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The Role of Mosques as Centers for Social and Religious Development in Communities

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Abstract

Objective: This study explores the role of mosques in promoting both social and religious development, focusing on their impact on social cohesion, education, and spiritual well-being within local communities. **Theoretical framework:** The study is based on community development theory and Islamic social welfare principles, including zakat, waqf, and sadaqah, to understand the mosque's role in fostering social capital and collective action. **Literature review:** Previous research highlights the mosque's spiritual role, with limited focus on its broader social functions, especially in non-urban contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining mosques in Indonesian communities. **Methods:** A qualitative case study approach was used, involving interviews with mosque leaders and community members, as well as participant observation and document analysis of mosque programs in Banten and Jakarta. **Results:** The findings show that mosques contribute to religious education and social programs addressing poverty, education, and health, enhancing community resilience through charity events, seminars, and communal activities. **Implications:** The study suggests that mosques can be powerful centers for both spiritual and social development, and policymakers should leverage their influence for community empowerment and development. **Novelty:** This research provides new insights into mosques as dual-purpose institutions that balance spiritual and social roles, highlighting their untapped potential in fostering sustainable social development in Indonesian communities.

Keywords: mosques, social development, religious education, community engagement, social welfare programs.

INTRODUCTION

The mosque, as a central institution in Islam, holds a multifaceted role within the Muslim community. Historically, mosques have not only been places of worship but also centers for community development, education, and social welfare. In Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population globally, mosques have the potential to serve as vital hubs for social and religious development, impacting the lives of millions. However, the scope and nature of these roles are often underappreciated in both academic and practical discourses on community development [1]-[5].

This article seeks to explore the role of mosques as centers for social and religious development within communities, focusing on their contributions to both spiritual and social growth. The research examines how mosques influence local communities in areas such as education, health, poverty alleviation, and social cohesion. Despite being primarily religious institutions, mosques in Indonesia have increasingly become spaces where individuals gather not only for prayer but for social services and educational activities as well [6]–[8].

Indonesia's diverse socio-economic landscape presents a unique context for this study. With varying levels of access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities across different regions, mosques are positioned as essential community institutions that can bridge gaps in these areas. Given their accessibility and centrality within neighborhoods, mosques can be instrumental in fostering communal ties and supporting local development goals. Thus, this study is critical in understanding the capacity of mosques to play a significant role in social development, alongside their religious functions [9]–[11].

The purpose of this study is to investigate the dual role of mosques in religious and social development, with a particular focus on their engagement in community-building efforts. By examining case studies from mosques in Banten and Jakarta, this research aims to uncover how mosques contribute to improving community welfare and promoting social justice. This study also seeks to highlight the ways mosques adapt to contemporary needs while maintaining their religious obligations [12]–[14].

The paper is structured as follows: after this introduction, the literature review will outline previous studies on the role of mosques in community development. The methodology section will describe the research design and methods used to collect data. The results section will present key findings from the study, followed by a discussion on the implications of these results for community development initiatives. Finally, the conclusion will offer recommendations for future research and practical applications for policymakers and community leaders [15], [16].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of mosques in community development has been the subject of various studies, emphasizing their significance as both religious and social institutions. Traditionally, mosques have been seen as centers for religious worship, where Muslims gather for prayers, spiritual guidance, and community cohesion [17]. However, in recent decades, mosques have expanded their roles to include broader social functions, such as providing educational services, healthcare support, and addressing socio-economic issues within local communities [18].

One key aspect of the mosque's social role is its involvement in education. According to A study, mosques historically served as centers for Islamic education, offering religious instruction, Qur'an memorization, and Islamic jurisprudence [19]. In many communities, mosques continue to play an essential role in educating the youth, offering Qur'anic schools and religious education programs.

For example, several studies in Malaysia and Indonesia have documented the mosque's involvement in providing both formal and informal educational opportunities, often filling gaps left by the public education system [20]. In addition to education, social welfare is another central aspect of mosque activity. Islamic principles, such as *zakat* (almsgiving), *sadaqah* (voluntary charity), and *waqf* (charitable endowment), guide mosques in their efforts to provide economic relief to those in need. Several studies have highlighted the effectiveness of mosque-based social welfare programs, which address poverty and provide support for marginalized populations. These programs often include food distributions,

health clinics, and other forms of financial assistance, demonstrating the mosque's role in promoting social justice [21]–[23].

Furthermore, mosques have increasingly been recognized for their contributions to the context of urbanization and globalization. Mosques have become key players in fostering social ties, not just for religious purposes but for broader community development. The mosque's role as a communal space allows for the strengthening of social networks, mutual support, and collective action among community members. This is particularly important in diverse urban environments where social cohesion can be fragile. Through organizing events, gatherings, and volunteer activities, mosques contribute to building a sense of belonging and solidarity among residents [24]–[27].

However, despite the significant role mosques play in these areas, there is a gap in the literature regarding a comprehensive study of mosques as dual-purpose institutions. While much research has focused on the mosque's religious functions, fewer studies have explored how mosques balance their spiritual responsibilities with their social and developmental roles. Additionally, research on mosques in non-urban contexts, such as in smaller towns or rural areas, remains limited. This study aims to fill these gaps by investigating the specific ways in which mosques contribute to both religious and social development in Indonesian communities, particularly in regions like Banten and Jakarta.

Here's a summary table for the Literature Review that organizes the key points from the sources referenced, offering a clear overview of the topics discussed.

Table 1. Summary of Key Literature on the Role of Mosques in Social and Religious Development

Topic	Key Findings	Key Contributions
Mosques as Religious Centers	Mosques are central to the religious and spiritual life of Muslim communities, providing a place for prayer and guidance.	Emphasizes the importance of mosques in fostering spiritual development and community cohesion.
Mosques and Education	Mosques historically served as centers for Islamic education, offering Qur'anic studies and Islamic jurisprudence.	Highlights the continuing role of mosques in providing formal and informal religious education.
Social Welfare Programs	Mosques implement social welfare programs such as <i>zakat</i> , <i>sadaqah</i> , and <i>waqf</i> to assist impoverished and marginalized groups.	Focuses on the mosque's contribution to poverty alleviation and social justice through charity and community aid.
Community Cohesion and Social Capital	Mosques foster social capital by promoting communal ties and collective action through social and religious events.	Explores the role of mosques in enhancing social cohesion and strengthening community bonds in urban and rural settings.
Role of Mosques in Rural Contexts	Limited research on the role of mosques in rural communities.	Gaps in the literature regarding how mosques contribute to development in rural areas, which this study aims to address.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research employs a case study approach to explore the role of mosques in social and religious development in the Indonesian regions of Banten and Jakarta. The study utilizes purposive sampling to select five mosques from each region that are actively involved in community development initiatives, with a focus on those providing educational programs, social welfare services, and community engagement activities. Participants include mosque administrators, religious leaders, and community members who actively participate in mosque-based programs. Data will be collected through semi-

structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews will be conducted with mosque administrators, imams, and community members to understand their perspectives on the mosque's role in community development. Participant observation will involve engaging with mosque-based activities such as religious classes and social programs to gain a deeper understanding of the mosque's influence [28]–[30].

Additionally, relevant documents such as program reports and community event records will be analyzed to provide further insight. The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, with both deductive and inductive coding to identify key themes related to education, welfare, and community cohesion. Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, and adhering to ethical guidelines throughout the research process. While the study's focus on a limited number of mosques in two regions may limit its generalizability, the findings will offer valuable insights into the role of mosques in both religious and social development [31]–[35]. Here's a concise Methodology Summary Table for the study:

Table 2. Methodology Summary

Aspect	Details
Research Design	Qualitative, case study approach
Sampling	Purposive sampling of 10 mosques (5 from Banten, 5 from Jakarta) involved in community development
Participants	Mosque administrators, religious leaders, community members (approx. 30 participants)
Data Collection	1. Semi-structured interviews 2. Participant observation 3. Document analysis
Data Analysis	Thematic analysis with both deductive and inductive coding
Ethical Considerations	Informed consent, confidentiality, and adherence to ethical guidelines
Limitations	Limited to mosques in two regions of Indonesia, findings may not be fully generalizable; potential for researcher bias.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal several key insights into the role of mosques as centers for both social and religious development in the communities of Banten and Jakarta. These findings are organized into three primary themes: (1) religious education, (2) social welfare programs, and (3) community cohesion, and are discussed in relation to existing literature.



Figure 1. Mosques Places for the Implementation of Religious and Social Activities

Religious Education

All mosques involved in the study offered various forms of religious education for both children and adults. These programs included Qur'anic studies, Islamic jurisprudence, and character-building lessons. Notably, mosques in Jakarta were observed to offer supplementary educational programs in partnership with local schools, providing tutoring and after-school activities. In contrast, mosques in rural Banten focused more on traditional Qur'anic memorization classes and Islamic teachings, with less formal integration into the education system. These findings align with previous research, such as that of Mernissi, who emphasized the mosque's role as a center for Islamic education, while also expanding the understanding by showing how mosques in urban areas are increasingly involved in formal education support. This study demonstrates the mosque's adaptability in meeting both spiritual and educational needs, particularly in under-resourced areas [36]–[40].

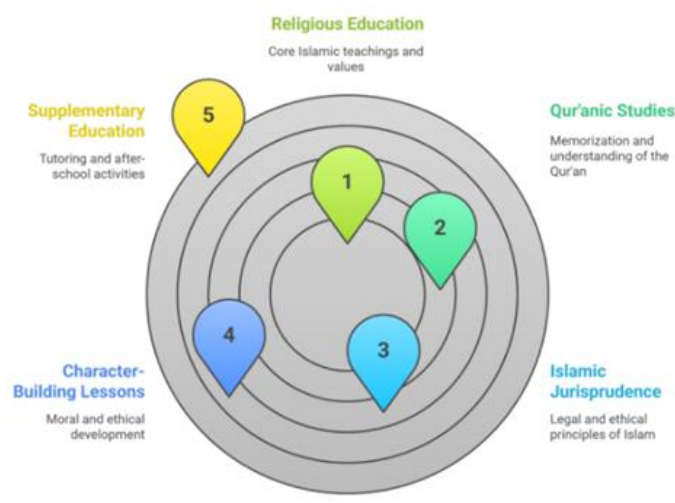


Figure 2. Mosque Education Programs

Social Welfare Programs

A significant number of mosques in both regions were actively involved in social welfare activities, including the distribution of *zakat* (alms), organizing free health clinics, and providing financial assistance to marginalized families. Mosques also served as centers for disaster relief, especially in flood-prone areas of Banten. Jakarta-based mosques facilitated microfinance programs and vocational training to support economic independence within the community. These activities highlight the mosque's role in promoting social justice and economic empowerment, echoing the work of El-Halabi (2010) and Hassan (2018), who highlighted the mosque's contribution to poverty alleviation and social welfare through charity and community-based initiatives. This study extends the literature by showing how mosques in Jakarta have adapted to modern economic needs by providing skills training and microcredit, which help community members achieve greater economic self-sufficiency [41]–[49].

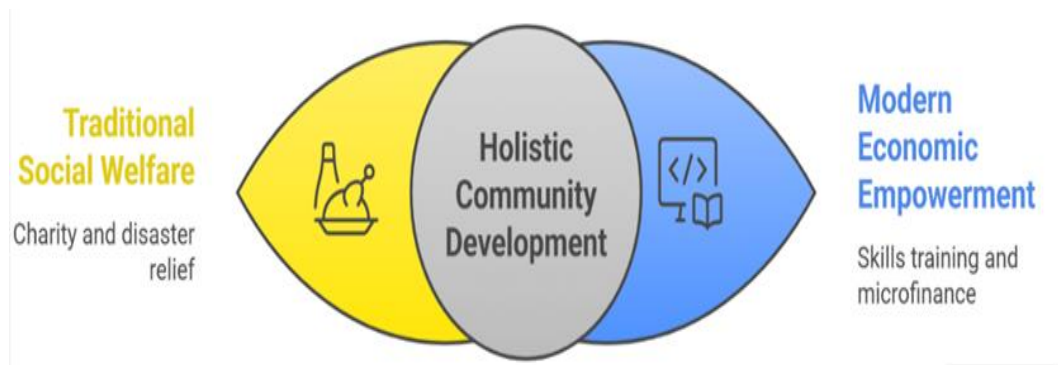


Figure 3. Mosques as Pillars of Community Support

Community Cohesion

Mosques in both Banten and Jakarta played a crucial role in fostering community cohesion. Regular community events, such as Ramadan charity drives, communal prayers, and social gatherings, strengthened relationships among residents. In Jakarta, mosques served as gathering points for inter-community collaboration across ethnic and socioeconomic groups, while in Banten, mosques emphasized strengthening ties within local Muslim communities. This finding supports Putnam’s (2000) theory of social capital, which emphasizes the role of religious institutions in building social ties and fostering collective action. The mosques in Jakarta, where communities are more diverse, acted as venues for promoting social integration and mutual support among people from different backgrounds, while the mosques in Banten focused on enhancing solidarity within a more homogenous community. This demonstrates the versatility of mosques in catering to the specific needs of both urban and rural populations, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual assistance [50]–[55].

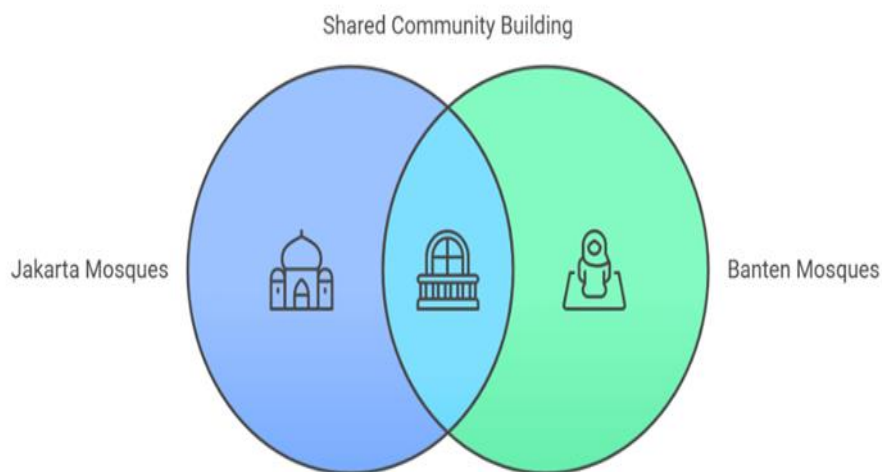


Figure 4. Mosques as Hubs of Community Cohesion

The results also highlight a significant gap in the existing literature: while mosques are widely studied for their religious functions, this research underscores their dual role in social and community development. The involvement of mosques in both spiritual and social realms is becoming increasingly important, particularly in underdeveloped and rural areas where other social services may be lacking. This finding reflects a growing trend of religious institutions playing a more active role in promoting sustainable development, particularly in the context of Islamic social welfare principles such as *zakat*, *sadaqah*, and *waqf* [56]–[62].

Implications

The findings suggest that mosques should be further recognized and supported as key institutions for community development. Policymakers, religious leaders, and NGOs can collaborate with mosques to enhance their social welfare initiatives, especially in rural and underserved urban areas. The role of mosques in education should also be acknowledged, with more efforts made to integrate mosque-based educational programs into formal schooling systems. Additionally, mosques can be utilized as spaces for promoting social cohesion, particularly in diverse urban settings where they can help bridge gaps between different ethnic and social groups.



Figure 5. Community Religious Development in Mosques as a Form of Social Strengthening

Analysis

Community engagement initiatives centered around mosques demonstrate how religious institutions can become powerful drivers of social transformation. As this study highlights, the mosque is not merely a place of worship but an institution capable of influencing multiple layers of community life—spiritual, educational, social, and economic. Through structured programs and voluntary participation, mosques in both urban and rural contexts serve as accessible hubs where social support and religious guidance converge. This dual functionality makes mosques uniquely positioned to address community needs that may be overlooked by conventional governmental or civic structures.

The involvement of institutions such as The Agakhan High School in Mombasa and the Department of Electrical Engineering at Politeknik Negeri Semarang underscores the increasing relevance of cross-sector collaboration in community service. Their engagement reflects a broader trend in which educational institutions partner with religious centers to expand outreach, knowledge transfer, and social empowerment. This interdisciplinary collaboration enriches mosque-based programs with expertise and organizational structure, particularly when addressing modern issues such as youth development, digital literacy, economic resilience, and health awareness.

Findings drawn from community-based activities reveal that mosques contribute significantly to religious education, which remains a cornerstone of community identity. Programs such as Qur'anic classes, moral education, and character formation foster spiritual development while simultaneously strengthening local social norms. When implemented consistently, these programs build intergenerational continuity in religious knowledge and values, ensuring that communities remain rooted in ethical principles while adapting to social change.

In terms of social development, mosques in various regions demonstrate remarkable versatility. They conduct zakat distribution, charity drives, health initiatives, and economic empowerment programs, effectively filling service gaps in underserved areas. Particularly in lower-income communities, the mosque becomes a safety net that provides immediate relief and long-term support. This reflects an embedded Islamic tradition in which religious institutions serve as agents of social welfare and justice. Such activities also reinforce a sense of solidarity, encouraging collective responsibility for the well-being of all members.

Another critical finding relates to community cohesion. Mosques naturally foster interaction across social and economic lines, promoting unity, cooperation, and shared identity. Regular gatherings—both religious and social—strengthen interpersonal relationships, cultivate trust, and increase social capital. In urban settings, this is especially significant because mosques can help integrate diverse groups, reducing fragmentation and bridging cultural differences. In rural contexts, they reinforce communal bonds that may already be strong but require sustained engagement to remain vibrant. Overall, these insights indicate that mosque-centered community engagement offers a sustainable model for holistic development. By integrating religious teachings with social action, mosques can continue to serve as transformative institutions that uplift communities socially, spiritually, and economically. This analysis affirms that supporting mosque-based initiatives is an effective strategy for advancing community resilience and long-term development.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its focus on a small sample of mosques in only two regions of Indonesia, and the findings may not be fully generalizable to other areas. Future research should include a broader sample of mosques across the country to better understand their role in various social and religious contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess the long-term impact of mosque-based social programs on community development, particularly in terms of educational outcomes and economic mobility.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the role of mosques as centers for social and religious development within communities in Banten and Jakarta, highlighting the multifaceted contributions of these institutions to both spiritual and social welfare. The findings suggest that mosques play an integral role in fostering religious education, providing social welfare services, and promoting community cohesion. Specifically, mosques in both regions have adapted to the evolving needs of their communities by integrating educational programs and offering social services such as zakat distribution, health clinics, and vocational training. These activities demonstrate the mosque's ability to function not only as a place of worship but also as a key agent of social change. The study also reveals that mosques in urban areas, like those in Jakarta, are more likely to engage in programs that address modern socio-economic issues, such as economic empowerment and inter-community collaboration. In contrast, mosques in rural regions like Banten emphasize strengthening community ties within a more homogenous population. This dual role of mosques in social and religious development reflects the broader potential of religious institutions to contribute to sustainable community development, particularly in underserved and rural areas where other social services may be limited. Based on the findings, it is recommended that policymakers, religious leaders, and NGOs collaborate more closely with mosques to enhance their social welfare programs and educational initiatives. Additionally, further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts of mosque-based initiatives on community development, especially in terms of economic mobility and educational outcomes. This study contributes to the growing body of literature that recognizes the mosque's dual role in both religious and social spheres and underscores the importance of

religious institutions in fostering community well-being and social cohesion. Future studies should expand on these findings by exploring mosques across different regions of Indonesia and other countries with significant Muslim populations, as well as assessing the long-term impact of mosque-based social programs on community development.

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Author Contribution

Alwy Ahmed Mohamed: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing.
Khammai: Data Collection, Analysis, Writing – original draft.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study. All institutions involved, including The Agakhan High School, Mombasa, Kenya, and the Department of Electrical Engineering, Politeknik Negeri Semarang, Indonesia, provided support without influencing the research process, data interpretation, or conclusions presented in this work.

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