CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS

9.1 OVERALL CONCLUSION

The study has thoroughly been done and successfully found the answers to all the research questions put forward in the introduction chapter. The existence of the Mihrab on Qibla wall is now clarified to be one of the liturgical elements of mosques all over the world. Its stature is placed parallel to the existence of the Minaret and the Dome. The origin of the Mihrab is researched and explained in thorough discussion.

The notion that suggests ornamentation in mosques is prohibited has been proven to be a baseless argument when this thesis shows that appropriate ornamentation is needed to enhance the internal ambiance of mosques portraying the greatness of Allah the Almighty as well as reflecting the glory of Islam. The importance of interior aesthetic in Islamic architecture is seen from the history of Islam itself. The literature review encompasses Quranic verse explaining the greatness of the Prophet King Sulaiman’s (a.s.) court, where the high quality of interior ornamentation had deceived and astonished Balqis, the Queen of Sheba at that time, and made her submit to the greatness of Allah and the glory of Islam. This story from the Al-Quran gives an indication that it is permissible to show wealth and power in certain situations, for example to portray the greatness of Allah the Almighty.

The argument that creates uncertainty about the effects of motif and ornamentation on the concentration of the congregation whilst performing solat (prayers) seems to be vague. Ornamentation on the Mihrab and Qibla wall that strictly follows the repetitive geometrical design of Islamic arts will not disrupt the concentration of the worshipers.

This thesis reveals the influences adopted by mosques in Malaysia which is reflected through the form and design of their interior lay out and elements. These interior motifs
and ornamentations provide a different perception towards the quality of contemporary mosques’ architecture in Malaysia. This study shows that most of the selected mosques employed local or vernacular motif and ornamentation on the Mihrab and Qibla walls even though their external physical appearance may seemed to be of foreign influence. The famous eight pointed star pattern of Islamic geometrical design is extensively used in designing modern mosques’ interior.

Typological study on the form and design of selected mosques’ Mihrabs came to the conclusion that there are forms and designs of the Mihrabs which are owned exclusively by Malaysian mosques. They are not found anywhere else because neither the Middle-Eastern nor the Western Muslim mosques employ them. Therefore, it supports and strengthens the statement that Islamic architecture evolves through regions to suit the cultural and social values of the locals.

Future scholars might query as to why should the Mihrab and Qibla wall be the most emphasized and highlighted components in mosques’ architecture and how could it be done. This thesis suggests some guidelines to enable the Mihrab and Qibla wall act as the focal point for the entire mosque building. It strongly believes that the first thing to be strenuously considered when building a mosque structure is the visibility of its Mihrab and Qibla wall from the entrance(s). Then, the formation of safs (prayer lines) parallel to the Qibla wall is studied in order to proof that the optimum Qibla wall offers long and straight safs. As a result, this part of the research found that quite a number of mosques under study owned an unacceptable form of prayer halls.

In order to be an important element in a mosque, the Mihrab must be given special attention or at least equivalent to the treatment of the Dome and the minaret in Islamic architecture. Study on the evolution of form and design of the Mihrab is essential for both contemporary and future mosques. Learning from the past will immensely assist
the development of a better future. Apart from that it can also be kept as a track record for historical and heritage studies.

Subsequently, research on the orientations of selected traditional and vernacular mosques built in Malaysia showed that most of them have strong level of visibility towards the Mihrab from the entrance point. The study also revealed that in most cases the formation of safs is uninterrupted due to the width and clarity of the prayer hall.

In contrast, floor plans of mosques built during the Colonial era were very much influenced by church designs and renowned Islamic buildings from the Medieval Islamic Dynasties. It is apparent that the colonization era transformed the whole physical and architectural values of Malaysian mosques. Mosques erected during this era were designed by non-Muslim British architects such as A.B. Hubback (Jamek Mosque 1909, Kuala Lumpur) and H.A. Neubronner (Kapitan Keling Mosque 1916, Penang).

Most of the Mihrab and Qibla wall of the selected mosques in this period are of plain white or with very minimal ornamentation. Only in later years that ornamentation such as carved stucco and wood were added to the Mihrabs and Qibla walls as found in Masjid Sultan Sulaiman (1932, Selangor) and Masjid Sultan Alaeddin (1898, Selangor). The typological studies of mosques built from 1700s to 1850 also showed the evolution of materials used in building them as well as ornamenting their Mihrabs and Qibla walls.

After independence, Malaysia started to own mosques that are designed and built by local designers and builders. Even though varieties of physical appearances on gigantic mosques came into existence, these mosques’ interior arrangement of important components were made secondary. Primary focus of mosques’ design was towards the
external facade rather than the practicality of the prayer hall. Consequently, Mihrab design and form adapted changes in its shape, size and ornamentation.

This research concludes with the morphology of Mihrabs in Malaysian mosques, which had evolved in shapes and forms, over time. In the beginning, mosques were built with basic traditional and vernacular design, reflecting Malay traditional houses providing comfort and familiarity to the users. In the late 18th, 19th and early 20th century, new forms and niche shapes were introduced. These changes were due to the discovery of new materials and the effect of colonization. This study concluded that there are five major types of Mihrab:

(1) Without niche on the Qibla wall. It has a wide recessed area/room/chamber on the Qibla wall which is clearly seen to position the prayer leader or Imam during congregational prayer and Friday sermon. This type of Qibla wall treatment is never been found in the medieval mosques under study.

(2) Semi circular concaved.

(3) Rectangular niche shape with arched ceiling.

(4) Polygonal niche shape.

(5) A two-level freestanding structure that is positioned in the middle of the Qibla wall to be used as both the Mihrab and the Mimbar simultaneously. The former sits on the lower section whilst the latter stands on top of it. This style is also unique to Malaysian mosques and it is found in Masjid Sultan Ibrahim and Masjid Sultan Ismail Petra.

Malaysian traditional mosques built in the 18th century mostly provide clear and easy circulation to ease the users seeking directions. These positive qualities in spatial
arrangement of Malaysian traditional mosque could still be adopted in the modern era to provide comfort and familiarity in the form and spatial arrangements to the users.

The Declaration of Independence in 1957 marks the freedom of design to Malaysian architects. New shapes and ‘styles’ of mosques architecture which includes the shape and form of the Mihrabs were introduced. Consequently, more forms and shapes from polygonal arrangement were designed. There are also modern mosque designs that tried to maximize interior space by positioning the Mihrab underneath the Mimbar for example Masjid Sultan Ismail Petra, built in 1990 which coincidently emulated Masjid Sultan Ibrahim, built in 1927.

The study concludes that the Mihrab is an essential element of mosques. The Mihrab is also an architectural form that brings out various cultural traditions and architectural expressions. The classification of architectural styles of mosques in Malaysia should not only be done by referring to the external features but also to the interior elements, especially to the symbol of honoured space such as the Mihrab.

9.1.1 Contribution to Knowledge

(1) The identification of the Mihrab as one of the important elements in mosque architecture. The importance of the Mihrab had been laid in Chapter Two with evidences that portrayed the Mihrab as the symbol of Islamic unity towards one focal point that is the Ka’aba in Mecca. In realizing this understanding, the Mihrab that exists in almost all important mosques throughout the world is often the focus for architectural decoration. The Mihrab usage is not only to position the Imam as the congregation’s leader but more importantly to indicate the middle point of the Qibla wall which is always parallel to the Qibla direction.
(2) It has been discovered that out of the 23 (twenty three) selected mosques in Malaysia, there are 5 (five) different designs of the Mihrab:

- Semi circular concaved
- Recessed area/room on Qibla wall without Mihrab niche
- Rectangular shape Mihrab niche
- Polygonal Mihrab niche
- Freestanding movable structure carrying both Mihrab and Mimbar

(3) The findings of motif and ornamentation on the Mihrab and Qibla wall of Malaysian mosques show that they actually originated from traditional Malay wood carvings motifs. There are evidences that those traditional and vernacular motifs are interlaced with Islamic geometrical patterns, especially the eight pointed star pattern. This study further proves that cultural and social values of Malaysia are still significant despite the influences brought in by the traders and the effect of colonization. Timber carvings with traditional motifs started to emerge richly and in high quality craftsmanship in a few mosques built after independence such as the Negeri Sembilan State Mosque.

(4) The study of the Mihrab and Qibla wall visibility proves that there are times when physically beautiful mosques are not as practical when studied through their internal layouts. For example Masjid Ubudiyah which was built during the colonial era, is one of the beautiful mosques in the world but spatial analysis of its internal layout provides an opposite response.

(5) It has been learnt that the most important usage of the Mihrab in Malaysian mosques is to indicate the Qibla direction. This had been proven by the study that shows the size of the Mihrabs are in proportion to the size of the Mosques. In a gigantic mosque, a large and tall Mihrab is easily captured from any points in the prayer hall.
9.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

More research on the same subject matter can be done to establish an elaborated body of knowledge in supporting the success of mosque functions. This research can be expanded through the following suggested researches:

(1) The same study can be conducted on other Islamic countries particularly in the South-East Asia region such as Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam. By doing this, more styles of the Mihrab and Qibla wall could be discovered. Hopefully, certain styles of the Mihrab and Qibla wall that originated from and unique to this region could be found from such a discovery.

(2) Study of mosque architecture on Muslim minority countries is seldom done, especially on important interior elements of the Mihrab and Qibla wall. Countries such as Thailand and Vietnam had embraced Islam during the same period as Malaysia. It is highly probable that they have their own styles of ornamenting their mosques. Thus, it could rather interesting to study and understand the motifs that they used and owned throughout the years.

(3) Other elements of mosque architecture such as Minaret, Dikka and Kursi are not being centered by researches. Detailed studies on their history and usage will carry the importance of these elements in Mosque art and architecture. Minaret for example, its purpose and usage will determine its positioning in the mosque lay out plan. In contemporary mosques especially in Malaysia, the Minaret is always positioned without any guidelines on its real usage, proportion or may be the level of visibility from the street.

(4) The study on elements and meanings of arches is quite interesting in carrying the cultural and heritage aspect of certain communities. Arch of the Mihrab alone can be defined further with proper observation, examination and
documentation to study its influences and evolution, and kept as records for the future generation.

This study has identified that the Mihrab on the Qibla wall is the most important element in mosque architecture. This research further concluded that the existence of a liturgical axis is mostly found in vernacular and traditional mosques. The efficiency of a mosque prayer hall does not depend on its size but rather on the clarity of its Mihrab and Qibla wall.