

## STUDENTS' ASPIRATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS 'SEKOLAH PONDOK'

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### Introduction

'Pondok' originates from the Arabic word "funduq" which means a place or shelter. Hence, it can be inferred that 'sekolah pondok' consists of small buildings for the temporary shelter of students. 'Sekolah pondok' began in 1450 in Malacca but it was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it spread to the other states like Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah. It reached its height of popularity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century due to highly trained religious teachers, strong religious beliefs among the Malays, adequate facilities and secularism. Much of the education was influenced by the school of thought in Mecca. However, by 1918, 'sekolah pondok' began to wane. The contributing factors include the increasing acceptance of the English and Malay schools, lack of knowledgeable religious teachers and financial support as well as the conflicting views of scholars concerning Islamic education. In spite of the pressures and challenges, 'sekolah pondok' was not completely eliminated. In fact with the current social problems among adolescents, parents and the society at large are reviewing the importance of religious education and the inculcation of values. As a result, many parents begin to send their children to 'sekolah pondok'. The questions are: Will 'sekolah pondok' regain its past popularity? What are the effects on the students? Will employers and society accept the students? These were the questions to be answered by this study.

### Materials and Methods

This is a descriptive study, utilising both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The main variables were aspirations

and perception. Under the qualitative approach, open-ended items were administered. Under the quantitative approach a Likert-type items were mainly used.

### Results and Discussion

The respondents of the study were 842 students of which 514 (61%) females and 328 (39%) males. The age of the subjects was between 11-66 years and their length of study at the 'sekolah pondok' was 1-13 years. The number of schools in the study was 7 (5 in Kelantan and 2 in Kedah). The findings indicated that the majority of the students came from the Government Secondary Schools (46.8%) and Non-Government Religious Schools (27.7%). The students' perception towards 'sekolah pondok' was mainly positive by which 81.4% said that the education received was adequate; 89 % said that they acquired a lot of knowledge and 95.9% stated that they could study religion in depth. The students also had positive perceptions towards the community's view of them. They were confident that their knowledge will be highly regarded (50.1%), that the community will encourage the development of the 'sekolah pondok' (54.7%), and the community will always support the school financially and materially (45.4%). Their perception towards the views of employers was equally positive. They were confident of getting jobs easily (46.5%), they could adjust well in the working environment (53.6%) and that employers will not have negative perceptions towards students with 'pondok' qualifications (45.6%). With regards to students' aspirations, 42.8% would like to become religious teachers, 13.0% religious lecturers, 7.3% professionals like doctors, lawyers and architects, 92.4% would like to further their studies in the universities, religious schools or colleges.

### Conclusions

The fact that parents, society and the students themselves have positive perceptions towards 'pondok' education, therefore it is pertinent that the 'sekolah pondok' should be given equal recognition and financial support as other government schools. There should be collaboration between 'sekolah pondok' and all relevant agencies towards the students' development and opportunity in the society.