

CONTEXTUAL DESIGN FRAMEWORK FOR CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSIONS OF ISLAMIC KELANTANESE ARCHITECTURE: REINTERPRETING FAÇADE IDENTITY IN KOTA BHARU COURTS COMPLEX

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Abstract: *Architecture significantly influences the formation and articulation of cultural and religious identity, especially in historically significant areas like Kelantan, Malaysia. Kelantan, celebrated for its unwavering adherence to traditional Malay traditions and Islamic beliefs, is often known as the “Serambi Mekah” (Veranda of Mecca), signifying its prominence as a hub of Islamic knowledge and practice. In 2005, Kota Bharu was officially designated as the “Islamic City”, a strategic project intended to strengthen Islamic heritage within its urban and architectural characteristics. Nonetheless, despite this cultural rebranding, the actual incorporation of Islamic Kelantanese architectural features into modern public places is restricted and implemented inconsistently. This study examines the decline of façade identity in contemporary public architecture, namely the absence of culturally rooted design methods that embody the region's Islamic and traditional Malay history. The aim of this study was to create a contextual design framework that reinterprets Islamic Kelantanese architectural components, particularly façade features, for applications in contemporary public spaces, with a focused case study on Kota Bharu Courts Complex, to promote social empowerment and cultural continuity. This study utilised a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative methods such as site observations and semi-structured interviews with local architects, with quantitative methods through the use of questionnaires. The focus of this study was directed at recognising reoccurring symbolic themes, material manifestations, and spatial arrangements inherent in traditional façades. The anticipated results included a profound comprehension of the convergence of Islamic and Malay aesthetics in local architecture and their meaningful*

translation into current design vernacular. This study aimed to provide a contextual design framework that maintains façade uniqueness while promoting community empowerment via an enhanced feeling of belonging and place. This framework was intended to serve as a reference to support architecture students engaged in culturally responsive public architecture in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Facade Identity, Islamic Architecture, Public Space, Design Framework*

Introduction

Architecture functions as a practical solution to human requirements while also serving as a significant cultural artefact that embodies the ideas, values, and identity of a society. In areas with profound historical and spiritual significance, such as Kelantan in northeastern Peninsular Malaysia, architectural manifestations are essential for the preservation and communication of cultural and religious identities (Abdul Razak & Sabil, 2024). Kelantan, also known as the "Serambi Mekah" or "Veranda of Mecca", is distinguished for its unwavering commitment to Islamic traditions and its profound Malay cultural legacy (Surya Pratama et al., 2023). Traditional Kelantanese architecture is *tebar layar* (ornamental gable ends), *pemeleh* (eave-end carvings), and elaborate wood carvings. These characteristics are not only ornamental; they include Islamic doctrines, indigenous wisdom, and cultural values, functioning as visual narratives that connect the historical with the contemporary and the holy with the secular (Mohamad, 2025). In recent decades, the architectural environment of Kelantan has been progressively shaped by worldwide design trends and modernisation. The architectural legacy of Kelantan embodies a profound Islamic and Malay character. Kelantanese architecture is traditionally defined by wood constructions, elevated floors, sharply sloped roofs, and elaborate carvings, reflecting spiritual, cultural, and environmental principles (Abdul Razak & Sabil, 2024). The degradation of architectural identity in Kelantan is not solely an aesthetic issue but a critical challenge that affects the cultural relevance, functionality, and community engagement of public architecture. Despite the deep-rooted cultural and symbolic significance of traditional design elements, these identity-rich features are increasingly absent from contemporary public buildings. This decline is particularly evident in spaces designed to serve and empower local communities, where the lack of cultural continuity undermines a sense of place and belonging (Mohd Fauzi & Mohamad, 2023.; Hasan et al., 2024). These areas aimed to promote community involvement and pride, goals when the constructed environment embodies the community's traditions and values, reported by Abdul Aziz et al. (2023) and aligned with Al-Shami et al. (2024). This study introduced a contextual design framework that re-examines essential architectural elements derived from Islamic Kelantanese tradition, emphasising façade attributes. It addresses the increasing disjunction between modern architecture and cultural identity by advocating for the incorporation of historic aspects into contemporary public architecture. The analysis of Kota Bharu Courts Complex calls for architectural strategies that enhance cultural continuity, reinforce local identity, and empower communities. The suggested framework acts as a reference for architecture students involved in culturally responsive design in Malaysia, facilitating the integration of local values and traditions into contemporary public spaces.

Literature Review

The architectural façade serves not just as a protective or decorative layer but also as a vital medium for conveying identity, legacy, and cultural narratives. In addition to its functional purpose, the façade serves as a symbolic bridge between the structure and its social setting,

embodying the values, customs, and collective memories of the community it represents (Alnaim & Alnaim, 2024). Sherstiuk (2023) asserted that façades function as semiotic 'signs' conveying profound connotations associated with national and cultural identity, shaping public perception, and promoting cultural continuity. Al-Adilee (2024) asserted that façades play a crucial role in establishing place identity by including architectural styles and culturally ingrained aspects that reflect collective memory and local character. In this context, façades serve as cultural texts that reflect the lived experiences, beliefs, and ambitions of a society, rather than purely architectural representations. But a lot of these studies only look at façade identity in a detailed way, not using enough semiotic theory or symbolic interpretation models to show how meanings are made, understood, and kept over time.

Visual Language of Facades in Public Building

The façade of a public building is essential in conveying architectural identity, serving as a visible intermediary between the constructed environment and its cultural, historical, and social context. The façade, being the most prominent aspect of a building, influences public perception and solidifies a feeling of place (Hollander & Anderson, 2020). The design language, including massing, articulation, apertures, materials, and ornamentation, enhances spatial coherence and conveys symbolic significance (Eilouti, 2018). Liu et al. (2025) stated that these components are essential for preserving visual continuity and cultural integrity in urban environments, especially in areas with significant historical heritage. Nevertheless, little research provides a theoretical foundation for the role of design components, such as decoration or materiality, in shaping cultural identity within particular regional or religious contexts. The analysis of identity and symbolism is often oversimplified and devoid of contextual richness, especially for Kelantanese or Malay-Islamic customs. Integrating traditional elements and indigenous design ideas into modern façades may enhance local identity and promote community connection. This strategy in Malaysia facilitates the preservation of cultural heritage, especially by incorporating Islamic and Malay architectural features (Shuaib & Enoch, 2014). Nevertheless, existing research offers little empirical or theoretical analysis of how local consumers perceive and emotionally react to these elements in public environments. The disparity exists in comprehending the lived experience of architecture on how symbolic elements like *tebar layar* or *pemeleh* are interpreted, esteemed, or acknowledged by communities. Mohamad (2025) emphasise that elements like the *tebar layar* (ornamental gable ends) and *pemeleh* (carved eaves boards) provide both decorative functions and signify spiritual ideals and community identity. Furthermore, façade design extends beyond cultural expression; it also addresses utilitarian requirements. Jamilu et al. (2024) examines the evolving role of façades as infrastructural systems that enhance energy efficiency, climate adaptability, and occupant comfort. This integration of form and function exemplifies the transforming significance of the façade in modern architecture. The façade is a crucial architectural component that links history and modernity, serving as a medium for buildings to convey identity, preserve cultural narratives, and create significant relationships with the people they serve.

Facade as Cultural Interface Between Society

In Malaysia, the incorporation of traditional elements, such as motifs, proportions, and spatial hierarchies derived from Malay and Islamic traditions into contemporary public architecture illustrates this purpose. According to Ismail et al. (2020), public university edifices often exhibit façades that integrate cultural symbolism with modern architectural design, aiding in the preservation and celebration of national identity. The representational function of façades is apparent in heritage towns such as George Town, Penang, where colonial-era structures exhibit a distinctive amalgamation of architectural forms that convey the city's ethnic and historical

development. Fayez et al. (2024) stated that these façades function as cultural texts, safeguarding and conveying the collective memory of many communities via their design, embellishments, and spatial configuration. Nevertheless, these instances mostly emphasise colonial or multi-ethnic narratives, without enough academic focus on how Islamic-Malay features especially function as identity markers in public empowerment contexts. Consequently, façades transcend mere architectural borders; they serve as dynamic, symbolic touchpoints linking buildings to the cultural identity of the society they occupy. By thoughtfully integrating local customs and historical narratives, façade design may reinforce cultural identity, improve community involvement, and promote the long-term preservation of cultural assets.

Current Situation in Kota Bharu: A Comparative Perspective

Malaysian cities have seen a shift in public architecture, with cities like Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, and Penang adopting modern aesthetics and functionalism. However, Kota Bharu, the cultural and administrative capital of Kelantan, maintains a strong inclination towards traditional architectural expressions, particularly in public buildings (M. Fauzi & Mohamad, 2012). Architectural elements like *tebar layar*, *pemeleh*, and Islamic motifs are prevalent, providing both decorative significance and spiritual and communal meaning. Despite this, modernization pressures may dilute the rich local character (Abdul Razak & Sabil, 2024). Kota Bharu's public architecture often lacks the integration of sustainable technologies, revealing a gap between symbolic expression and environmental performance (M.Nasir & Sheffield, 2011). The city offers a case for exploring how traditional façade elements can be reinterpreted within contemporary design frameworks to balance cultural authenticity with functional demands. Integrating indigenous design features into modern public buildings in Kota Bharu supports local identity formation and acts as architectural resistance to cultural homogenization.

Symbolism and Spiritual Meaning in Islamic Architecture

Islamic architecture is profoundly symbolic, using geometric patterns, calligraphy, and adornment to embody spiritual ideals and divine order. Geometric elements convey *tawhid* (unity) and cosmic harmony, while calligraphy incorporates Quranic verses into architectural structures, converting façades into spiritual tales (Atefeh, 2013). Traditional Kelantanese architecture includes features like *tebar layar*, *pemeleh*, and *kerawang*, which blend Islamic symbols with local craftsmanship in a harmonious way. However, many of these symbolic functions are treated descriptively, without connecting them to established Islamic aesthetic theories or metaphysical design frameworks. A stronger conceptual link between spiritual symbolism and its architectural expression is needed to guide their reinterpretation in contemporary public buildings. Nevertheless, such components are often omitted from contemporary public edifices, resulting in a diminution in symbolic depth. Reinterpreting historical façade elements in modern design provides a chance to preserve legacy while addressing current requirements (Al-Adilee, 2024). Table 1 captures key Islamic architectural elements, their descriptions, and their symbolic significance concisely.

Table 1: Symbolic Elements in Islamic Architecture and Significance

Element	Description	Symbolic / Spiritual Significance
Geometric Patterns	Repetitive, symmetrical motifs in decoration.	Represent unity (<i>tawhid</i>), divine order, and reflection on creation.
Calligraphy	Quranic verses inscribed on walls and façades.	Integrates the word of God into architecture; spiritual and aesthetic balance.
Muqarnas	Three-dimensional decorative transition elements (e.g., between dome and walls).	Reflect atomistic worldview; symbolizes divine unity through architectural rhythm.
Mihrab	Ornate niche indicating direction of Mecca.	Represents divine presence; focal point of prayer and spiritual orientation.
Kelantanese Carvings	Traditional elements (<i>tebar layar, pemeleh, kerawang</i>).	Express Islamic values, cultural identity, and local craftsmanship.
Modern Interpretation	Reuse of traditional features in public architecture.	Promotes cultural continuity, identity, and meaningful public spaces.

Source: (Atefeh, 2013; Ismail et al., 2020; Mohamad, 2025)

Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach to investigate the reinterpretation of Islamic Kelantanese architectural components in modern public buildings, specifically examining Kota Bharu Courts Complex (as shown in Figure 1 and 2). In recent years, the building has been completed and functions as a regional court complex and a symbol of civic authority. Its architectural language incorporates stylistic and symbolic references to Kelantanese and Islamic vernacular traditions while simultaneously satisfying the functional requirements of a contemporary judiciary building. The study approach used qualitative and quantitative methodologies, supplemented with secondary data to improve contextual comprehension.



Figure 1: Kompleks Mahkamah Kota Bharu

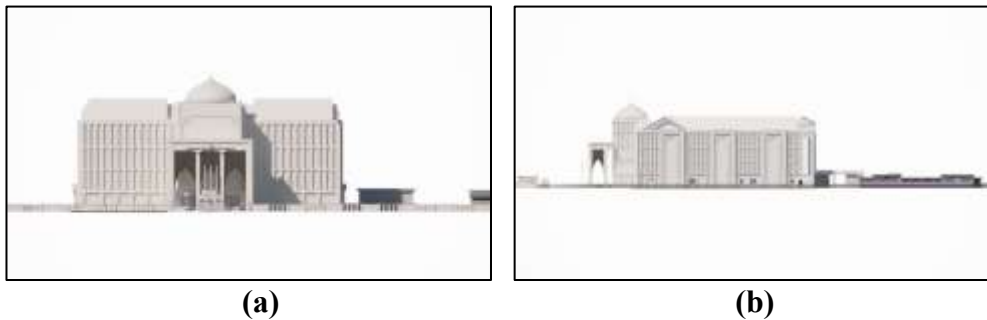


Figure 2: (a) Front Elevation and (b) Side Elevation of Kompleks Mahkamah Kota Bharu

Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility by integrating guided questions with open-ended discussions, enabling comprehensive perspectives on complicated topics like architectural design goals and cultural influences. This approach allows the interviewee to express themselves freely, yielding crucial contextual insights that may not arise from conventional forms. This approach enables the interviewer to ask follow-up questions and clarify responses, thereby improving data quality. Nonetheless, the methodology has drawbacks, such as the possibility for bias stemming from subjective replies and difficulties in comparing data across many interviews. It is also labour-intensive, and it significantly depends on the interviewer's proficiency. Notwithstanding these limitations, semi-structured interviews are particularly effective for investigating intricate, context-dependent matters in architectural research. An interview was held with the Professional Architect, Dato Ar. Hj. Mohd Asri bin Mohd Salleh (director of MASA Architect) accountable for the building's design. The interview were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed using manual coding to identify recurring patterns related to symbolism, identity expression, cultural translation, and functional integration.

Site Observation

Site observation is an effective technique for immediately evaluating the physical and visual characteristics of architectural façades in their real setting. It enables researchers to assess the functionality of materials, ornamentation, spatial configurations, and environmental adaptations in actual situations. This method provides clear understanding of how architecture interacts with the weather and culture, helping to better grasp how well designs work and their symbolic meanings. Nonetheless, site observation has constraints. It just records what is seen and happening at a certain moment, perhaps overlooking seasonal or use fluctuations. Notwithstanding these deficiencies, site observation continues to be an essential instrument for contextual and experiential study in architectural research. On-site observations were conducted to assess the physical attributes of the façade, including materials, decoration, spatial arrangement, and environmental adaptation. Attention was directed on the manner in which these traditional design elements address climatic circumstances, social use, and cultural representation. Ventilation panels, perforated screens, and shaded arcades were evaluated for their efficacy in addressing tropical weather conditions while maintaining aesthetic value. Observations concentrated on the expression of symbolic ornamentation, including *Jawi* calligraphy, Islamic floral patterns, and the stylised *tebar layar* roof finials (as shown in Figure 3), to comprehend their cultural implications and public visibility. Field notes and photographic documentation were analysed using a visual analysis matrix, focusing on recurring traditional features, climate response, and symbolic legibility.



(a)



(b)

Figure 3: (a) Islamic Floral Patterns and (b) *Tebar Layar* Roof

Survey Questionnaire

A sample size of 21 respondents was considered suitable for exploratory qualitative research, facilitating both controllable and varied community input while assuring depth in replies. The selected respondents included local community acquainted with the building, chosen for their experiential knowledge and engagement with the façade, which offered pertinent insights on its cultural and artistic significance. The inclusion criteria targeted those aged 18 and older who live or work in proximity to the site, whereas the exclusion criteria eliminated visitors or those without familiarity with the building's environment. The questionnaire comprised both closed-ended and open-ended questions, covering themes such as perceived identity, cultural symbolism, visual impact, and emotional connection to the building. Responses were analysed through descriptive statistics for quantitative questions and thematic coding for qualitative responses. Data triangulation was accomplished by integrating questionnaire results with site inspections and expert interviews, thereby augmenting the study's rigour. This multi-source validation enhanced both the reliability and validity of the findings, ensuring that public perceptions were contextualised alongside professional and architectural analyses.

Findings

Comprehending public perception is crucial for formulating a contextual design framework that reinterprets conventional Islamic components in modern buildings, particularly within culturally rich regions like Kelantan. As supported by Sherstiuk (2023) and Al-Adilee (2024), façades act as cultural texts and semiotic signs, reinforcing place identity and community values. Islamic design components may be classified into aesthetic, functional-spatial, and symbolic categories. These components fulfil not just visual or structural functions but also convey profound cultural, religious, and environmental significance. Evidence from the survey questionnaire conducted at the Kota Bharu Courts Complex confirmed this tripartite role of Islamic elements. The survey indicated that respondents mostly linked the building's façade to a strong cultural and architectural character. Specifically, 85% of participants expressed that the façade reflects Kelantanese-Islamic identity through distinct features such as the *tebar layar* and Islamic floral patterns, supporting Mohamad (2025) who emphasised their symbolic and spiritual function. The majority of respondents were working professionals acquainted with the local environment, revealing important details about how the building's architecture conveys Kelantanese-Islamic tradition. Respondents consistently identified elements such as Islamic floral patterns, traditional carvings, and rhythmic spatial arrangements as indicative of Islamic visual language, aligning with Atefeh (2013) who described such features as carriers of tawhid and divine order. The results indicate a collective admiration for designs that integrate heritage with modernity, underscoring the public's desire for these features to be included in future urban architecture. This is in line with Shuaib & Enoch (2014), who suggested that incorporating indigenous design features enhances local identity and strengthens community connection. The

public's positive reception of these symbolic and spatial design components supports Eilouti's (2018) assertion that architectural articulation plays a role in communicating deeper cultural meaning. This communal contribution was crucial in formulating the suggested design framework, guaranteeing its alignment with community values, architectural identity, and *wau* cultural expression (as shown in Figure 4). The findings reinforce the need for a design strategy that not only visually recalls Islamic heritage but also ensures that such symbolism remains intelligible, functional, and spiritually resonant for contemporary users.



Figure 4: *Wau* as Cultural Expression

Perception of Architectural Identity

The survey examined respondents' awareness of traditional Kelantanese-Islamic architectural elements on the façade of Kota Bharu Courts Complex. The results as shown in Table 2 and Figure 5 indicated that most respondents recognised significant historical elements integrated into the building's architecture.

Table 2: Perception of Architectural Identity

No	Traditional Kelantanese-Islamic Architectural Feature	Percentage (%)
1	Arched doorways/windows	81.0
2	<i>Jawi</i> calligraphy	52.4
3	Decorative wood carvings	42.9
4	Ventilation panels	42.9
5	Traditional roof forms	28.6
6	Dome at the porch	4.8
7	No specific elements noticed	4.8

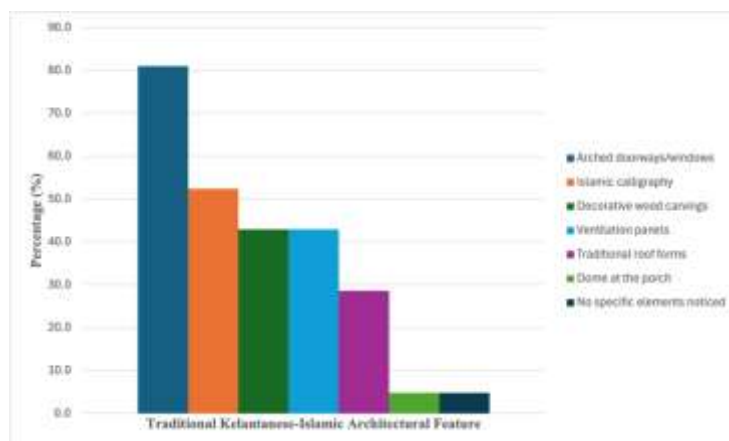


Figure 5: Perception of Architectural identity

The predominant characteristic identified through the survey, as illustrated in Figure 6, was the use of arched doorways and windows (*gerbang*), recognised by 81% of respondents. This reflects the symbolic significance of arches in Islamic architecture, commonly associated with spiritual thresholds and institutional authority, as supported by Alnaim & Alnaim (2024). The result was followed by *Jawi* calligraphy, recognised by 52.4%, and decorative wood carvings and ventilation panels, each acknowledged by 42.9% of the respondents. Traditional roof forms were acknowledged by 28.6%, indicating modest recognition or familiarity with these features. Interestingly, a smaller percentage of respondents noticed the dome at the porch (as shown in Figure 7), with only 4.8% referencing it, suggesting that some elements may be visually understated or symbolically less resonant within this specific cultural setting. Notably, 4.8% of participants said that they did not see any distinct traditional aspects in the façade. These findings demonstrate a relatively high degree of public awareness and recognition of Kelantanese-Islamic features, particularly those that are visually prominent or culturally familiar. They support Eilouti's (2018) view that façades communicate identity through visible ornamentation and symbolic elements, especially when these elements are culturally embedded and contextually appropriate. The survey results also reinforce Mohamad's (2025) emphasis on *gerbang* and Islamic calligraphy as key architectural expressions of spiritual and cultural identity. These features appear to be the most effective in conveying symbolic meaning within the façade of the Kota Bharu Courts Complex, suggesting their continued relevance in modern civic architecture.



(a)



(b)

Figure 6: Arched Doorways and Windows (a) and Decorative Wood Carvings (b)



(a)



(b)

Figure 7: (a) Jawi Calligraph and (b) Dome at the Porch

Perception of Facade Elements

The results, as shown in Table 3 and Figure 8, indicated a strong public interest in preserving and reinterpreting culturally significant features from the Kota Bharu Courts Complex in future public architecture. This aligns with Fayez et al. (2024), who highlighted façades as cultural texts that reflect collective memory and foster continuity. *Jawi* calligraphy emerged as the most preferred feature, with 66.7% of respondents expressing a desire for its inclusion in upcoming architectural projects such as community centres, libraries, and youth facilities. This finding underscores the symbolic role of calligraphy in conveying spiritual and cultural values, consistent with Atefeh (2013), who emphasised its significance in Islamic architectural storytelling.

Table 3: Perception of Facade Elements

No	Facade Elements Preferred for Reinterpretation	Percentage (%)
1	<i>Jawi</i> calligraphy	66.7
2	Islamic geometric and floral patterns	57.1
3	Natural materials	52.4
4	Islamic wood carvings	47.6
5	Traditional roof designs	38.1

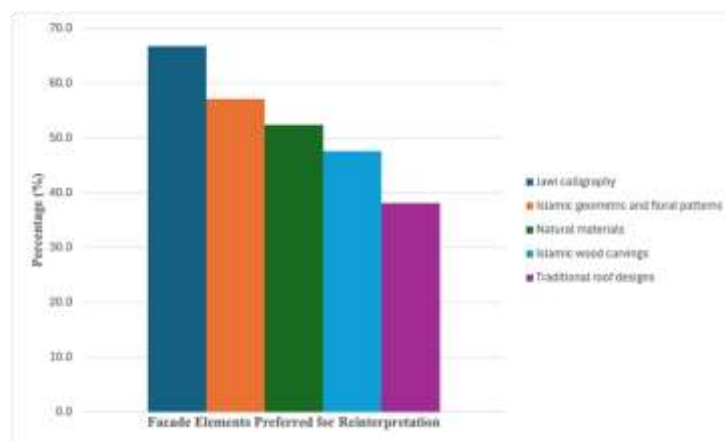


Figure 8: Facade Elements Preferred for Reinterpretation

Referring to the Figure 9, Islamic geometric and floral motifs were significantly esteemed, garnering approval from 57.1% of the respondents. Natural materials valued for both ecological and cultural reasons were favoured by 52.4% of respondents, indicating growing appreciation for sustainable materials that maintain visual and cultural continuity. This echoes Jamilu et al. (2024), who advocated for façades that integrate both symbolic identity and environmental responsiveness. 47.6% of respondents expressed support for Islamic wood carvings, demonstrating a sustained admiration for artisanal artistry in public architecture. Traditional roof designs, shown by the *tebar layar* roof, received endorsement from 38.1%, reflecting modest acceptance for the integration of vernacular roof typologies in contemporary architectural expressions. Overall, the findings reflect a collective aspiration to maintain and reinterpret the Kelantanese-Islamic architectural identity in contemporary public buildings. This reinforces the argument by Shuaib & Enoch (2014) that blending indigenous cultural elements with modern design supports heritage preservation while fostering local identity. The public's prioritisation of symbolic, decorative, and material features demonstrates a culturally rooted design preference, highlighting the importance of integrating these values into future urban development strategies.



Figure 9: Facade as Environmental Responsiveness

Cultural Reflection in Design

The results, as presented in Table 4 and Figure 10, indicated that the majority of respondents viewed the design of the Kota Bharu Courts Complex as a strong representation of Kelantanese-Islamic cultural values. This reinforces the notion that architectural form can effectively communicate identity and heritage, as articulated by Al-Adilee (2024) and Sherstiuk (2023). Specifically, 38.1% of respondents stated that the building epitomised these cultural ideals very strongly, while 42.9% believed it did so strongly. Furthermore, 14.3% assessed the cultural reflection as moderate, while only 4.8% rated it as minor. Notably, no respondents perceived the building as lacking cultural expression, suggesting widespread recognition of its symbolic and contextual relevance. The findings demonstrated that the courthouse's architectural language through its incorporation of arches, Islamic motifs, traditional carvings, and material selection successfully resonated with the public's perception of cultural identity. This aligns with Eilouti (2018), who argues that the spatial articulation and decorative language of façades significantly influence cultural perception and continuity. The broad affirmation of the courthouse's cultural rootedness underscores the value of integrating traditional Islamic and Kelantanese design elements in contemporary civic architecture. It further validates the approach proposed by this study, which advocates for the reinterpretation of such elements within a contemporary framework that maintains symbolic meaning while fulfilling modern needs.

Table 4: Cultural Reflection in Design

No	Response Category	Percentage (%)
1	Very strongly	38.1
2	Strongly	42.9
3	Moderately	14.3
4	Slightly	4.8
5	Not at all	0

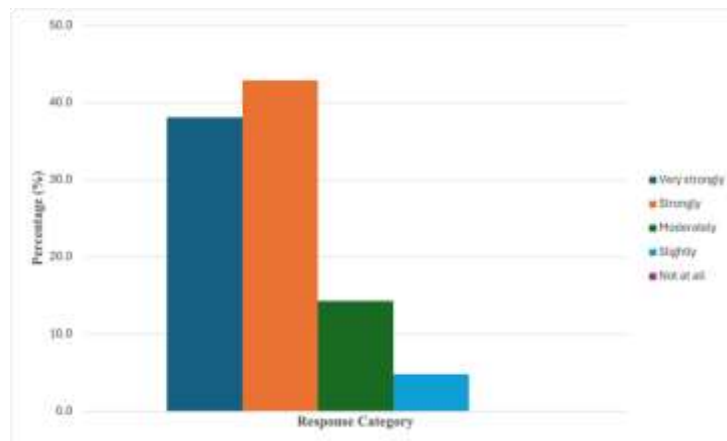


Figure 10: Cultural Reflection in Design

Architect's Insights on Reinterpreting Kelantanese-Islamic Facade Identity

The interview with the lead architect of the Kota Bharu Courts Complex provided critical insights into the design rationale and challenges of integrating traditional Kelantanese-Islamic elements into contemporary public architecture. These perspectives deepened the study's understanding of how architectural decisions were shaped by both cultural intention and functional necessity. The architect highlighted that elements such as ventilation panels (as shown in Figure 11), *janda berhias* motifs, and *tunjuk langit* carvings represent a deliberate fusion of Islamic geometric order with local vernacular traditions. This supports Atefeh (2013) and Alnaim & Alnaim (2024), who described Islamic architecture as inherently symbolic, encoding spiritual and cultural values through ornamentation and spatial arrangement. The courthouse was designed not only to function as a judicial building but also to serve as a civic and cultural landmark. Traditional elements were selected not merely for symbolic purposes but also for their climatic adaptability and passive performance. For example, the integration of courtyards and cross-ventilation (as shown in Figure 12) through timber panels was intentionally used to enhance thermal comfort, reflecting a harmony between cultural symbolism and environmental functionality, aligning with Jamilu et al. (2024) on performative façades. A major challenge highlighted by the architect was the need to justify the inclusion of these traditional features to stakeholders unfamiliar with their cultural or practical relevance. This challenge was compounded by the scarcity of durable local materials, necessitating creative reinterpretation using modern construction techniques.



Figure 11: Ventilation Panels on facade

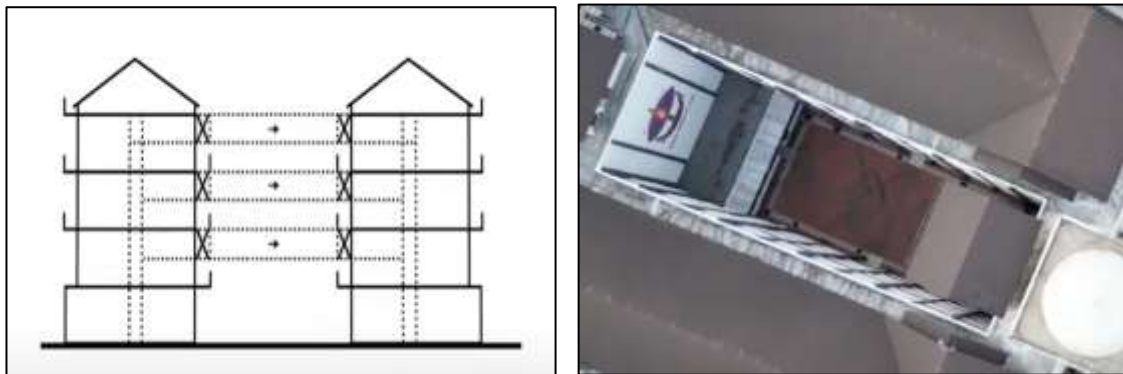


Figure 12: The Integration of Courtyard and Cross-Ventilations

Despite these constraints, the architect noted that the building's façade communicated its Islamic civic identity clearly, without the need for signage illustrating the power of symbolic form in conveying institutional meaning, as supported by Sherstiuk (2023). Importantly, the architect advocated for future public spaces such as urban plazas or civic centres to embody Kelantanese-Islamic identity through a flexible framework that respects tradition while embracing innovation and sustainability. This directly reinforces the study's aim to propose a contextual design framework that bridges heritage expression and modern public architecture. Table 5 presents a summary of the core themes, including symbolic expression, functional adaptation, design challenges, and future recommendations, as derived from the architect's professional account.

Table 5: Summary of Interview Response

Theme	Summary of Interview Response
Traditional facade elements	Blend of Islamic patterns and local motifs; symbolic features include <i>tunjuk langit</i> , perforated walls.
Design intentions	To establish a new civic landmark and express Kelantanese-Islamic identity through architecture.
Selection criteria	Chosen based on climatic performance and functionality, not purely decorative appeal.
Design challenges	Skepticism from clients; loss of traditional materials and insufficient research support.
Contextual response	Dome signifies Islamic values and aligns with the spiritual context of the judiciary.
User perception	Façade intuitively expresses its institutional identity to the public.
Recommendations	Proposes civic plazas to showcase identity and foster community engagement.
Design framework support	Endorses a flexible, adaptive approach to integrate traditional identity in modern public buildings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the recontextualization of traditional Kelantanese-Islamic architectural features within modern public architecture, with a focused case study on the façade identity of the Kota Bharu Courts Complex. It aimed to understand how architectural identity can be preserved and expressed through the integration of cultural elements in contemporary civic design. Key findings revealed that the public strongly associated the building's façade with Kelantanese-Islamic cultural values, particularly through features such as arched entrances,

Jawi calligraphy, ventilation panels, and decorative wood carvings. Over 80% of respondents viewed the structure as a strong or very strong embodiment of regional identity, affirming the public's appreciation for culturally rooted design. These findings align with the literature that supports the façade as a medium of symbolic expression and a vessel of collective memory. From the architect's perspective, the inclusion of traditional elements was not merely symbolic but also practical serving climatic functions such as ventilation and shading. However, challenges emerged in justifying these elements to clients and authorities, particularly due to material availability and cost concerns. This highlights the ongoing need for broader awareness and education for heritage-informed contemporary design. The proposed contextual design framework as presented in Table 6 offers guidance to architecture students on how to meaningfully reinterpret Kelantanese-Islamic features in future public buildings. This framework supports not only aesthetic continuity but also community empowerment by reinforcing local identity and a sense of belonging through architecture. While the study provides valuable insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged. Additionally, the study was confined to a single building, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to broader architectural typologies. Future studies should expand the sample, include comparative case studies, and explore long-term user experiences with culturally expressive architecture. This study will benefit architectural students by offering an evidence-based model for integrating identity into modern public space design. It serves as a starting point for developing culturally responsive urban environments that honour local heritage while addressing contemporary functional needs.

Table 6: Recommended Contextual Design Framework

No	Theme	Summary of Interview Response
1	Cultural symbolism integration	Reinterpret key symbolic elements (e.g., <i>Jawi</i> calligraphy, wood carvings, roof forms) as narrative tools in design.
2	Climatic responsiveness	Utilize traditional passive design strategies (e.g., perforated panels, courtyards, ventilation panels).
3	Material adaptation	Encourage use of natural/local materials or modern equivalents that maintain traditional character.
4	Community perception alignment	Integrate elements that the public resonates with (e.g., Islamic motifs, floral patterns, domes) in meaningful ways.
5	Functional compatibility	Ensure traditional elements are adapted for contemporary needs (e.g., privacy, circulation, accessibility).
6	Interpretive flexibility	Allow freedom in form, scale, or abstraction of traditional motifs, ensuring creative evolution.

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