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EXPLORING THE ESTABLISHMENT MOTIVES OF *PONDOKSTAY*: A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

AY Hashim[1*], Samshul Amry Abdul Latif[2], Anis Najiha Ahmad[1], Nurul Atiqah Abdul Aziz[2]

[1]International Institute for Halal Research and Training (INHART), International Islamic University Malaysia, 53100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

[2]Kulliyyah of Sustainable Tourism and Contemporary Languages (KSTCL), International Islamic University Malaysia, 84600 Muar, Johor

*Corresponding author: Email address: ahmad.yasir@live.iium.edu.my

Abstract

Pondok's potential as a tourist product is promising for numerous reasons, including its primary reference point, religious teaching, and serene atmosphere. However, an investigation into the motives behind the establishment of *Pondokstay* is rarely discussed. There is no agreed definition of *Pondokstay*, but it could be described as a tourist program held at the *Pondok*, just like Temple Stay in South Korea, which offers cultural programs at the Buddhist temples. This study aims to explore the reasons behind their decision to establish, and it utilizes semi-structured interviews with five participants. Three criteria are set: the length of establishment, the number of students, and the number of teachers. The responses are recorded, transcribed, manually grouped, and themed, and the process requires close attention because it is a cross-linguistic study. Four establishment motives are promoting the district, boosting local commerce, encouraging sustainable trips, and increasing the institution's socioeconomic benefits. Variables from three types of tourism—spiritual tourism, educational tourism, and Islamic tourism—are used to describe *Pondokstay*. By contributing insights into the establishment motives of Pondokstay, this study not only enriches scholarly understanding but also holds implications for tourism development, destination management, and religious tourism promotion.

Keywords: *Pondokstay*, spiritual tourism, educational tourism, Islamic tourism.

Introduction

The tourism landscape is profoundly transforming, with travelers increasingly seeking external exploration and internal fulfillment. This shift is exemplified by the emergence of spiritual, Islamic, and educational tourism, each offering unique opportunities for travelers to delve into deeper dimensions of experience. *Pondokstay*, within the context of the literature on tourism, particularly aligns with the spiritual and educational dimensions of travel experiences that promote Islamic values and ethics. For example, prominent *Pondokstay* like Yayasan Al-Jenderami in Selangor, *Pondok* Borakatul Qodiri in Melaka, and *Pondok* Sungai Durian in Kelantan offer not only lodging but also a range of enriching experiences, including religious teachings, traditional martial arts performances, cultural displays like firework shows, and opportunities for communal work alongside local inhabitants (*Pondokstay Has Potential as a New Tourism Product - Nancy*, 2020). In the discourse of spiritual tourism, *Pondokstay* could serve as a platform for facilitating journeys of inner exploration and self-discovery, especially for Muslims. *Pondokstay* accommodations are designed for travelers seeking solitude, a connection with nature, and personal and

spiritual growth opportunities. They provide environments conducive to contemplation, introspection, and spiritual enrichment.

As noted by Tri (2019), educational institutions have the potential to offer promising educational tourism programs for several reasons, including the possibility of serving as a poverty alleviation strategy with the commitment of all involved parties. Additionally, according to Yusof & Simpong (2021), Fazial et al. (2024), and Zabidi et al. (2022), a similar approach can be implemented in *Pondok* due to various contributing factors. In Malaysia, *Pondok* establishments have been present since the 19th to 20th century, providing a platform for the Malay society to learn Islamic teachings (Abdul Hamid, 2017). In Arabic, the word "funduq" translates to "hut" or "temporary stay." These structures are typically constructed near the homes of *Tok Guru* or mosques and serve as accommodations for students who come from various regions to study, and *Tok Guru* is tasked with overseeing all aspects of these arrangements (Sulong, 2017; Abdul Hamid, 2017; Nasir et al., 2019). Factors such as serene ambiance, the main reference point, religious ceremonies, respected religious teachers, and traditional learning approaches are illustrated in Figure 1. This study aims to examine the motives behind the establishment of *Pondokstay*. Understanding their motives is essential, particularly concerning their ability to meet the increasing demand for immersive and culturally rich travel experiences (Abdul Hamid, 2017; Nasir et al., 2019). This research can offer valuable insights for tourism stakeholders, policymakers, and community leaders who are looking to leverage the socio-economic advantages of this emerging tourism niche.
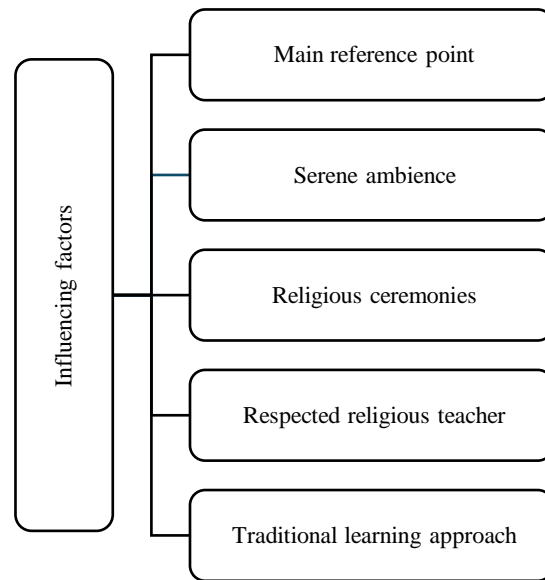

Figure 1 Influencing Factors

Source: Yusof & Simpong, 2021; Fazial et al., 2024; Zabidi et al., 2022

Literature Review

The following literature review section is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of three critical dimensions of tourism: spiritual tourism, Islamic tourism, and educational tourism.

2.1. Spiritual tourism

Poggendorf (2022) defines spiritual tourism as a quest for both external and internal contentment, distinguishing it from conventional forms of travel like city sightseeing and beach vacations. While traditional tourism was mainly associated with rest and leisure, the current trend leans towards fulfilling inner joy (Poggendorf, 2022). This parallels the findings of Griffin and Raj (2017), who highlight the pursuit of authenticity as a significant motivator for religious tourism. Furthermore, the ethical underpinnings of spiritual and sustainable tourism are akin, as they prioritize the well-being of people, the planet, and financial prosperity (Poggendorf, 2022; Romanelli et al., 2021). Moreover, Romanelli et al. (2021) propose that religious tourism has the potential to drive long-term tourism development, asserting that "religious beliefs propel individuals to venture beyond their familiar surroundings in search of significance, values, beliefs, and experiences while also seeking personal growth within cultural, touristic, and religious settings" (p. 2).

There are currently two main types of spiritual tourism: traditional spiritual tourism and new spiritual tourism. Traditional spiritual tourism includes activities such as midday prayer at the River Danube, offering support to spiritual ascetics, and participating in voluntary activities at the church (Poggendorf, 2022; Griffin & Raj, 2021). In Japan, the Grand Shrine of Nachi provides a breathtaking natural landscape that can create a special connection between visitors and the place, dispelling negative feelings and inspiring devotion (Poggendorf, 2022). On the other hand, new spiritual tourism includes places like the Meditation House in Germany and Shrine Farm in England, offering opportunities for contemplation, self-reflection, and enchanting rural settings (Poggendorf, 2022).

In contrast to traditional and new spiritual tourism, Romanelli et al. (2021) note that The Camino de Santiago de Compostela and Via Francigena are renowned for their religious pathways, attracting pilgrims seeking spiritual fulfillment or the sacredness of the locations to renew their faith (Romanelli et al., 2021; Griffin & Raj, 2017). Additionally, archaeological sites in Peru, burial sites in Rome, and sacred islands in Chile are examples of sacred sites worldwide (Griffin & Raj, 2017).

2.2. Islamic tourism

Similarly, Islamic tourism encompasses pursuing spiritual fulfillment, focusing on Islamic values and ethics. According to Amir Abdullah et al. (2020) and Suid et al. (2017), it is crucial to address the specific needs of Muslim travelers and ensure adherence to religious principles throughout their journeys. From the perspective of suppliers, providing Islamic attributes such as facilities that cater to religious needs and sex-segregated facilities is obligatory to guarantee the satisfaction of Muslim tourists. Additionally, practices such as gambling, adultery, the availability of non-halal beverages, and the wearing of skimpy outfits are prohibited (Amir Abdullah et al., 2020; Suid et al., 2017). These Islamic attributes motivate travelers to experience pleasure while also seeking the blessings of Allah during their journeys (Suid et al., 2017). Furthermore, according to Amir et al. (2022), Islamic tourism is guided by Islamic values and ethics, closely tied to the concepts of halal (lawful or permitted) and haram (unlawful or prohibited). This approach aligns with the broader concept of spiritual tourism while considering the distinct requirements of Islamic travelers.

Generally, Islamic tourism is commonly associated with pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina during specific periods for Hajj or Umrah (Suid et al., 2017; Amir et al., 2022).In the broader context of Islamic tourism, *Rihla* refers to the journey for knowledge acquisition or other formal purposes, whereas *Ziyara* refers to the journey to shrines, and both should be handled properly to meet the client's preferences or demands (Suid et al., 2017; Amir et al., 2022). Besides, Islamic tourism and spiritual concepts are similar; both types focus on human requirements and spiritual fulfillment should be addressed holistically (Amir et al., 2022). Even though Islamic tourism focuses on the spiritual dimensions, the material dimensions should be noticed and addressed at its expense (Amir et al., 2022).

In addition, Allah says, "Travel throughout the land and see the fate of the deniers. Ask them, O Prophet, "To whom belongs everything in the heavens and the earth?" and "To Allah!" He has taken it upon Himself to be Merciful. He will gather all of you together for the Day of Judgment—about which there is no doubt. However, those who have ruined themselves will never believe." (The Qur'an, 6:11-12). These verses show that tourism or travel provides opportunities to see the greatness of God's creation and learn lessons from the past who disobeyed Allah. *Pondoksta*y could be a valuable platform for carrying out this responsibility throughout the program, and it must be equipped with appropriate arrangements from the host.

2.3. Educational tourism

The concept of educational tourism introduces a new perspective on travel, presenting it as a means for intellectual and cultural growth. In this view, educational tourists are divided into four distinct groups: seniors, adults, students, and preschool children, each with unique motivations (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). To ensure their satisfaction, they should be removed from their familiar surroundings and provided with learning opportunities, guidance, and a genuine desire to learn. The outcomes of these journeys are categorized as cognitive, affective, and behavioral (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). Furthermore, according to McGladdery and Lubbe (2017), integrating educational tourism with non-tourism sectors could contribute to global harmony.

Second, Voleva (2020) defines educational tourism as a mix of tourism and educational products. The nature of tourism products, such as accommodations, malls, and airports, is static, whereas education products, such as seminars, summer camps, research trips, and much more (Voleva, 2020; Živković et al.,2022). There is no rigid specification of educational tourism if the educational contents are helpful and can be tailored according to the needs of the edu-tourists (Voleva, 2020). The educational tourist is expected to gain specific academic knowledge, practical skills, and intercultural competencies, while the host should demonstrate creativity (Voleva, 2020; Živković et al., 2022). Finally, from an economic standpoint, educational tourism influences the local and international economy (Voleva, 2020; Živković et al., 2022; Tri, 2019).

Lastly, Živković et al. (2022) emphasized the importance for supply-side actors to focus on the essence of the product, coordinate promotional campaigns, leverage natural and cultural resources, and anticipate impacts on the destination and program partners. While their primary goal may be learning, satisfaction can also come from the trips. The study uses the European Union Student Exchange Program as a case to demonstrate the economic impacts, particularly how surplus funds from off-season accommodation demand can contribute to tourism development (Živković et al., 2022). Additionally, the program has the potential to boost a destination's visibility as students share their experiences of the culture, attractions, and traditions after completing their attachment (Živković et al., 2022).

In essence, the emergence of *Pondokstay* reflects the convergence of spiritual, Islamic, and educational elements within the tourism landscape. By offering travelers immersive experiences rooted in Islamic spirituality, cultural education, and spiritual enrichment, *Pondokstay* accommodations cater to the evolving needs of modern travelers seeking deeper connections and meaningful experiences. Understanding the establishment motives behind *Pondokstay* establishments provides valuable insights for stakeholders seeking to tap into this burgeoning tourism niche, aligning with the broader objectives of promoting socioeconomic development.

Objectives

This study aims to investigate *Pondokstay's* establishment motives. In simpler terms, it seeks to understand why *Pondokstay* is offered. Is it related to the school's potential as a tourist product, or is there another driving force behind their motivation?

Methodology

Qualitative research aims to gather and clarify information about complex, subjective, and dynamic situations (Plakoyiannaki & Stavraki, 2022). The study utilizes semi-structured interviews. After establishing the conceptual framework, twenty-eight specific questions guide the researcher in steering the sessions to achieve the objectives, focusing solely on the topic (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). In addition, the session was recorded to omit crucial information, and the researcher jotted some points after permissions were granted, which aligns with Rutledge and Hogg's (2023) study. The sessions began on August 22nd, 2022, and continued until August 28th, 2022, following written approval from the Religious Education District Office. Figure 2 depicts the five phases of this study.
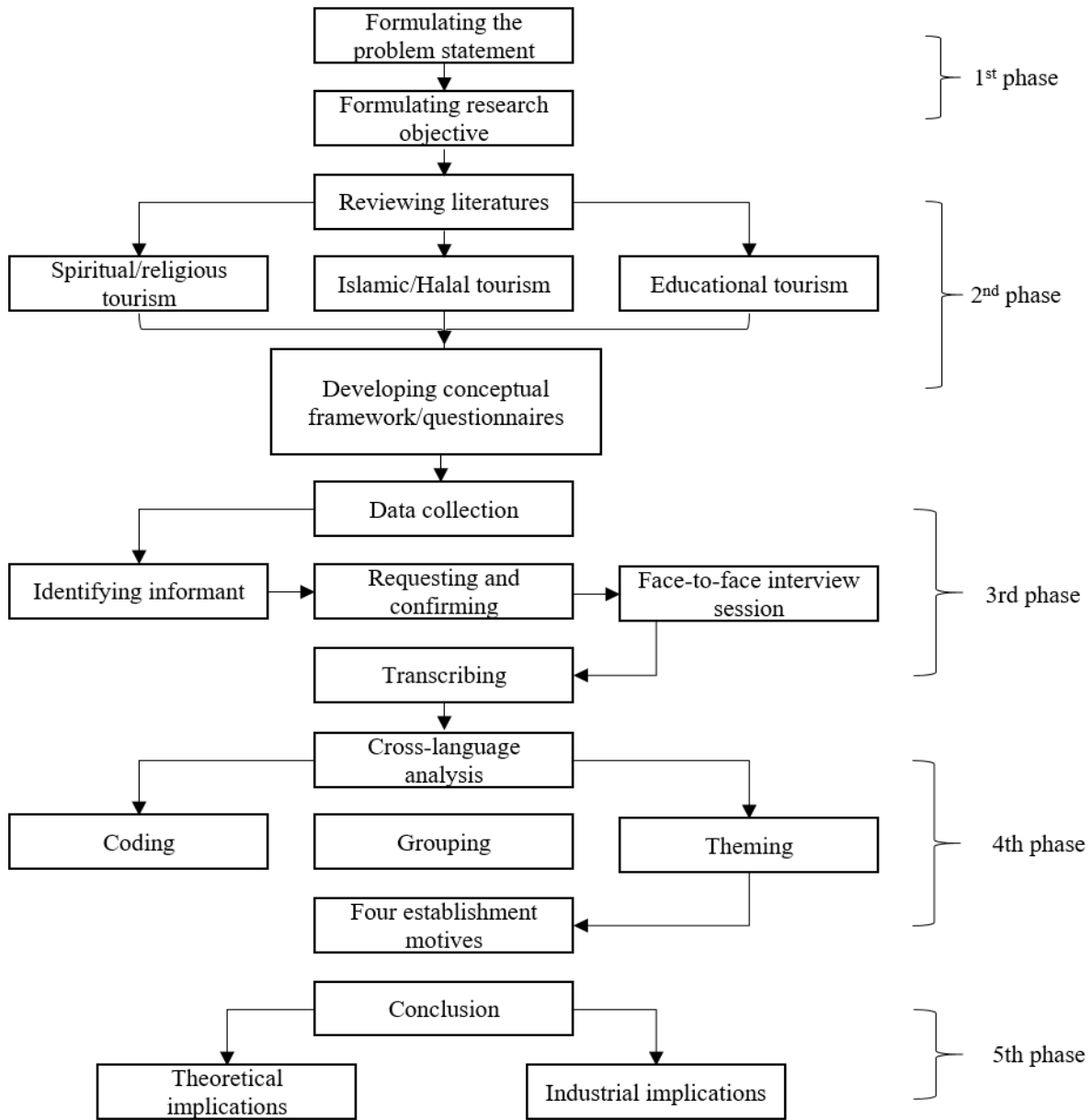
Figure 2 Research Design

The second factor to consider in this cross-language study is the linguistic barrier during data collection, interpretation, and reporting (Esfehani & Walters, 2018). This is particularly relevant in our case, as the session was in Malay, but the analysis was in English. Therefore, special care must be taken to ensure clarity in discussions, translations, and reporting of the codes, as different languages may interpret the same concepts differently (Esfehani & Walters, 2018; Mohamad Nasri et al., 2021). The researcher, being bilingual, meticulously followed the procedures, and no software was utilized in the process; all recording was done manually in Microsoft Excel.

Finally, according to Nowell et al. (2017), the trustworthiness of thematic analysis is crucial for its acceptance in the study. This involves considering factors such as informant credibility, transferability of findings, maintaining logical processes, data-driven interpretations, and keeping personal records throughout the analysis process (Nowell et al., 2017).

Results

Five informants were involved in the interview, and their responses revealed diverse perspectives on *Pondokstay's* establishment motives. The interview session was held from 21 August 2022 to 29 August 2022. The demographic profile of the informants is provided below, and each informant is given identical codes from INF1 until INF5.

ID	Code	Period	Staff	Student	Location
INF1	MTS/MR/006	34	15	91	Parit Bakar
INF2	MTS/MR/011	10	9	43	Parit Kassim Darat
INF3	MTS/MR/007	51	7	52	Parit Jawa
INF4	MTS/MR/003	26	10	74	Parit Sakai Laut
INF5	MTS/MR/004	25	6	50	Sungai Pulai Seri Menanti

Table 2 Profile of the Informants

Source: Religious Education District Office

Four themes emerged after thorough analysis, as depicted in Figure 3. These include promoting the district, stimulating tourism growth, encouraging sustainable practices, and enhancing socioeconomic benefits. The section below elaborates on the empirical evidence to support the themes.
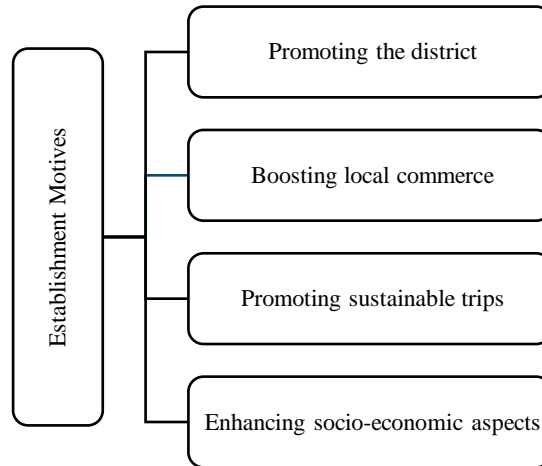
Figure 3: Establishment Motives

Source: In-depth interviews

The first theme centers on promoting the district. According to Informant 1, one approach to achieve this is by promoting the district's performances and attractions on the school's official social media page. Though this may seem like minimal effort, it is a crucial step toward increasing the district's visibility and potentially reaching a wider audience through word of mouth.

In the meantime, the second focus is on boosting local commerce. Informant 2 mentioned that "the sightseeing activities should prioritize the district's capital, as it offers abundant natural, man-made, and culinary resources, which visitors may wish to experience through purchases." However, Informant 3 proposed that visitors also sample popular dishes like Mee Bandung during the sightseeing trip. These responses shed light on how these efforts could improve local commerce, but actual expenditure amounts and percentages need validation.

Simultaneously, the third theme involves promoting sustainable travel experiences. According to Informant 3, "Compelling narratives can be developed around the mosque, situated next to the river, to create economic and food opportunities for the residents, and it is our responsibility as stewards to ensure its continued sustainability.". Additionally, Informant 4 suggested that "we could create a story about the shrimp's natural habitat at the shrimp pond to remind people of the origins of the shrimp and help them avoid consuming questionable food.". Both observations align with the study by Amir et al. (2022) and its connection to the philosophy of Tauhid, emphasizing the preservation and responsible use of resources to uphold justice and virtue. Moreover, outdoor excursions could reinforce the knowledge acquired during indoor sessions (Tri, 2019). Therefore, the host should offer outdoor programs besides indoor activities, provided the local ecosystems are thriving.

Lastly, there is the potential to enhance the school's socioeconomic benefits. One viewpoint, which was expressed by Informant 3, suggests that the school could take advantage of the opportunity to sell food merchandise such as paste and coffee bags to visitors. On the other hand, Informant 5 emphasizes the importance of reducing the gap between society, locals, and teachers to challenge false perceptions about the school. This alternative approach positions the school as a place to deepen Islamic knowledge for regular

students and visitors. However, it is essential to investigate and discuss the role of *Pondokstay* in formal educational progression, as it is directly linked to students' prospects (Qomaro, 2019). From an economic perspective, there are opportunities for revenue generation, as highlighted in studies by Voleva (2020) and Živković et al. (2022).

Limitations and Future Direction

To achieve better results, broadening the research scope and utilizing a mixed-methods approach is recommended. In addition, future research could explore tourism analysis, including a cost-benefit analysis. With promising analysis results, the *Pondokstay* concept stands a greater chance of becoming a reality. Once solid validation is obtained, *Pondokstay* should be introduced in Malaysia as a homestay program, like Korea's temple stay program, especially within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The entrepreneurial ecosystem encompasses various interconnected elements, such as financing options, structured training, and collaboration with the business ecosystem, all influencing entrepreneurial performance (Lux et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study offers essential inputs for the establishment motives for that potential host, and the results provide consequential practical insights or initial signals for the related actors in the ecosystem. Because the opportunities are great, the current study expands on the previous findings by looking into establishment motives. *Pondokstay* could live up to the Islamic tourism landscape, which offers endless opportunities to the country, especially in the social and economic aspects. Furthermore, the breadth of Muslim-friendly Islamic tourism in Malaysia can be broadened because these types of tourism are often associated with visits to mosques and halal accommodations only thus far.

Acknowledgment

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