

The Importance of Upgrading Mosque Furniture and Accessories

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Abstract:

A Mosque is the heart of the Islamic architecture. Since the dawn of Islam until now, mosques are still considered one of the most important places and facilities for Muslims. Muslims gather for prayer inside the mosque five times a day, where a mosque purpose is not only for worshipping, but also as a meeting point for Islamic social and intellectual activities that usually reflect religious identity.

Indeed, Muslims are doing all their best to preserve and maintain their mosques as an overarching privilege that enhances their religious, social and cultural interactions. Despite the unlimited number of mosques all over the world and the noticeable increasing interest in developing their architectural, structural, fundamental elements, there is a less interest in developing, modernizing and updating the mosque furniture and its accessories.

Accordingly, this research paper mainly focuses on clarifying the importance of developing these furniture and accessories that meet the physical and psychological requirements of the mosque visitors (worshippers) as these items and accessories enhance and improve worshippers' experience inside mosques.

In a sequential manner, the paper is a brief for the evolving role of the mosque (from ancient times until today), and then explains its value as an Islamic architectural beacon. The paper goes into depth in diagnosing and discussing significant needs for updating mosque furniture and accessories, by highlighting weakness or shedding light on what is not available.

In this context, the researcher presents and discusses many contemporary design paths for mosque furniture, in addition to clarifying many different ideas for accessories by presenting drawings and details of many design ideas for contemporary mosque furniture (Footwear shelving system, locker system, chairs ...). Moreover, it is highlighting some contemporary ideas for various accessories, such as: The Holy Quran reading holder and the central chandeliers in the mosque.

Keywords:

Mosque, Islamic architecture, design, mosque furniture, mosque accessories.

Introduction:

Throughout history, Muslim communities have always been attached to the mosque which played as an institution and a central role in religious, cultural, and social life. From a historical perspective, the mosque cannot be separated from the early existing of Islam, which acted as a focal point of all activities based on the importance bestowed upon it by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) during his lifetime and the life of his companions thereafter. So, the distinctiveness of the mosque is linked directly to the worldview of Islam (Abdel-Hady, 2010).

As such, the mosque becomes the center of Muslims' life which is outlined by a wide range of functions: such as a place of worship, a place of deliberation, education and propagation center, a court, empowerment of people, a place of welcoming delegates or guests of the state and other religious leaders, wedding ceremony, and a set of war strategy (Ch, 2016). Recently, in light of many variables, the role of the mosque is rapidly changing, but the interest in the mosque itself has not changed (For more detail about the developed role of the mosque, see Utaberta, 2015). For Omar (2010), Islamic architecture represented in mosques would include not only the facilities but at the same time would be a physical locus of the actualization of the Islamic message. Practically, Islamic architecture represents the religion of Islam that has been translated into reality by the hands of Muslims. It also represents the identity of Islamic culture and civilization. With a different point of view, Mufidah Ch (2016) said that "the role of the mosque is very vast and infinite, but in its development, the function of the mosque is increasingly minimalist and exclusive only to worship ...". Indeed, there are several studies about the role of the mosque in past, how it was changed in present and how it will be expected in future Ahmad (2016). In this variable context, researchers' opinions are based on many different aspects related to the depth of their research, their scope, and somehow their ethnics, originality, or territories ...

So, whatever the variety and the disharmony of the previous opinions, there is no dispute over the importance of the mosque for Muslims. Despite this importance, the main concern always and still goes to mosques' architectural aspects, structure and somehow decoration without enough caring about mosques' furniture and accessories. This furniture and accessories require more interest of designers and creators especially when realizing their vital role in enhancing worshipers' experience and increase their calmness, reverence, and focuses ...

According to this view, the core of this paper is to explain, discuss and highlight the importance of mosque furniture and accessories. Through challenges' diagnosis, highlighting the weakness and by presenting many contemporary ideas (Some of them designed under the researcher supervision) which are designed to meet worshipers' expectations, the researcher summarized the main design aspects which are recommended to follow when designing this specific type of furniture and accessories.

Research problem

The main problem of this research paper can be divided into two correlated points.

- First, is about the lack and the less interest of designers and creators about mosque furniture and accessories.
- Second, is about the functional un-suitability, low aesthetic values and the outdated used furniture and accessories inside many contemporary mosques.

Research aim and importance:

The aim of this paper is divided into two sub aims: First, highlighting the importance of the mosque furniture and accessories in enhancing worshipers' experience through achieving their significant needs (Physical and Psychological). Second, presenting and discussing many contemporary furniture and accessories designs which are following and applying many essential design aspects that are being recommended to be used inside mosques to solve variable problems and to be applicable for several purposes.

Research Hypotheses:

The main two hypotheses of this research paper can be summarized as the following:

- Designing functional, aesthetic furniture and accessories will solve many current problems and challenges inside mosques.
- Designing more suitable up-to-date furniture and accessories will enhance worshipers' experience and achieve their variable required needs.

Research Methodology:

This research paper is mainly based on a qualitative approach where the researcher collected data about the phenomena "Mosque Furniture and Accessories". In the literature review, the paper briefs information about the continues and the varied role of the mosque from the historical perspective until now, mosque importance, mosque as an architectural beacon, and mosque furniture and accessories ... The discussion part is a sequenced context that focuses on describing and diagnosing each problem/challenge, discusses its negative influence on worshipers, then giving the solution by highlighting, presenting, and discussing many contemporary furniture and accessories designs. In particular, the researcher explains using the presented drawings how these contemporary solutions/designs are following and applying many essential design aspects and how these designs will enhance the worshipers' experience, and increase their calmness, reverence, and focuses.

The used method in this research paper involves the credibility criteria that the results are credible or believable from the researcher perspective which is based on presenting real challenges, discussing optimal observation, giving solutions based on experience and practice.

Mosque as an architectural beacon:

As said earlier, mosque is one of the most important places for Muslims. There Muslims gathering each other's and mainly meet to pray five times a day, where the place works as a point of convergence for Islamic social and intellectual activity which usually reflects the Islamic religiosity and its identity.

The equal Arabic word for mosque is "*Masjid*", which simply means a "place of prostration". Additionally, it could be equal to the Arabic word "*Jame3*", which is a usually bigger, and centrally positioned than "*Masjid*" and gathering Muslims for not only every day praying, but also for Friday prayer and many directly and indirectly correlated activities ... (For more detail about the mosque, see Yusuf (2013)).

The design of the mosque has undergone changes throughout history. The first basic model for a mosque was the residence that the prophet *Muhammad* (SAW) built when he moved to Medina. This first mosque was an enclosure marked as a special place of worship. The mosque was extremely simple. It consisted of an enclosure with walls made of mud bricks and an arcade on the "*qiblah*" side (towards Makkah) made of palm-trunks used as columns to support a roof of palm-leaves and mud. A small part of the mosque was sectioned off to house the Prophet and his family, and the remaining enclosed rectangular courtyard was left open as a place for Muslims to pray. (For more details about the first mosque and its role, see Omar (2010, pp. 117-120)).

Although later mosques developed into complex architectural structures built in diverse styles, the typical mosque still basically a prayer space with a wall marked with a "*mihrab*" – a niche

indicating the direction of Mecca, which Muslims should face when praying. Next to the “*mihrab*”, a pulpit “*minbar*” is often provided for the delivery of sermons “*khutba*”. A typical mosque also includes a minaret or many (towers), a dome or domes, separate sections for women, a place to wash before prayers. In many mosques, several rows of columns are used to mark the way for worshipers to line up behind the imam during prayer. Indeed, mosques are varied according to many variables (Place, space, facilities ...), but generally, each feature has its own significance.

Indeed, the early mosque served an equally important function that thousands of mosques continue to serve today: The mosque is a place where Muslims foster a collective identity through prayer and attend to their common concerns. Through time and as Islam spread outside Arabia, mosque architecture was influenced by many various architectural styles, and both simple and monumental mosques were worldwide built. Despite the borrowings from diverse civilizations, certain common features became characteristic of most mosques and thus serve to distinguish them from the sacred spaces of other religions and cultures.

Mosque furniture and accessories:

From all what was discussed above, there is no doubt that mosques have been (and still) at the center of Muslims’ religion, intellectual and cultural life, nevertheless recently this role is developed and changed from a society to another, but mosques are yet still reflecting the size, the mood and the needs of individual Muslim’s communities ...

Despite what was mentioned, the main role of the mosque is still being a place for praying. Worshipers’ actions require many parallel services, such as washing before praying and reading Quran. These actions and others are varied from an individual to another (Age, gender ...), which require different furniture pieces and accessories. Starting from the mosque entrance, where worshipers should take off their footwear (Shelving system needed), and continually, where they are washing before praying, (Well prepared washing area needed), reading Quran (Quran reading holders needed). Down to the state of prayer itself, where aged or special needs people can't stand and pray, so, they are used to using chairs to pray while seating.

Based on this explanation, there are many furniture elements and accessories that are needed to be updated to fulfil the physical and psychological requirements of the mosque visitors. These elements and accessories will enhance and improve worshipers' experience inside mosques.

Indeed, most of these elements and accessories are the same for long times (form and function), majority are without any updates or development which is necessary now to be up-to-date, parallel to the mosque updates itself. The coming discussion will diagnose many challenges in detail where it will present, discuss variable solutions and updated designs for many furniture pieces and accessories.

Discussion:

Although there is a noticeable renaissance in mosque architecture in terms of spaces, architectural construction, and fundamental equipment, there is a kind of lack in developing the mosque furniture and accessories (facilities). Indeed, there are many examples that can describe this lack of interest ...

Wherever the mosque is, its size and facilities, usually it is a problem to offer a well-organized place for worshipers' footwear. Usually, the system is based on shelves outside or to be cornered inside the mosque. In many big mosques there are numbered shelves systems, which is somehow valid, but at the same time it is not a sufficient functional system especially in the case of big mosques or in case of crowding like Friday prayer.



Figure (1): Messy footwear outside mosques ...

Another face of the problem is that many rushing worshipers used to leave their shoes scattered in the entrance area which reflects unsuitable visual impact about the mosque and its visitors (Figure 1). Additionally, it leads to chaos and a scramble to find shoes after praying and when leaving the mosque. This problem requires a simple smart solution that provides easy access for everyone and solves this unsuitable cause outside or inside the mosque ...

One of the smart solutions which was participated and honored from “*Abdullatif Al-Fozan Award for Mosque accessories*”¹ July 2020 is an idea called “*Kashwan*” which suggested to add an additional threshold to the entrance of the mosque (to keep the footwear in) with led light to alert the worshiper of the number of thresholds. Moreover, adding lines or carving grooves with a different material from the entrance threshold material to help the worshiper to keep their feet stable and do not slip, and also to help people with special needs (Figure 2).

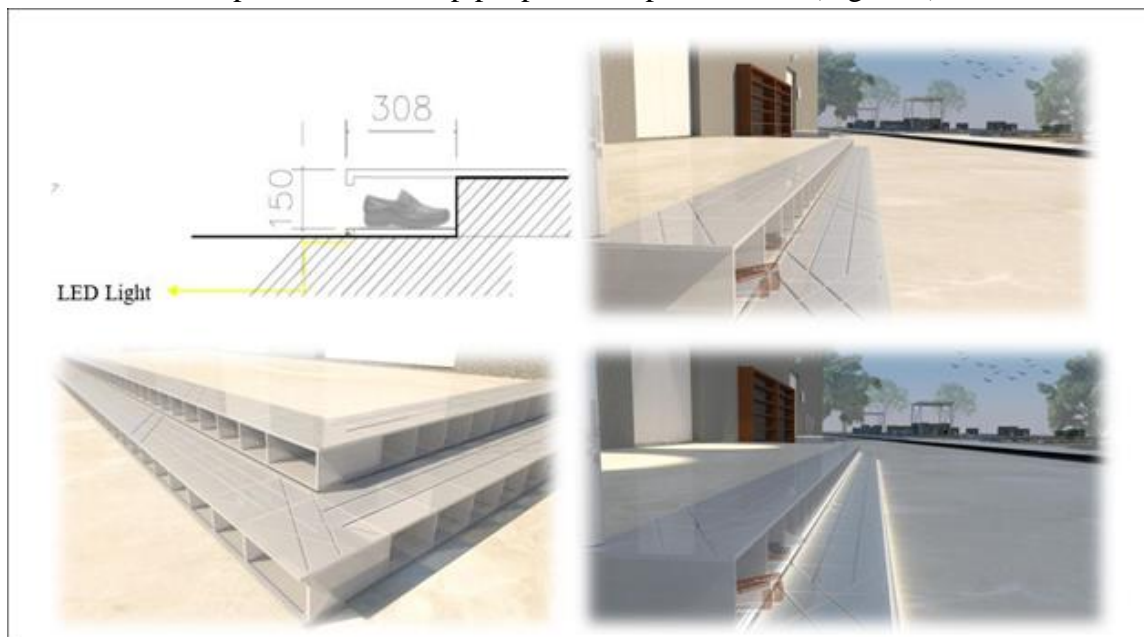


Figure (2): “Kashwan” design: A solution of arranging footwear mess outside mosques ...

This simple idea will basically reduce the footwear mess outside the mosque. Moreover, it is suitable for those who come rushing and leave their shoes scattered in the entrance area. The positive influence of this design is that it will indirectly change and enhance the behavior of worshipers and motivate them to arrange themselves without paying any effort (without touching their footwear).

Another good solution was presented as a project by Ghadi Alfaifi (Interior design student, Effat College of Architecture & Design) under the supervision of the researcher*, where the designer created wall lockers (drawers) using the rectangular geometric shapes in a repeated grid and adding simplified Islamic pattern (Figure 3). The suggested design is providing suitable drawers which can apply extensionally (Vertical or horizontal) and can be used to keep footwear, bags or any belongings. For safety and privacy, the designer suggested to use a kind of digital lock for each drawer ...

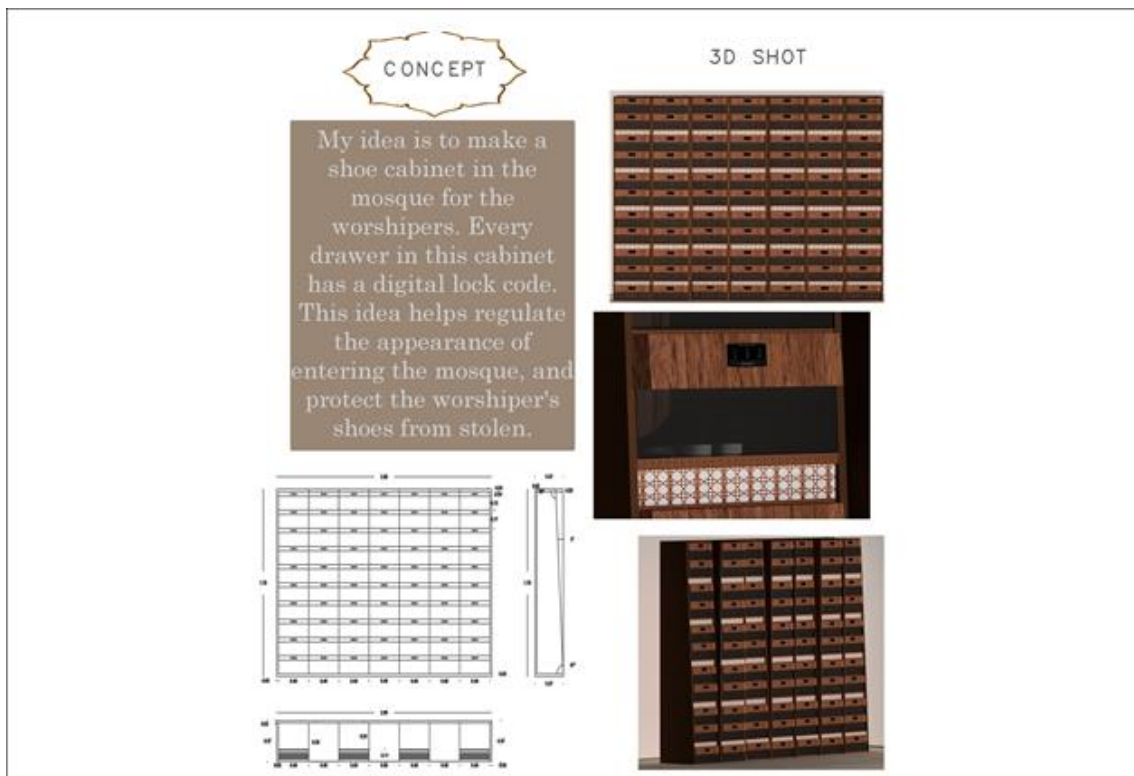


Figure (3): Wall lockers (drawers) to keep worshipers' footwear or their belongings

Another related challenge facing most of worshipers who go to the mosque and have a bag, whatever its size, or what it contains, is how and where to keep their bags? Usually there is no safe place to keep their bags especially for example if it contains something expensive or something valuable such as a laptop. What happens is that the worshiper places the bag in front of him/her or beside him/her. During praying s/he keeps thinking or looking at the bag, which is contrary to reverence and focus in praying.

Is there a solution to this problem? Is there a possibility of designing small suitable lockers to store bags or valuables, which makes the worshiper/prayer reassured and referenced in praying without thinking and fearing about losing property? The expected that these lockers shouldn't be tough like station's lockers (Figure 4), but whatever the design would be, it should be in harmony with the mosque design, safe, well secured, and easy to use ...



Figure (4): Samples of stations' lockers ...

Alhanouf Alsubaiee (One of the researcher's students) presented an idea of designing a wooden lockers system inspired by the hexagonal Islamic pattern/shape ... The system can apply horizontally reaching a suitable level and provide an unlimited number of lockers. The designer suggested to add an Islamic motive to decorate lockers' faces and she proposed to use a fingerprint keys for each locker (Figure 5) ...

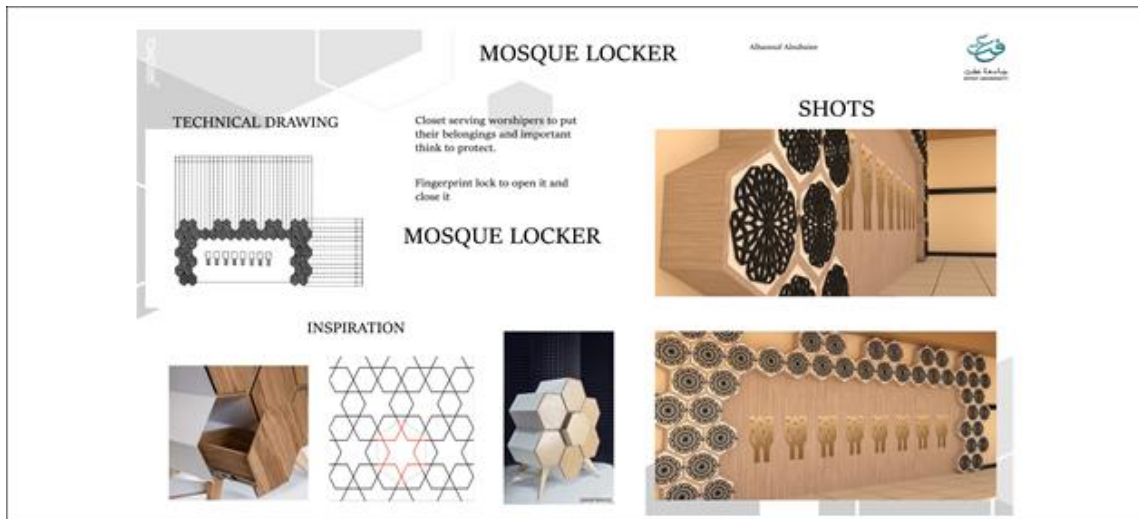


Figure (5): Mosque lockers system ...

Chairs are considered as another messy furniture element in mosques, which are mainly used for the older people who cannot pray standing in the default way. In most mosques whatever its size or facilities, unsuitable movable plastic or metal chairs are used without enough interest to fulfill the real needs (quality and safety) of the user and without enough caring to be matching with the mosque interior design.

Recently, in many mosques, fixed seating benches were added which are separately designed and do not match with the mosque design too ... This messy challenge requires a careful study to identify the suitable alternative solutions and design functional esthetical comfortable furniture elements.



Figure (6): Messy chairs and benches in mosques ...

Here is one of the creative solutions designed by Chaimae Beladel (One of the researcher’s students who worked and updated her design under his supervision). The designer studied the current situation of many mosques and did all her best to provide an updated creative design that achieves the worshiper’s actual needs (Physically and psychologically).

The design is contemporary and simplified, but it still reflects the Islamic identity by using an abstract Islamic pattern. In terms of size, weight, movability, and storage, the design is light-weighted, telescopically easy folding with a possibility of height adjustability. The design takes small space when folding for storage and requires a minute to be ready for use. An additional option provided in this design is the back has a Quran holder with adjustable angle which can be used by the worshiper in the next line (Figure 7) ...



Figure (7): Contemporary foldable mosque chair

“Quran reading stand” or “Quran reading holder” is one of the basic useful equipment (accessories) inside most of the mosques. Traditionally, the wooden x-shaped foldable holders are used (Figure 8) which is still almost the same except for some minor improvements, (These improvements were mainly about the holder decoration, such as: carving Islamic motifs or adding expensive materials, such as Inlaying ivory or silver. Recently, metal, movable and height-adjustable holders were used ...).

Indeed, the updated Quran holders’ versions are functional, but their ideas are built on the traditional valuable format without a bold modification in terms of form, function, and improving the interaction with the user ...



Figure (8): Various types of traditional Quran reading holders ...

These semi-static forms motivated many recent designers to rethink and led them to improve the holder design concept itself. Throughout the designing process, creators decided to build many alternatives and use different materials with simple techniques.

One of the up-to-date Quran reading holders’ ideas was designed by the “Engineering Bitar Office” from Jordan where the group won the award of “Abdullatif Al-Fozan for Mosque accessories” July 2020.

In addition to the creative simple form (One piece without any joints or fittings), this contemporary Quran reading holder design (Figure 9) has two main advantages. First, it has been designed in a way that best suits the purpose of a Quran reading stand suitable for placing the body on the ground, (It does not interfere with the knees like the common traditional Quran holders). The second advantage is that it works as a partition that can be easily placed and stored anywhere around the mosque, with the possibility of preserving the Quran if someone wants to read from it during prayer.

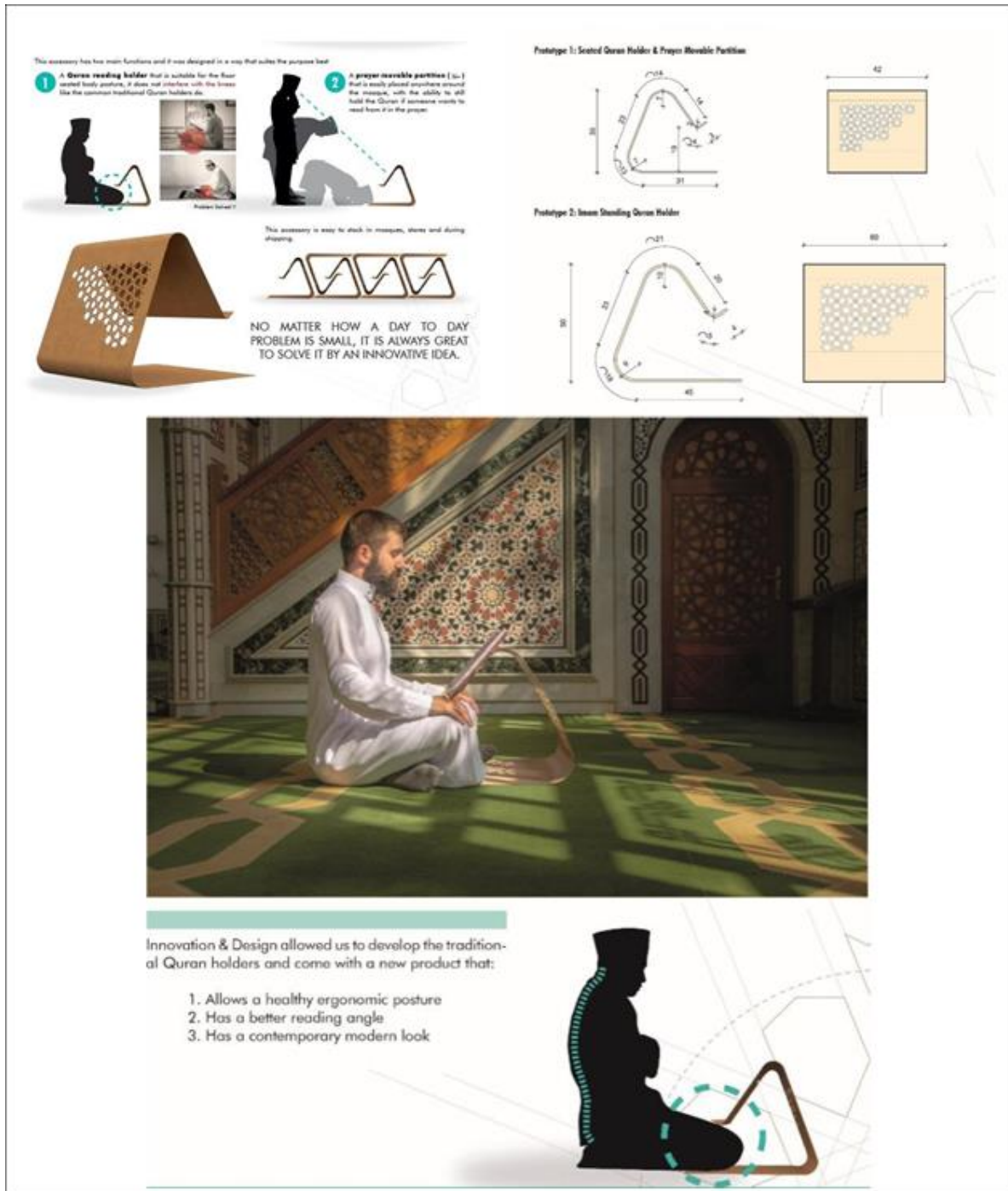


Figure (9): Contemporary Quran reading holder



Figure (10): Contemporary movable Quran reading holder

Another good design of the movable Quran reading holder was designed by Mr. Samer Moh. El-Sayary. The design participated and was honored by “Abdullatif Al-Fozan Award for Mosque accessories” July 2020. The design is based on only one modular unit of 45 cm length that could be replicated to produce numerous ideas. As shown in figure (10), the design could be adapted to build Quran stand/holder, chair, partition ... The design is easy to be used/built which enables any ordinary user to adjust without any prior technical experience or equipment.

Yamina Ahmed Zaid designed an attractive Quran Reading Holder too. The design participated and was honored by “Abdullatif Al-Fozan Award for Mosque accessories” July 2020. The design is simple and light weighted which is created to suit the worshiper’s different sitting positions for reading the Holy Quran, the position of sitting on a regular or wheelchair, the position of joining the legs, and the position of the extended legs. The design is adjustable regarding height and angle and easy to be folded and stored. See figure (11).

The selection of finishing depends on materials with a long life span, in addition to the possibility of recycling or re-use. The suggested used materials are wood, stainless steel, and Plexiglas.

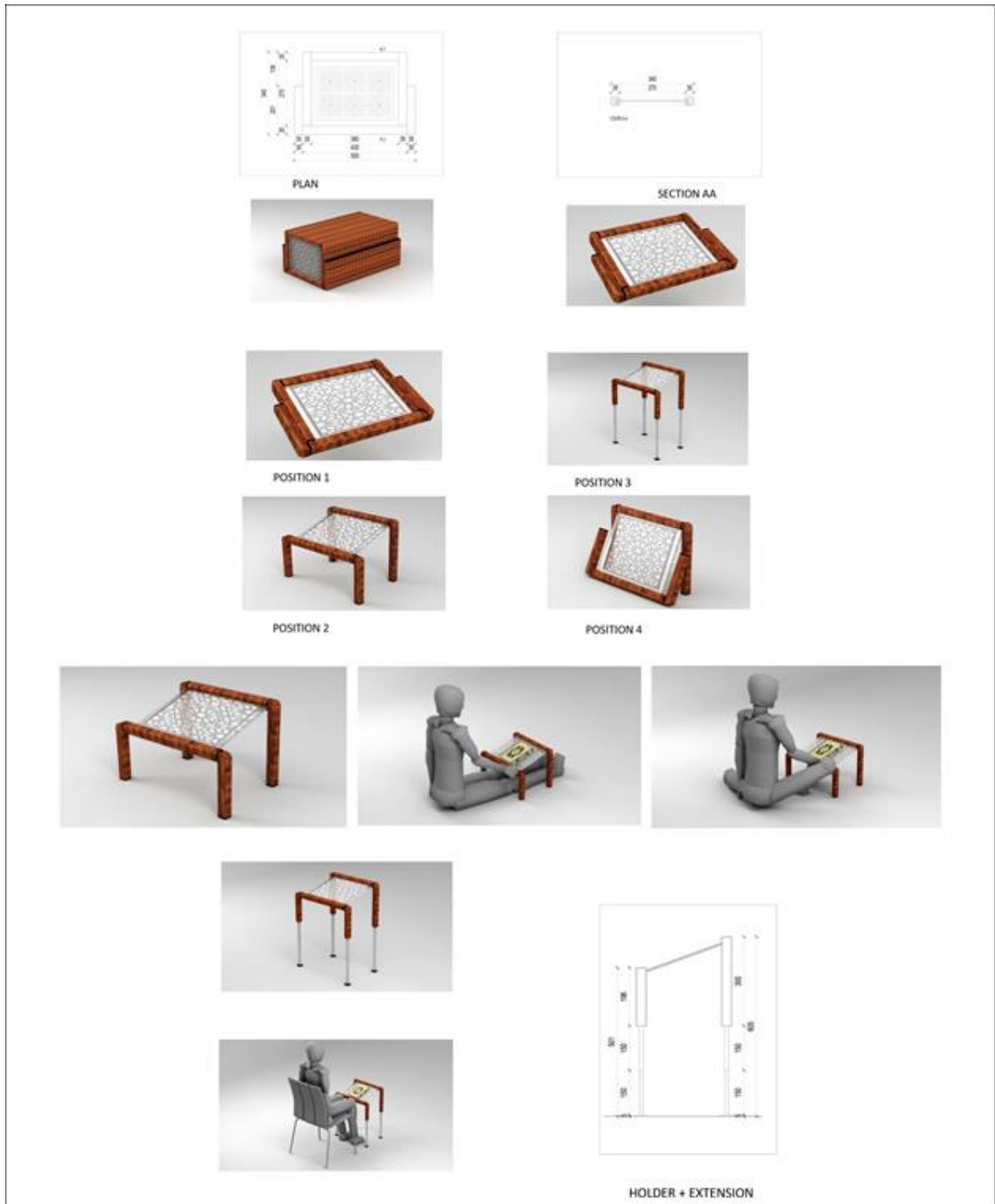


Figure (11): Multifunctional contemporary Quran reading holder

Indeed, there are many furniture pieces and helpful accessories inside mosques that still need to develop and to improve their functions by redesigning or by creating new alternatives, such as lighting systems, which are not carefully studied in many mosques, in terms of lighting efficiency, its amount, controlling and the design of the lighting fixture itself.

Dhena Allihyani (She is one of the researcher's students, who worked and developed her design under his supervision) designed a central lighting unit that its shape was inspired from the traditional chandeliers. The designer simplified and modified the traditional idea to be more abstract which fits with any mosque design (Figure 12). The chandelier design has a light metal skeleton covered by a one sized stainless thin strips which work as reflectors of the used light sources. This is to increase the lighting efficiency and reduce the number of used lighting sources ...

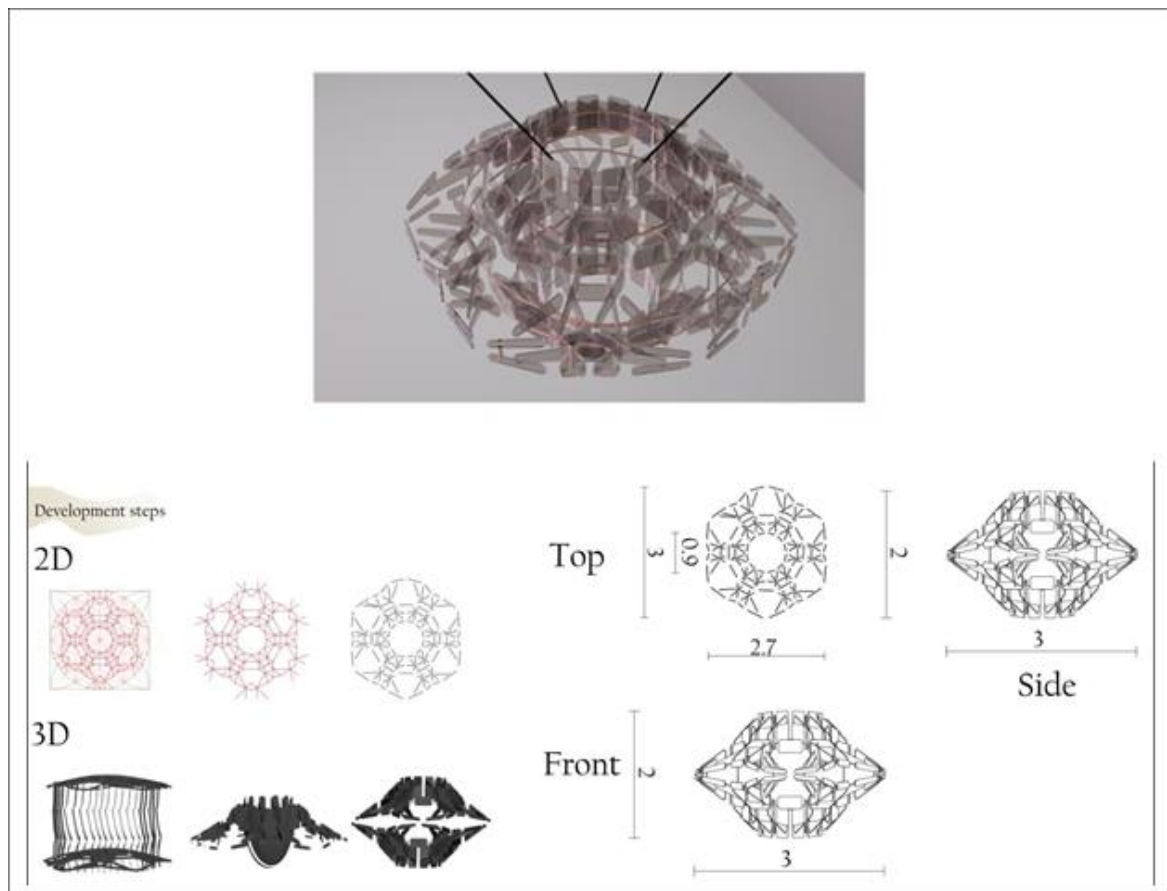


Figure (12): Contemporary mosque chandelier

Conclusion and recommendations:

There is no doubt that mosque is the most important building for Muslims. Since the beginning of Islam, the institution of mosques has been playing a central role in establishing, developing, and flourishing Muslims' communities. Majority of scholars in a wide range of time periods have unanimously agreed that the significance of mosques in the life of Muslims is undeniable. However present-day mosques are different and somehow not fulfilling the same role as in the past.

Although the noticeable interest in establishing and renovating worldwide uncountable mosques, there is not enough caring to develop and redesign mosque furniture and accessories. In brief, as clarified and discussed, most of the current used mosque furniture and accessories

are unsuitable regarding measurements, human requirements, usability, worshipers' significant needs, used materials, and visual aesthetic values ...

So, the presented contemporary designs of the mosque furniture and accessories will work in parallel with many other aspects to revive the significance of the mosque as a modernized interactive institution. These designs could be considered as guide samples of the suitable required mosque furniture and accessories. Each design was created to solve a real challenge in an up-to-date contemporary context with an approach of reflecting the Islamic aspects/values and focusing on achieving the physical and the psychological worshipers' needs, enhancing their experience, increasing their safety, calmness, and reverence.

In conclusion, and as the main result of this research paper, it is recommended when designing mosque furniture and accessories to follow and take into consideration the listed/taled five design aspects.

	Design aspects/domains	Explanation
1	Human physical requirements	Designers are recommended to follow and apply the human factors, ergonomics, good design rules and universal principles.
2	Functionality and usability	(User/s actual needs) Designers are recommended to think deeper to design what meets and achieves worshipers' real needs (Safety, privacy, easy use ...).
3	Originality and innovation	Designers are recommended to create original furniture and accessories that reflect Islamic values and match with mosque/s' architectural design philosophy (Match with the interior environment).
4	Used Materials	Designers are recommended to carefully select the used materials which are used in producing the required furniture and accessories (Suitable, available, safe, environmentally friendly, sustainable ...).
5	Durability and long-lasting	Designers are recommended to be accurate and do their best to select simple production methods which provide durability and full use endured for a long period of time.

Acknowledgment:

It is a pleasure to thank all the designers and creators who I mentioned by presenting their designs or ideas in this research paper ... In particular, it is a great chance to thank my dear students who I taught "Furniture & Equipment in Interior Design" course and mentioned their names and presented their ideas and designs.

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More than 150 participants from more than 10 different countries around the world participated in the competition, they were evaluated by an independent committee. 47 participants were nominated for the shortlist after the first jury meeting on September 15, 2019, then 6 participants were chosen (a winner and 5 honors).
 * (From August 2019 - now): The researcher (Assistant Professor) is the coordinator and the main interior design instructor at the Design Department, College of Architecture & Design, Effat University, Jeddah, KSA.