

## Challenges in Developing Pondok Institutions As Islamic Tourism Destinations

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### Abstract

Pondok institutions are traditional Islamic educational institutions in predominantly Muslim countries, including Malaysia. In the context of Islamic tourism, Pondok institutions can be considered as an attractive and unique tourism product for visitors interested in Islamic culture and history. This indirectly contributes to the continuous economic growth of pondok institutions. However, many pondok institutions in Malaysia face various problems and challenges in establishing themselves as tourist destinations. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to identify the pondok institutions promoted as Islamic tourism destinations and analyze the development challenges they face. This study utilizes a literature review methodology, which includes references to journals, articles, books, and theses related to pondok institutions, and Islamic tourism. The study findings reveal that pondok institutions face various challenges and obstacles in becoming tourist destinations.

**Keywords:** Pondok Institutions, Islamic Tourism, Challenges, Potential, Islamic Education

### Abstrak

Institusi pondok adalah institusi pendidikan Islam tradisional di negara majoriti Islam, termasuk Malaysia. Dalam konteks pelancongan Islam, institusi pondok dapat dianggap sebagai satu produk pelancongan yang menarik dan unik untuk dilawati oleh pelancong yang berminat dalam budaya dan sejarah Islam. Perkara ini secara tidak langsung dapat meningkatkan ekonomi institusi pondok secara berterusan. Namun begitu, kebanyakan institusi pondok di Malaysia berhadapan dengan pelbagai masalah dan cabaran bagi memastikan pembangunan institusi pondok sebagai satu destinasi pelancongan dapat direalisasikan. Justeru, objektif kertas kerja ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti institusi pondok yang dipromosikan sebagai destinasi pelancongan Islam. Kedua, menganalisis cabaran pembangunan yang dihadapi oleh institusi pondok sebagai destinasi pelancongan Islam. Kajian ini menggunakan kajian kepustakaan yang terdiri daripada rujukan jurnal, artikel, buku-buku dan tesis yang berkaitan dengan institusi pondok, dan pelancongan Islam. Hasil kajian

mendapati institusi pondok berhadapan dengan pelbagai cabaran dan halangan dalam menjadikan institusi pondok sebagai satu destinasi pelancongan.

Katakunci: Institusi Pondok, Pelancongan Islam, Cabaran, Potensi, Pendidikan Islam

## **Introduction**

Pondok institutions are Islamic educational institutions that offer holistic religious education, including the teaching of the Quran, Hadith, jurisprudence, Aqidah and Arabic language. The main goal of Pondok institutions is to educate students to have a strong understanding of Islam, develop noble character, and produce morally upright Muslim generations. In general, Pondok in Malaysia refers to traditional Islamic educational centers that provide a fundamental education in the field of Islam. Most pondoks in Malaysia were established by religious figures in the 19th and 20th centuries as an alternative to the formal education system that was too focused on scientific and technological knowledge. Additionally, Pondok also serves as the center for the dissemination and preservation of Islamic cultural heritage in Malaysia. Pondoks in Malaysia usually consist of various buildings with different functions, including student dormitories, prayer rooms or mosques, kitchens, and recreational areas. Most Pondok in Malaysia also have close ties to the local community and often serve as centers for social activities, such as feasts, Eid celebrations, and others (Mohd Noor, 2012; Kassim, 2013).

In general, Pondok institutions have their tourism appeal as they have a rich historical value and play an important role in the development of Islam in Muslim countries. Tourists visiting Pondok institutions can experience direct learning in a traditional and authentic atmosphere. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for tourists to understand the unique and diverse culture and traditions of Islam. As an Islamic tourism product, Pondok institutions can also have a positive impact on the local economy and promote the preservation of cultural and historical heritage. Tourists visiting Pondok institutions can benefit the local community by helping to increase income and strengthen the local economy through tourism activities.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are formulated as follows:

1. To identify Pondok institutions promoted as Islamic tourism destinations.
2. To analyze the challenges of developing Pondok institutions as Islamic tourism destinations.

## **Literature Review**

### **Pondok Institutions**

The study found that Pondok institutions had an impact on the development of the early Islamic education system in Malaysia. Furthermore, Pondok institutions have produced many respected religious scholars, particularly in the field of Islamic education, as well as in other areas such as arts and politics. Research on Pondok institutions and entrepreneurship has been conducted by Ahmad et al (2018), highlighting the role of Pondok institutions in addressing the issues faced by marginalized groups through social entrepreneurship. Additionally, a study on the role and influence of pondok pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) on Islamic education in Malaysia, with a focus on curriculum aspects, teaching methodologies, and students' religious development, has been conducted by (Azman, 2019). Mohamad and Ahmad (2020) analysed the potential of pondok pesantren as halal tourism destinations in Malaysia, including factors that attract Muslim tourists and strategies for developing Islamic tourism around pondok pesantren.

**Islamic Tourism**

Mohd Shuib, Ahmad, and Ibrahim (2018) studied the potential of Islamic tourism in driving economic development in Malaysia. The findings showed that Islamic tourism can significantly benefit Malaysia's economy through an increase in the number of Muslim tourists visiting the country. A study conducted by Altinay and Paraskevas (2008) regarding Islamic tourism in Turkey emphasized the importance of effective management and planning in the Islamic tourism sector. Islamic tourism in Turkey has significant potential but requires better management and planning. Research on the challenges and barriers in Islamic tourism has been conducted by (Norviana et al., 2020). This study examines Islamic tourism in Indonesia and identifies the challenges faced in the Islamic tourism sector in the country. The findings indicate that Islamic tourism in Indonesia has a great potential but requires more efforts to overcome challenges such as the lack of suitable infrastructure and low awareness of the needs of Islamic tourism.

**Methodology**

This paper employed qualitative study using document analysis involves several important steps in identifying, collecting, analyzing, and interpreting relevant documents related to the topic. These documents can include reports, academic articles, books, journals, or any other written materials relevant to the study (Creswell, 2014). This study is analysed using content analysis. Content analysis is one of the qualitative research methods used to analyze and understand the content of documents, texts, or other written materials (Nueman, 2000). As suggested by Nueman (2000), this method involves a systematic process of identifying, categorizing, and interpreting units of information contained within the content.

As suggested by Othman (2011), this research implemented trustworthiness which is plausibility in order to fit with reliability and validity of data. The plausibility involved with motivation and intuition. The research issues have motivated the researcher to undertake the research regarding pondok institutions. The application of intuition is confirmed by making sense to outside readers constitutes plausibility. The intuition is parallel with critical review from past studies that make sense in the worldview of pondok institutions due to challenges and issues. Hence, this method is applicable to analyse the data in answering the objective of studies.

**Analysis and Discussion**

In general, Pondok institutions have their unique appeal as Islamic tourism destinations due to their rich historical value and significant role in the development of Islam in Islamic countries. Tourists visiting Pondok institutions can experience direct learning in a traditional and authentic atmosphere. Moreover, it provides an opportunity for tourists to understand the rich and diverse culture and traditions of Islam. As an Islamic tourism product, Pondok institutions can also have a positive impact on the local economy and promote the preservation of cultural and historical heritage. Tourists visiting Pondok institutions can benefit the local community by helping to increase income and strengthen the local economy through tourism activities. Additionally, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture of Malaysia has proposed transforming Pondok schools into tourist attractions to enhance the country's image in the Islamic tourism market and restore the glory of these educational institutions. Abdul Khani Daud, the Director-General of the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), believes that Pondok schools have the potential to be promoted as Islamic tourism products through

Malaysia's educational tourism sector by transforming them into village stays or tourist centers that can be visited by tourists. There are several examples of Pondok institutions worldwide that have undertaken Islamic tourism projects. Some examples of Pondok institutions in the archipelago that have successfully implemented Islamic tourism projects are:

- i. Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum Jombang, Indonesia - This Pondok institution offers Islamic tourism programs that provide opportunities for tourists to experience life in Pondok Pesantren while studying Arabic language and religious knowledge.
- ii. Pondok Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki, Indonesia - This Pondok institution offers Islamic tourism programs aimed at introducing students and tourists to Islamic life and Javanese culture.
- iii. Madrasah Al-Iman Al-Shafi'iyah, Syria - This pondok institution offers Islamic tourism programs that provide opportunities for tourists to study the Arabic language and Islamic religious knowledge under the guidance of Syrian scholars and intellectuals.
- iv. Darul Uloom Deoband, India - This Pondok institution offers Islamic tourism programs that offer learning and living experiences within the Deoband pesantren, one of the oldest Pondok institutions in India.
- v. Ma'had Tahfiz Al-Quran Wal Qiraat Al-Khairiyah, Malaysia - This pondok institution offers Islamic tourism programs that provide opportunities for tourists to study religious knowledge and the Arabic language in a well-known pondok institution in Malaysia.
- vi. Pondok Moden Al-Saadah, Johor Bahru - Pondok Moden Al-Saadah in Johor Bahru has successfully carried out an Islamic tourism project titled "Ziarah Al-Quran" (Quranic Pilgrimage) held annually. This project invites participants to reflect upon and contemplate the meanings of the Quran while visiting historical and religious sites in Malaysia. The project successfully attracts many participants each year and has a positive impact on the development of religious tourism in Malaysia.

Islamic tourism projects can be an effort undertaken by Pondok institutions to improve their financial situation. Religious tourism projects can help Pondok institutions increase their income by offering tourism packages that provide accommodation and activities related to Islam, such as Quranic classes, visits to historical sites, and more.

### **Challenges in Developing Pondok Institutions as Islamic Tourism Destinations**

In making Pondok institutions Islamic tourism destinations, most Pondok institutions face various problems and challenges, including the lack and issues of infrastructure. Many pondoks in Malaysia face challenges in terms of limited resources. This includes insufficient funds to upgrade infrastructure, a lack of adequate equipment and textbooks, and a shortage of qualified teachers. These limited resources can affect the quality of education and the experience of students in pondok pesantren. From a tourism perspective, Pondok institutions often lack sufficient tourism infrastructure, such as adequate accommodation, halal restaurants, tourism information centers, and transportation. This indirectly hinders the ability of Pondok institutions to attract and serve tourists (Mahmood and Noor, 2019). Pondok management is responsible for maintaining and preserving the assets of the Pondok, including buildings, gardens, and other facilities. They need to ensure that the Pondok is in good, safe, and clean condition for visitors. Maintenance efforts include painting, minor repairs, and ensuring basic facilities such as water and electricity supply are functioning

properly. According to the Minister of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, Mohamaddin Ketapi, one of the criteria to be imposed by the government is that the Pondok school must have a complete dormitory facility, and the government will allocate special spaces for tourists to stay and experience being in the Pondok.

Secondly, rural areas may have limited or inadequate roads and infrastructure that do not meet the necessary standards for easy access. Winding roads, broken bridges, or a lack of sufficient parking facilities are among the problems that travelers may face when visiting Pondok institutions. Generally, most Pondok institutions are in rural areas, and this makes it difficult for tourists to access them. Limited road infrastructure and limited public transportation or a lack of connectivity can pose challenges in developing Pondok as an easily accessible tourism destination (Ahmad and Ramli, 2019). Additionally, rural areas may lack supporting facilities such as dining places, mini markets, or other shops. This makes it difficult for travelers to meet their daily needs or obtain necessary items while staying in the pondok (Khalid et al., 2018)

Furthermore, many Pondok institutions are unable to implement effective promotion and marketing efforts to attract tourists. Factors contributing to this include a lack of understanding of marketing strategies, a shortage of resources and expertise in tourism promotion, and a lack of online presence, which can hinder Pondok pesantren from increasing their visibility and attractiveness in the tourism market (Musa, Rahman, and Jamaludin, 2016). Pondok management needs to implement effective promotion and marketing efforts to attract visitors to the institution. This includes providing information about Pondok and its facilities, distributing brochures or leaflets, and leveraging social media and websites to promote Pondok. They can also collaborate with tour agents, government agencies, or other parties related to the Islamic tourism industry.

In making Pondok institutions a destination for Islamic tourism, the administration of the Pondok institutions requires skills development and training in Islamic tourism. Expertise in tourism management, guest experience, customer service, and understanding the needs of Muslim tourists can help Pondok pesantren develop themselves as professional and high-quality tourism destinations.

Usually, Pondok institutions are often associated with strong religious and cultural values. However, in developing tourism destinations, adaptation to cultural changes and tourist preferences can pose a challenge. It is noteworthy that Islamic tourists heavily rely on shariah to direct their decision-making while selecting travel activities, locations, hotels, tours, and meals for religious rites (Kessler, 2015). Muslim travellers make selections about their travel destinations based on their adherence to Islamic teachings (Hamira and Joan, 2010). Therefore, finding a balance between maintaining traditional values and adapting to the needs and priorities of tourists is a complex task (Bakar, Aziz Fadzil, and Ahmad, 2020). Pondok management needs to plan and manage events and activities related to Islamic tourism. This includes religious lectures, studies, workshops, and other religious programs. They need to ensure that these activities are beneficial and contribute to the understanding and appreciation of Islam by visitors.

**Conclusion**

The project of developing pondok institutions as Islamic tourism destinations aim to enhance the image of pondok as a community-friendly educational institution. Religious tourism projects can help in improving cultural understanding as tourists visiting pondok institutions can interact with the local community and learn about local customs and culture. From an entrepreneurial perspective, this project aims to train pondok institutions involved in religious tourism projects to enhance their skills in the field of tourism. Pondok management can learn about tourism package management, tourism promotion, and marketing, as well as improving the quality of accommodation and provided activities (Yunos, 2016; Yusoff, et al., 2018).

Although pondok schools face various challenges, they continue to be part of the educational institutions in this country and can be considered important places in terms of religious education. The development of pondok institutions in the field of tourism is an effort to develop pondok institutions under the concept of Muslim-friendly hospitality and tourism. It is also an effort by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC) through its agency, the Islamic Tourism Center in 2020. The development of pondok institutions is seen to benefit the economy, social and lifestyle aspects, community sustainability, the pure values of structure and infrastructure, cleanliness, health, safety, and the spiritual content of the pondok institution itself (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, 2020).

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