

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

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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.

# 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 (Pesanelli, 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