

Student's Perception towards the Mosque's Physical Identity in Banda Aceh

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Abstract. *The emergence of various mosque designs today enriches the repertoire of Indonesian architecture. This is due to differences in the understanding of the community and precedents related to Islamic architecture. This phenomenon results in differing perceptions of the physical identity of mosques, including those in Banda Aceh. This research aims to understand the perceptions of UIN Ar-Raniry students regarding the physical identity of mosques in Banda Aceh. Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires to 100 respondents. The research results indicate that respondents consider domes as the identity of a mosque. However, respondents do not see the presence of minarets and the use of ornaments as the identity of mosques in Banda Aceh. Despite the small percentages, another important finding is that a small number of respondents believe that the use of domes, ornaments, and minarets is not a necessity in mosque design.*

Keywords: Mosque, Identity, Perception

Abstrak. *Munculnya variasi desain masjid saat ini memperkaya khasanah arsitektur Indonesia. Hal ini disebabkan perbedaan pemahaman masyarakat dan preseden terkait arsitektur Islam. Fenomena tersebut menimbulkan perbedaan persepsi terhadap identitas fisik masjid, termasuk masjid di Banda Aceh. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui persepsi mahasiswa UIN Ar-Raniry terhadap identitas fisik masjid di Banda Aceh. Proses pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menyebarkan kuisioner kepada 100 responden. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa responden menganggap kubah sebagai identitas masjid. Namun, responden tidak menganggap keberadaan minaret dan penggunaan ornament sebagai identitas masjid di Banda Aceh. Walaupun dengan persentase yang kecil, temuan penting lainnya adalah sebagian kecil responden beranggapan penggunaan kubah, ornament, dan minaret bukan suatu keharusan pada desain masjid.*

Kata Kunci: Masjid, Identitas, Persepsi

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1. Introduction

The mosque is a building that has an important role in Muslims' life. Apart from being a worship space, the mosque also serves as a community development center (Handryant, 2010). This function has been seen since the first mosques existence built at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). At that time, the Mosque became the center of Muslim activity and was used as a place to advance the civilization of the Islamic people. Various social activities are carried out in the mosque and involve the wider community. The function of the mosque at that time was not only as a place of worship but also as an educational or character-building place for the people. Even the mosques facilitate the political, economic, and socio-cultural activities of the people (Iskandar, 2004). Therefore, the mosque is multifunctional.

The history of the mosque began after the *Hijra* of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to Medina. The first step he took was to invite all his followers to build a mosque (Supardi & Amiruddin, 2001). The mosque built by the Prophet (PBUH) in Medina (formerly called Yatsrib) became a milestone of Islamic civilization (S. Kurniawan, 2014). Physically, the Quba Mosque as the first mosque has a prayer area, a mihrab, a courtyard, and a veranda. There was no use of dome roofs or towers in the earliest mosque designs.

The development of knowledge and technology has influenced the physical appearance of mosque architecture as one of the Islamic architecture products. The current mosques have a visual look and physical elements that are far different from the appearance of the Quba Mosque of the Early Period. Some factors that cause such differences are the location of the design, the mindset of the designer and the community as well as the understanding of Islamic architecture, as the main reference (Iskandar, 2004; Salim et al., 2019; Utaberta, 2008). In its understanding and application, Islamic architecture is influenced by several approaches, namely the populist revivalism approach, the awareness of eclectic historical aspects, the regionalism approach, the metaphorical and structural integrity approach, and the approach through the fundamental values of Islam, namely the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Utaberta, 2008). Those factors impact the emergence of various mosque designs.

Variations of mosque design can also be found in Banda Aceh. Several mosques have different visual appearances such as Baiturrahman's Great Mosque which resembles the Arabian, Classical European, and Moorish architectural styles (K. R. Kurniawan & Kusumawardhani, 2012), Oman Al Makmur's Mosque implements Middle Eastern architecture, particularly Oman's mosque style (Azzahra & Nasution, 2018; Rahmawati, 2023), *Teungku Di Anjong* Mosque which applies the concept of Nusantara with a nested roof (*tumpang* roof) (Utaberta et al., 2009) or the *Baitul Musya'adah* Mosque known as *Kupiah Meukutop* Mosque because of the use of a hat-shaped roof typical of Aceh. The mosques mentioned above have different physical identities, including the shape of the roof, the presence of the *minaret*, and the ornament.

The varied physical form of the mosque affects the perception of the Banda Aceh community in terms of the mosque's physical identity. This leads to a different perception of the public on the visual appearance and the physical elements of the mosque. It is because perception is formed from the experience, knowledge, and way of view of a person. Those three things are the necessary stimulus in the formation of perceptions that ultimately produce different perceptions between one person and the other. Given the many variations in the physical form of the mosque that have been discovered today, the author would like to know how UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh students perceive it as part of the Banda Aceh community towards the physical identity of the Mosque.

2. Methodology



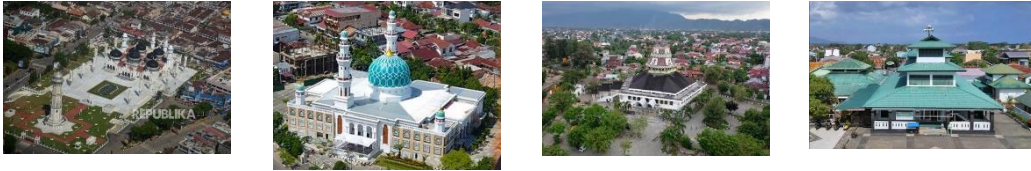
According to (Sumalyo, 2006) the mosque's architectural elements are the ablution area, the *mihrab*, the pulpit, the *minaret*, the *dikka*, the dome, the gate, and ornament. Meanwhile, (Fanani, 2009) adds the prayer area, and the veranda as the mosque's architectural element. He also excludes *dikka* and the gate from the mosque's architectural element. Table 1 shows the comparison of Sumalyo and Fanani theories. The elements stated by both scholars are the ablution area, the *mihrab*, the pulpit, the *minaret*, the dome, and the ornament. Amongst these six elements, only the *minaret*, the dome, and the ornament are visible easily from the outside. Meanwhile, others are located inside the building or enclosed. As the physical identity is related to the appearance of the building, this research focuses on the *minaret*, the dome and the ornament. Particularly for "the dome", the researcher uses the term "the roof" to avoid bias as the dome is one type of roof building.

Table 1. The Comparison of Mosque Architectural Elements

Sumalyo, 2006	Fanani, 2009
The ablution area	The ablution area
-	The prayer area
<i>Mihrab</i>	<i>Mihrab</i>
The pulpit	The pulpit
-	The veranda
<i>Minaret</i>	<i>Minaret</i>
<i>Dikka,</i>	-
The dome	The dome
The gate	-
Ornament	Ornament

The data collected in this study is carried out by disseminating the questionnaire in the form of a printout sheet and distributed to the students of UIN Ar-Raniry. It is made in the form of a printout to make it easier for respondents to give answers. The respondents are 100 non-architecture students of UIN Ar-Raniry. To avoid bias, the questions contain several images of the mosques in Banda Aceh. It's done to produce pure answers from respondents. A list of questionnaire questions can be seen in Table 2. After the respondents looked at the picture, the researchers asked the respondent's perceptions.

Table 2. The Questionnaire

No	Questions
1.	The Roof
	
2.	The ornament
	
3.	The <i>minaret</i>
	

3. Result & Discussion

a. The roof

There are some kinds of answers or student perceptions in answering questionnaires distributed by researchers. From these answers, the keyword that forms the basis of the grouping of answers is obtained. Some sample quotes from respondents' answers can be seen below.

“In my opinion, a mosque with a dome indeed appears synonymous with beauty, and it helps signify that the structure is a mosque. Even mosques with domes (roofs) that have non-circular or unique shapes look interesting. This design perspective often draws inspiration from traditional mosques, creating a connection to historical mosque architecture.” (MR, Faculty of Pedagogy and Education).

"In my opinion, the dome on a mosque is merely an identity marker; in reality, a mosque is a place of worship that should be clean and comfortable.“ (F, Faculty of Pedagogy and Education).

"The domes of mosques don't have to be uniformly round; even those with non-circular shapes are still considered mosques. A mosque is defined by its function, not just its form." (S, Faculty of Psychology).

Based on the respondent's answers, some keywords such as "mosque's dome for aesthetic purposes" can be taken from the sample quotations of the first respondent, "mosque's dome as the identity of the mosque" from the second responders' answer sample, and "a dome isn't a must" from a sample of third respondents' answers. Based on the keyword, a percentage grouping of student perceptions about the roof of the mosque is made.

Table 3. Students' Perception of the Mosque's Roof

No	Student's Perception	Amount	Percentage
1	Dome for aesthetic purposes	18	18%
2	Dome as mosque's identity	47	47%
3	Mosque doesn't have to have domes	19	19%
4	Mosques have to have domes	10	10%
5	Dome provides a magnificent impression	6	6%
Total		100	100%

Of the five perceptions, it is clear that 47% of the 100 respondents of UIN Ar-Raniry students have a perception that “the dome is the identity of a mosque”. While the perception that “mosques have to have domes” was mentioned by only 10% of the respondents.

b. The ornament

Students of UIN Ar-Raniry have various perceptions related to the use of ornaments on the walls of the mosque.

"The ornamentation or calligraphy on the walls of a mosque adds a touch of beauty and elegance. However, its absence doesn't diminish its significance." (RJ, Faculty of Islamic Propagation and Communication).

"In my opinion, mosques with ornaments are more captivating as they feature artistry, showcasing symbols of Islam." (F, Faculty of Islamic Theology).

"Ornaments in mosques, in my opinion, are not particularly crucial. It's nice if they are present, but it's also fine if they are not, as per my perspective." (I, Faculty of Islamic Propagation and Communication).

Then from the answers of the respondents, the researchers take the keywords that form the basis of the grouping of student perceptions. Here is a table of percentages of student perceptions associated with ornaments in the mosque.

Table 4. Students' Perception of the Mosque's Ornament

No	Student's Perception	Amount	Percentage
1	Aesthetic purposes	45	45%
2	Mosque doesn't have to have the ornament	19	19%
3	Mosques have to have the ornament	10	10%
4	Ornament as mosque identity	16	16%
5	Ornament as an Islamic symbol	10	10%
Total		100	100%

From the table above, there are 5 differences in perception related to the use of ornaments at the mosque from 100 respondents. A total of 45% of respondents said that "ornaments add to the beauty of the mosque". Meanwhile, only 16% of respondents agree that the ornament is a mosque identity. The two lowest perceptions are "a mosque should have an ornament" and "a symbol of Islam" with a percentage of 10%, respectively.

c. The *minaret*

A *minaret* is an additional element to a mosque that is located outside or attached to the mosque. From the questionnaires distributed by the researchers, there are some differences in the perception of UIN Ar-Raniry students related to the mosque *minaret*. Sample answers from respondents can be seen below.

"A mosque with a *minaret* is often more renowned than one without. It showcases both aesthetic and functional values." (MR, Faculty of Pedagogy and Education)

"*Minarets* in mosques are essential, especially in urban areas, as they serve as landmarks, helping people identify the nearest mosque when it's time for prayers." (S, Faculty of Pedagogy and Education)

“According to me, the *minaret* is an extension of the loudspeaker system so that the call to prayer (*azan*) that is recited will be heard further. If there is no *minaret*, it's also fine because the call to prayer can still be recited without it, but it may not be heard as far.” (BA, Faculty of Social Sciences and Political Science)

From the questionnaire distributed to the respondents, there are 7 different groupings of perceptions, as shown in the table below. It can be seen that 31% of respondents perceive the *minaret*'s function as a loudspeaker location, rather than as the mosque identity.

Table 5. Students' Perception of the Mosque's *Minaret*

No	Student's Perception	Amount	Percentage
1	<i>Minaret</i> as mosque identity	18	18%
2	<i>Minaret</i> for aesthetic purposes	12	12%
3	Mosque doesn't have to have a <i>minaret</i>	11	11%
4	The <i>minaret</i> serves as a loudspeaker location	31	31%
5	Mosques have to have a <i>minaret</i>	7	7%
6	<i>Minaret</i> provides a magnificent impression	21	21%
Total		100	100%

The perception of individuals is influenced by both internal and external factors. The research results indicate that despite using the same research instrument (questionnaire), the perceptions expressed by respondents vary. Regarding the physical identity of mosques, UIN Ar-Raniry students stated that domes are the identity of a mosque with a percentage of 47% out of 100 respondents. The presence of ornaments and the *minarets* are not seen as the mosque's identity. 45% of respondents stated that the presence of ornaments on the mosque walls adds aesthetic value, while 31% of respondents said that the *minaret* serves as a loudspeaker location.

External factors greatly influence respondents' perceptions, especially the "familiar" factor. The perceptions of UIN Ar-Raniry students are shaped by their daily experiences of frequently seeing mosques with domed roofs. As known, mosque designs in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, as the respondents' domiciles, generally feature domed roofs. Most of it adopts the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque's dome (Azzahra & Nasution, 2018; Fakriah & Bakri, 2022). Due to this familiar factor, perceptions like the ones mentioned above arise. This result also align with Hildayanti's study that stated many people still believe that the shape of a mosque should have a dome to preserve the identity that has been associated with mosques since the 8th century AD (Hildayanti, 2022). She adds that identity is a concept or agreement in determining the character of a building and reflects the appreciation of the community in recognizing and understanding the characteristics of the structure (Hildayanti, 2022).

The research findings also reveal that the majority of respondents do not insist that a mosque "must have a domed roof," "must have ornaments on the walls," or "must have a *minaret*." This is evident from the low percentage of responses for these keywords, each at 10%, 10%, and 7%, respectively. These percentages indicate that respondents understand that a mosque does not necessarily have to possess these three aspects. Fundamentally, the Quran does not specify the design of a mosque. This means that designers are free to design as long as the mosque's function operates optimally and does not violate Islamic values. The perceptions of UIN Ar-Raniry students in Banda Aceh show that they understand there is no standardized mosque design.

4. Conclusion

From the research results, it is revealed that there are various perceptions among UIN Ar-Raniry students (excluding architecture students) regarding the presence of domes, ornaments, and *minarets* in a mosque. Based on the questionnaire distributed to 100 students, 47% of students perceive that domes on mosques serve as an identity for the mosque. Furthermore, 45% of UIN Ar-Raniry students perceive that the use of ornaments on mosque walls is for aesthetics, and 31% of UIN Ar-Raniry students perceive that the presence of a *minaret* in a mosque is for a loudspeaker location.

Moreover, based on the analyzed data, it can be observed that UIN Ar-Raniry students seem to understand that the physical identity of a mosque does not necessarily have to be the same as long as the mosque functions as a place of worship. The analysis also indicates that external factors such as familiarity and the students' experiences of frequently seeing mosques in their surroundings greatly influence their responses regarding the use of domes, ornaments on walls, and the presence of *minarets* in a mosque.

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