young children because they are still using diaper
Physical space	Play area	When there are no special area for children at masjid, they tend to be scattered around and caused noise/disturbance to other <i>jamaah</i>
	Special room/nursery	
Masjid management	Unwelcomed approach towards children	Parents with children felt neglected/ignored at masjid
<i>Jamaah of masjid</i>	Negative perception towards children at masjid	Children feel scared to come to masjid

The effects of the issues seem to be affecting the children, their parents, the management of the masjid as well as other *jamaah*. Under the theme of children, there are three significant issues which are behaviour, *saf* and unclean of the child. Crying, playing and running events seem to disturb the *jamaah*. *Saf* and children's position in the congregational prayer also become issues as some agree children can be in the same *saf* with an adult, and some show disagreement. Children wearing diaper are bringing the concern to *jamaah* as they perceived it as unclean. While on the physical space, the issues concentrated on play area and nursery for children. As there is no

designated space for children, they tend to be scattered around. This may cause disturbance to other *jamaah* following the noise they are making. On the theme of masjid management, the issues focus on the approach of the management, which deemed as unwelcoming the children. There are no specific efforts to include children in the masjid. Thus parents with children felt ignored in the masjid. Under the theme of *jamaah* of masjid, the issues mainly revolve around the behaviour of the *jamaah* towards children. They tend to show hostile gesture such as scolding and glancing towards children and their parents. Therefore parents with children may be shy away from coming to masjid.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study, it can be concluded that the issues concerning children at masjid can be summed under four themes – children, physical space, masjid's management, and *jamaah* of masjid. The nature of children being active is sometimes perceived as behaviour that may not be accepted or tolerated by adults in the masjid. This might also be associated with noise. The issues of a child's position in the *saf* and cleanliness are something that needs to be managed by the adults wisely.

It seems that it is high time that the design of masjid should consider the needs of children and their families as to facilitate them like others. The management of masjid may want to look further in accommodating children – physically and spiritually. The management would be the right 'person' to mediate any dispute among the *jamaah* on any matters concerning children at the masjid. Awareness campaign on the inclusion of children at masjid can be done. This may lessen the negative perception of children at masjid among the *jamaah*, and hopefully, one day, this perception shall disappear when properly addressed. The management of masjid, together with the community, must work together to address each issue towards creating a conducive environment in the masjid. The establishment of issues concerning children at masjid through the systematic desktop study has shed light for various parties to be objective in taking necessary actions. It is pertinent to conduct a study to get first-hand information from the stakeholders as this can further strengthen/support the result of this research.

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