

IDENTIFYING KEY DIMENSIONS IN THE MOSQUE'S CONTRIBUTION
TO MUSLIM SOCIETY AND UMMAH DEVELOPMENT: A
QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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Received 30 August 2025: Revised 4 September 2025: Accepted 23 February 2026

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify the major dimensions of a mosque's roles that can be used as benchmark in promoting Muslim society and Ummah growth, particularly their responsibilities at the level beyond the traditional worship function. A qualitative methodology was employed, involving experts' interviews and thematic analysis using VOSviewer. Purposive sampling technique selected ten experts that represented a variety of nationalities, educational backgrounds, positions, and experiences. Seven critical dimensions have been identified for this study: Spiritual Excellence, Community Engagement, Design and Facilities, Social Welfare and Support, Education and Knowledge Dissemination, Management and Transparency, and Economic Aspect. The identified dimensions reflect multifaceted roles of mosque that have potential scope of making spiritual, social, educational, and economic contributions significantly. A limitation of the study is dependency on qualitative data from a limited number of regions, resulting in a possibility that not all regional or cultural aspects are captured. Future research can adopt the dimensions backed by quantitative methodology to develop an excellence model. The findings offer important guidance to mosque administrators, policymakers, and scholars regarding the areas to improve the functions of mosques. The study is unique to provide comprehensive framework for the multi-dimensional roles of mosques and handling the gaps in the literature related to their engagement in community and Ummah development. Theoretical and practical implications arise for increasing the mosque's utilisation to contribute to Muslim society and mankind.

KEYWORDS: *MOSQUE, UMMATIC DEVELOPMENT, SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT, ROLE OF PLACES OF WORSHIP*

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti dimensi utama peranan masjid yang boleh dijadikan penanda aras dalam menggalakkan pertumbuhan masyarakat Islam dan Ummah, khususnya tanggungjawab mereka pada tahap di luar fungsi ibadah tradisional. Metodologi kualitatif telah digunakan, melibatkan temu bual pakar dan analisis tematik menggunakan VOSviewer. Teknik persampelan bertujuan memilih sepuluh pakar yang mewakili pelbagai bangsa, latar belakang pendidikan, jawatan dan pengalaman. Tujuh dimensi kritikal telah dikenal pasti untuk kajian ini:

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Kecemerlangan Rohani, Penglibatan Komuniti, Reka Bentuk dan Kemudahan, Kebajikan dan Sokongan Sosial, Pendidikan dan Penyebaran Pengetahuan, Pengurusan dan Ketelusan, dan Aspek Ekonomi. Dimensi yang dikenal pasti mencerminkan pelbagai peranan masjid yang berpotensi untuk memberi sumbangan rohani, sosial, pendidikan dan ekonomi dengan ketara. Batasan kajian adalah pergantungan pada data kualitatif daripada bilangan wilayah yang terhad, menyebabkan kemungkinan tidak semua aspek wilayah atau budaya ditangkap. Penyelidikan masa depan boleh menggunakan dimensi yang disokong oleh metodologi kuantitatif untuk membangunkan model kecemerlangan. Penemuan ini menawarkan panduan penting kepada pentadbir masjid, penggubal dasar, dan ulama berkenaan bidang-bidang untuk meningkatkan fungsi masjid. Kajian ini unik untuk menyediakan rangka kerja komprehensif untuk peranan pelbagai dimensi masjid dan menangani jurang dalam literatur yang berkaitan dengan penglibatan mereka dalam pembangunan masyarakat dan Ummah. Implikasi teori dan praktikal timbul untuk meningkatkan penggunaan masjid untuk menyumbang kepada masyarakat Islam dan umat manusia.

KATA KUNCI: MASJID, PEMBANGUNAN UMAT, PEMBANGUNAN MASYARAKAT, PERANAN TEMPAT IBADAH

1. INTRODUCTION

A mosque plays an extremely important role in Islam. History has shown that mosques have played great role in the Muslim society in the early period of Islam including the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and then the Caliphs Ar-Rashidun (May Allah be pleased with all of them). Mosques were the place not only for daily congregational prayers, but also the place where the Prophet of Allah (pbuh) and the Caliphs used to discuss societal issues including state governance. However, over the years, in many Muslim countries, mosques are regarded as only for prayers and discussion other than so-called religious issues is considered as unacceptable. Therefore, in these countries, mosques are not playing their comprehensive role for societal development. Therefore, it is necessary to revisit the pristine role of a mosque in the Muslim society. Our premise is that if we, the Muslims, use our mosques as guided by the Prophet (pbuh), then it can contribute significantly for spiritual, social, educational, and economic development in the Muslim society. The purpose of the present research is to develop a mosque excellence model which will incorporate variables that highlight essential role of a mosque, and the model can be used to measure performance of mosque as well.

While mosques play an important role in the lives of Muslim people, misconceptions about their role persist. As per the definition, Mosque provides a place for Muslims to worship and learn their religion, and they can be a source of social support, community engagement, a court of law, business agreements, homeless shelters, school of education, and many other aspects of lives. Such multifaceted roles continue in modern contexts. For instance, in Indonesia, mosques like Masjid Az-Zikra serve as eco-friendly hubs for environmental education, community gatherings, and sustainable development programs (Hidayat *et al.*, 2018). In Bangladesh, the Amber Denim Mosque integrates open, climate-responsive design to support factory workers' spiritual and social needs beyond prayer (Snyder, 2019). In Malaysia, conceptual and award-winning designs reimagine mosques as social catalysts with community kitchens, bazaars, safe play areas, and economic empowerment spaces (Sarif *et al.*, 2024). These examples illustrate how mosques extend their functions to include education, welfare, shelter, and economic activities, addressing contemporary community needs while rooted in Islamic tradition. Such definition has been observed to be practiced by the Muslims when we look back to the history of Islam. In fact, 20 different roles of mosque have been explored by Mohammad (1996) in his book "The Role of the Mosque" that are further supported by Darsh *et al.* (1996) in their book "The Role of the Mosque in Islam". All these roles are backed up by both the primary sources (*Quran* and *Hadith*) and secondary sources (*Ijma*, *Qiyas*, *Maslaha*, *Istishab*) of *Shariah*. Simultaneously, the recommended (*mandub*) and forbidden (*haram*) roles of mosques have also been identified by the scholars. By putting all these roles of mosque together, a mosque is supposed to be a centre of making all the decisions that will bring only benefit for a particular society where the mosque is located.

Mosques serve various purposes globally. In Saudi Arabia, mosques are being transformed into multifunctional public spaces to enhance urban quality of life and community engagement (Alnaim & Noaime, 2023). Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore utilise mosques for historical and cultural tourism, promoting cultural diversity and understanding (Adriani *et al.*, 2022). In Europe, mosques are central in political debates despite the presence of Muslim communities, reflecting societal tensions (Öcal, 2022). In rural Pakistan, mosques are vital social spaces where religious beliefs shape sociospatial relationships and community activities (Mughal, 2015). Moreover, mosques worldwide historically functioned as hubs for administrative, educational, and social activities, with potential for disaster management centres in Muslim communities (Asif *et al.*, 2016).

In reality, Muslims in many societies (e.g., India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, etc.) have limited their relationship with the mosque within praying and charity donation only. Any discussion other than *Quran* and *Hadith* inside the mosque is simply forbidden and/or punishable in many places. As a result, a significant percentage of the Muslim community do not have the opportunity to develop a relationship with the mosque. Most of the millennials look at the mosque as a place of worship only. Such failure of being unable to utilise the roles of mosque and having a positive impact on the society is, perhaps, due to the lack of having a standard mosque excellence model. Although there are few models of mosque, those are limited to one or few activities (e.g., architectural management) and not reflecting the broader role of a mosque (Ch, 2016). The Muslim community around the world is lacking a unified mosque excellence model that can ensure the efficiency of a mosque by optimising its roles in a particular society. This is even more crucial to alleviate the islamophobias around the world and to eliminate the negative attitude and aversion, that has been increased significantly since the 9/11 attack, against mosques and Islamic institutions (Atom, 2014).

Hence the objectives of the present study are the following:

1. To identify the dimensions regarding various roles of a mosque in the Muslim society; and
2. To analyse on how a mosque can contribute for the development of *ummah* (mankind).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews literature from a variety of sources that include research papers, books, web articles, journals, and reports. The objective is to explore different roles of a mosque that can be practiced by the Muslim societies globally. For instance, MaktabaIslamia Publications (2016) portray the mosque as a multifaceted centre for prayer, counselling, education, ethical guidance, healthcare, shelters, feeding the needy, and social welfare to address spiritual and communal needs. Similarly, Alnaim and Noaime (2023) explore mosques as multi-functional public spaces in dense urban settings like Hail City, advocating integration of safety, aesthetics, green spaces, and versatility to meet diverse community needs.

Haraty *et al.* (2019) examine hygienic design considerations for ablution spaces in Malaysian mosques, contributing to community engagement and societal cohesion through improved functionality. Likewise, Mokhtar and Ph (2009) establish design standards for Muslim prayer facilities in public buildings, focusing on architectural functionality and inclusivity to support spiritual experiences and broader community involvement. Muin *et al.* (2016) identify top management support, teamwork, training, financial stability, and policy as key drivers for sustainable facilities management in Malaysian mosques, ensuring inclusive and technologically advanced spaces.

Mosque as the place of worship and religious activities

The spiritual function of a mosque has been mentioned by several verses in the *Quran*. For example, Allah (SWT) says:

[Such niches are] in houses [i.e., mosques] which Allāh has ordered to be raised and that His name be mentioned [i.e., praised] therein; exalting Him within them in the morning and the

evenings [Are] men whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allāh and performance of prayer and giving of zakāh. They fear a Day in which the hearts and eyes will [fearfully] turn about. (Al-Quran 24: 36-37)

Mosques should be exalted, due respect given to them, and there should be no quarrelling, shouting or fighting inside. Mosques are also the most appropriate places to offer prayers. At the mosque, a sense of holiness and reverence replaces the cares and troubles of everyday life. As per the saying of the Prophet (pbuh), the only places on earth where the angels are most frequent are the mosques (Ad-Darsh, n.d.; Darsh *et al.*, 1996; Mohammad, 1996). Recent studies reinforce this foundational role while highlighting expansions beyond it. For instance, in the U.S. context, Bagby (2020) documents the growth of mosques primarily as worship centres, with 2,769 counted in 2020, driven by population increases and serving as spiritual anchors. Similarly, in sustainable development discussions, mosques are positioned as places of worship that integrate environmental and community functions (Hamidi *et al.*, 2025).

Mosque as the centre of social support and community engagement

The mosque, in its history, had served as the centre of social support and community engagement. From the life of our Prophet (pbuh), it has been observed that mosque has been used to be the place of meeting or discussion, resolving problems and making decisions regarding community and running trade and business. Simultaneously, mosques had functioned as centres for receiving all kinds of charities that contributed to social and community development (Omar *et al.*, 2019). Karim *et al.* (2017) propose an e-commerce platform to position mosques as integrated centres offering moral guidance, ethical resources, and comprehensive services beyond rituals to enhance Muslim community wellbeing. Likewise, Omar *et al.* (2019) outline frameworks for empowering mosques historically and presently as agents for community development through charities, social welfare, and societal transformation in line with Islamic principles. Additionally, mosque plays a significant and efficient role to enhance community engagement by calling the community five times a day to come and pray together. Such frequent congregation enhances the bonding among the people in the community through greetings, sharing of sorrows and happiness, helping, and many other ways. More evidence shows that the Prophet (pbuh) advocated for marriage ceremonies and agreements to take place in the mosque. A'ishah (ra) was leaning on the shoulder of Prophet (pbuh) and watching the Abyssinians perform a traditional dance inside the mosque (Ad-Darsh, n.d.).

Recent studies affirm this role in modern contexts. For example, mosques in the U.S. provide social support through community programs, strengthening family bonds and advocating for rights (Hasnat, 2025). In urban Islamic communities, mosques act as hubs for social innovation, addressing welfare and community needs (Rahmawati *et al.*, 2024). During the COVID-19 pandemic, mosques adapted to provide health support and engagement, reinforcing their social role. In this regard, Ab Rahman *et al.* (2019) propose a mosque-based model for zakat governance with dedicated units for management and distribution, supporting social welfare, poverty alleviation, and global peace. Similarly, Muslim (2017) introduces a mosque-centered model for economic empowerment of the urban poor, fostering entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and trustworthy business development in adherence to Islamic equity.

Mosque as the source for court of law

Judges used to hold court sessions in the mosque to resolve conflicts and investigate complaints. There is much evidence for this, and there is agreement among the major schools of thought on this (Darsh *et al.*, 1996; Mohammad, 1996; Spahic, 2010). In mosque, decisions on justice, conflict resolution, punishment of criminals, including their imprisonment and chastisement, were determined (Farahati, 2011). Recent studies on mosques as sources for courts of law are limited, as this role is primarily historical and less common in modern secular states. However, discussions of Sharia arbitration in community settings persist; for instance, in Pakistan, mosques occasionally intersect with legal debates, but not as formal courts (Hamdani, 2025).

Mosque as the school of education

The first revealed verse of *Quran* (96:1) is about reading which implies the aspect of learning and education. There are many references in which the importance of the mosque as a place of learning is emphasized. Imam Bukhari and Muslim reported a story when the Prophet (pbuh) was sitting in learning circle inside the mosque and three men showed up. One of those three men took an empty sit at front, the second one sat behind others, and third one left. Then the Prophet (pbuh) said: “The first person came forward, then Allah came forward towards him. The second was shy, so Allah was shy towards him. The third turned away, so Allah turned away from him”. Such an incident is the most moving moral and spiritual motivation to study and learn in the mosque.

At that time, the Medina Mosque and other mosques were organised as places for learning the Holy *Quran*, conversing about, and resolving religious concerns. Muslims attended the sessions on scientific topics organized by the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) in order to understand the *Quran* and Islamic law. Such sessions used to be led by the companions like Imam Ali (ra), Ziad Ibn Sabit (ra), Maadh Ibn Jabal (ra), and Abi Ibn Ka’ab (ra) gladly after performing the prayers or on other occasions in the mosque. When necessary, the Prophet (pbuh) himself attended these meetings to uplift the outstanding followers and further the transmission of knowledge (Farahati, 2011). Rahman *et al.* (2015) develop a performance measurement model for mosques in Malaysia, emphasizing congregational prayers as key to spiritual promotion, alongside educational programs and transparent management to foster informed and ethical communities. Recent studies confirm mosques function as educational centres. In urban areas, they integrate education with social programs (Hadi, 2025). Globally, mosques serve as centres for religious and civic education (Karimullah, 2023).

Mosque as the place of homeless shelters

Perhaps most importantly, mosques should be seen as places of refuge and solace for those who are homeless or displaced. At the time of migration, the mosque served as the home for many unmarried, homeless, and poor Muslims who travelled with the Messenger (pbuh). These people were referred to as the *Suffah* like Abu Hurairah (ra), Abdullah ibn Umar (ra) and many others. One of the companions, Rufaydah (ra), used to care for ailing people at the Mosque of the Prophet. She cared after Sa’d ibn Mu’adh (ra) in her tent inside the Mosque till he passed away. Furthermore, mosques also serve as the main places for foreign guests (formal and informal) to visit when they come to an Islamic country. Recent studies in the USA show mosques functioning as homeless shelters. In NYC, mosques have become de facto shelters for migrants since 2020, providing housing and food (Associated Press, 2024). A Bronx mosque repurposed as an overnight shelter since 2020 (Iqbal, 2023).

Mosque as the political centre for Muslim societies

After establishing the new Islamic order in Medina, the Prophet (pbuh) established the mosque as a public gathering place for Muslims to congregate and perform their religious obligations. People were given such power by the mosque that they could influence important choices made by the government. He prepared most battles’ social and mental aspects in the mosque. He sent Muslims to the front lines of warfare by inspiring them to fight with his persuasive speech delivered in the mosque. History tells us that the Prophet (pbuh) used to consult his companions and take decisions regarding multiple battles (battle of Badr and Ohud) in the mosque (Farahati, 2011). Mosque attendance in the U.S. boosts political engagement when social activities are involved, a trend that leaders increasingly support (Westfall, 2018). Visibility of mosques influences far-right politics (Valli *et al.*, 2025).

Functions of mosque in Medina after the migration

Most of Medina’s residents were non-Muslims when the Prophet (pbuh) moved there from Mecca. Before building his own home in Medina, the Prophet (pbuh) constructed a mosque to emphasize the significant importance of mosque. Belteshazzar (2017) in his article has identified a number of functions of mosque that have been performed after Islam has been flourished in Medina. The reviewed functions of the mosque are listed below:

- a) It was the first Islamic school where Muhammad (pbuh) nurtured and educated the companions and taught them about Islamic ideology;
- b) From the podium of the mosque, spiritual discourses, and exhortations to defend in opposition to non-Islamic influence were delivered;
- c) In this mosque, the companions received appreciations and honour for their accomplishments in the battles and other matter of religion as well as social aspects;
- d) Official Islamic assignments were forwarded from the mosque by both Prophet (pbuh) and his successors;
- e) It is the mosque where the tribes of Arab used to take oaths of commitment to Prophet (pbuh) and Islam; and
- f) It served as the administrative centre for the Islamic state's operation. The agreements, pacts, and treaties were commissioned in the mosque.

The *Shariah* (Law of Islam) has been established in the mosque where the *halal* and *haram* have also been declared.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study primarily employed qualitative methods essential for identifying the dimensions of the various roles of a mosque within Muslim society. This methodology was considered suitable for the exploratory research (Creswell, 2014; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) of this study and for investigating the underutilised functions of mosques. Experts were consulted to obtain insights on mosque management concerning the roles they deemed underutilised and essential. The dimensions were derived by consulting ten respondents. The respondents were meticulously chosen via purposive sampling and represented a variety of nationalities, educational backgrounds, positions, and experiences. Interviews with experts were conducted to identify and elucidate various perspectives on the dimensions of the roles of an ideal mosque. The varied background of the experts enhanced the interpretations of the study's results. As shown in Figure 1, the respondents comprised experts from Malaysia (40%), Bangladesh (20%), Pakistan (20%), Afghanistan (10%), and Sudan (10%).

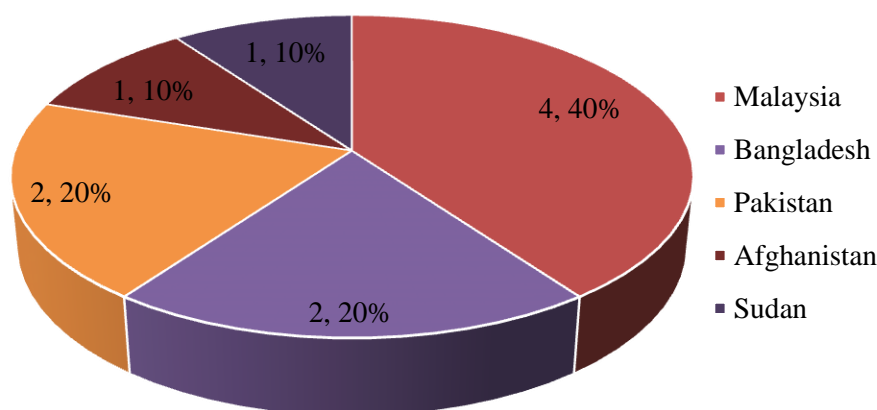


FIGURE 1: NATIONALITY OF THE RESPONDENTS

Source: Figure by Authors

This study's respondents comprised different positions of their gender and academic qualification, age, and experience (refer to Table 1). Two experts associated directly to Mosque playing dual roles as Mufti and Imam who were able to contribute significant notions from their leadership and religious experiences. Six respondents were academics comprising five Assistant Professors and one Associate Professor. One participant was a President and Principal Research Fellow; another was a Director of an Islamic institution (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement, ABIM).

Seven (70%) of the respondents were male and holding a PhD level of education. Simultaneously, 30 percent of the sample was female (3 respondents) and held a master’s degree. In terms of age, the respondents fell into three groups: On average, 30 percent of the sample was made up of younger professionals (ages 33–36), 50 percent of mid-career participants (ages 41–45), and 20 percent of senior participants (ages 55–75). Regarding experience, three categories emerged: between the voices of early-career professionals with less than 10 years of experience (20%), mid-level professionals with 10–20 years of experience (50%), and highly experienced individuals with over 30 years of experience (30%). Taking into account the differences in positions, genders, qualifications, age groups, and level of experience filled by this diverse bunch of respondents, a broad spectrum of perspectives were received that enriched the data of the study.

TABLE 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS

Position	Gender	Age	Education	Experience (Years)	Analysis code
1. Mufti, Imam, and Principal	Male	36	Master	22	E1
2. President and Principal Research Fellow	Male	55	PhD	30	E2
3. Director, Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM)	Female	75	Master	35	E3
4. Assistant Professor	Male	41	PhD	6	E4
5. Assistant Professor	Male	44	PhD	10	E5
6. Mufti, Imam, and Trainer	Male	33	PhD	20	E6
7. Associate Professor	Male	45	PhD	15	E7
8. Assistant Professor	Female	44	PhD	10	E8
9. Assistant Professor	Male	36	Master	10	E9
10. Assistant professor	Female	42	PhD	8	E10

Source: Table by Authors

An in-depth semi-structured interview was used to get the answers from the participants. Each interview session typically lasted around 35 minutes on average. There was an audio recording of every interview with the exception of three participants who gave written responses. The following questions were asked to participants during the interview sessions:

- Q1. Kindly explain the roles of a mosque in the Muslim society.
- Q1. In your opinion, do you think that the mosques are performing their role fully? If yes, please explain in detail. If not, then what could be the reasons behind non-performance?
- Q3. If not, then in which areas, improvements are needed?

Each interview session was followed up with the transcription of the participant’s comments. The next step was to analyse the transcripts. The co-occurrence maps that emerge from utilising VOSviewer for text analysis have the ability to offer valuable data insights, as stated by Bukar *et al.* (2023). The current study employed VOSviewer for data analysis to identify and standardise the dimensions and sub-dimensions of the roles of a mosque. VOSviewer, a widely recognised tool for visualising bibliometric and text data, facilitated the clustering and mapping of themes derived from the qualitative dataset. Similar to the six stages of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis started with data preparation and familiarisation, where qualitative data from expert interviews were pre-processed and structured for input into VOSviewer. However, the manual coding and thematic grouping stages are automated by the software. Identifying the key terms (codes) were determined by their occurrence frequency which was set to minimum 4 times.

The analysis initially identified 48 key terms through co-occurrence mapping. However, for greater focus and relevancy of the analysis, four terms were excluded as irrelevant, thereby cutting the final list of key terms to 44. Simultaneously, VOSviewer’s default resolution settings led to the production of 2 clusters, initially. However, the resolution parameter was readjusted for several times in order to

increase its granularity and identify more specific thematic clusters. As a result, we found seven clusters, which provided a finer tuning of the dimensions and sub dimensions (refer to Table 2).

TABLE 2: KEY TERMS AND CLUSTERS

Key terms	Occurrences	Cluster	Key terms	Occurrences	Cluster
counselling	9	1	community	8	2
guidance	9		cultural center	9	
imams	6		event	5	
Islam	4		interfaith dialogue	6	
mosque	10		Muslim community	4	
prayer	10		Muslim society	7	
prophet	4		Muslim ummah	4	
religion	5		Non-Muslim	4	
role	10		society	6	
worship	8		shelter	7	
live stream	7	3	masjid	5	4
online	4		charity	5	
technology	9		<i>sadaqah</i>	6	
knowledge	6	5	<i>zakat</i>	4	6
dawah	4		transparency	4	
education	9		governance	9	
youth	5		management	4	
program	8		finance	9	
communication	5		Economic		
training	4		Income		
design	7	7	Market	8	
facilities	4		Hall		

Source: Table by Authors

The number of clusters and identified key terms are also visualised in Figure 2. The resulting visualisation includes a total of 44 terms (items), organized into eight distinct clusters, connected by 782 links, with an overall link strength of 3452. The nodes in the map represent key terms from the transcripts, with the size of each node indicating the frequency of the term's occurrence. Larger nodes such as "prayer," "community," "governance, economic, " and "technology" suggest that these terms are highly recurrent in the dataset, reflecting central roles of a mosque. The edges, or links, between nodes represent the occurrence of terms within the same transcript, with thicker edges indicating stronger relationships.

	Research
6. Management and transparency	Well defined Management committee Transparent financial management Transparent decisions Ethical conduct Communication with public
7. Economic Aspect	Income-generating entity Training Programs

Source: Table by Authors

4. FINDINGS

Based on the data analysis in the preceding section, seven dimensions (see Table 4) have been identified that are: *Spiritual excellence, Community Engagement, Design and facilities, Social welfare and support, Education and knowledge dissemination, Management and transparency, and Economic Aspect.*

TABLE 4: DIMENSIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Dimensions	Definitions
1. Spiritual excellence	Enhancing religious devotion and personal growth through worship, counselling, guidance, and other spiritual activities.
2. Community Engagement	Fostering social connections, cultural exchange, and interfaith understanding within and beyond the community.
3. Design and facilities	Incorporating Islamic architectural principles and modern technology to ensure accessibility, functionality, and digital presence.
4. Social welfare and support	Addressing community needs through charity (<i>zakat, sadaqah</i> , and other donations), shelter, and healthcare initiatives.
5. Education and knowledge dissemination	Promoting learning, skill development, preaching, and research to enhance religious education and knowledge.
6. Management and transparency	Ensuring ethical, transparent, and effective governance in decision-making and financial operations.
7. Economic Aspect	Generating and managing financial resources through businesses, training programs, and rentals for sustainability.

Source: Table by Authors

Spiritual excellence

The dimension of "Spiritual Excellence" was identified as the core role of a mosque. All experts agreed on the fact that the primary function of a mosque is as the centre of worship for spiritual enhancement. Relevant statements from the experts were as follows:

".....the mosque is a place of worship and da'wah...." (E2)

"Primary function includes prayer and worship." (E6)

However, religion is beyond prayers and worship. So is the role of a mosque. Imams are responsible to convey this message as stated by expert-1

"We should not limit our religion to prayers, imams should not limit their sermons only about prayer and fasting." (E1)

Such role has a deeper and inseparable connection to Islam that involves various activities central to the spiritual well-being of the Muslim community. Some common activities are daily congregational prayers, Jumma prayer, and *tarawi* prayers during Ramadan. Additionally, sense of spirituality is enhanced through proper guidance and counselling that can be provided in the mosque. According to expert 4:

“...it is a centre to help and cultivate the spirituality...it also functions as a place where Imam and scholars in the mosque will provide the guidance on religious practices” (E4)

Other activities related to worship may include *i'tikaf* (an act of worship to focus on Allah avoiding worldly affairs), *Qiyamul Layl* (optional prayers performed after midnight), and others. By prioritising spiritual excellence, mosques can continue to inspire devotion and provide a sense of purpose and belonging among worshippers, reinforcing their pivotal role in fostering a cohesive and spiritually enriched society.

Community engagement

The "Community Engagement" role emphasises how the mosque is an important place for people to come together, share their culture, encourage religious dialogue, and learn about each other's backgrounds. According to experts, mosques are vital for maintaining cultural traditions and fostering social relationships since they serve as community hubs. Experts said:

“A mosque-based community centre is important for Muslims to have social gatherings, celebrate social events such as marriage, Eid, iftar, and others” (E1).

“We encourage people to arrange their nikah or marriage in the mosque, which is also the Sunnah, to encourage community engagement.” (E6)

“The mosque also is an identity for social unity i.e., congregational prayers, fostering brotherhood.” (E5)

Another expert also noted that mosques may help bring people of different faiths together:

“I see the masjid as the cultural bridge between the Muslims and non-Muslims” (E3).

From this vantage point, it is clear that the mosque plays an important role in encouraging social peace and inclusion via discourse and engagement. Mosques may be even more dynamic and influential via community outreach programs. The mosque has the ability to empower young people, according to one expert:

“From the viewpoint of societal necessity, the mosque serves as a community centre. ...improve more and more community related activities such as certain programs where it would be focusing for engaging and empowering the youth” (E4)

Additionally, Inclusion is crucial as stated by the experts:

“Mosques serve as hubs for fostering community cohesion by hosting social gatherings, facilitating psychological guidance, resolving conflicts within the community, promoting inclusivity, diversity, and unity among members, engaging in outreach programs to connect with the broader community.” (E8)

“.... fostering a sense of unity and community among Muslims, and it gather all Muslims from different race and colures in a house without any discrimination and superiority.” (E9)

“Strengthening community outreach initiatives to build stronger connections within and beyond the Muslim community is equally critical to ensuring the mosque remains a vibrant and impactful institution.” (E7)

According to an expert, it is crucial to promote understanding on mosque's roles among different generations and distinct groups by engaging them in different activities in the mosque.

“Engagement of the younger and older generation are needed to be able understand the need of the mosque audiences.” (E10)

Design and facilities

This dimension crucial emphasising mosque's infrastructure and technological innovations in enhancing the spiritual and practical functionality. It is targeted as Islamic architecture, text and epigraphic design, functional and accessible design, technology integration and digital outreach. Mosque architectural design is more than an architectural patterns with spiritual beauty, it is also an historical and culture heritage pattern. One expert stated that:

"...strategic architectural considerations is important to exemplify holistic service to society" (E10).

Moreover, mosque infrastructure's accessibility for different groups including women, children, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities depends highly on its functional and inclusive characteristics. One interviewee put it like this:

Mosques should ensure their infrastructure and services are accessible and welcoming to all segments of the community, including women, children, senior citizens and disabled people." (E7)

With the incorporation of modern technologies mosques are enabled to engage with wider audiences through digital outreach programs. For instance, one interviewee said,

"Every mosque should have the facility to video record the sermons and activities. I believe that the mosques need to be updated with modern technology. But that's not to say that we want technology to be so much that, through technology, our way of worship violates Shariah" (E1).

One stressed the need to reach out more online and further emphasised important work for example through online sermons, educational content and a social media presence for outreach to a broader population (E5). Mosques also function as cultural and spiritual landmarks that attract tourists and promote interfaith understanding. One expert explained,

".... tourists come to take photograph and to see the architecture. Masjids should have rooms for travellers who want to know about the spiritual perspective of mosques" (E3).

Together, all of these insights are critical to the architectural design, technological integration, and accessibility of mosques for the community.

Social welfare and support

"Mosques deliver a role in social welfare, offering support to the needy...", stated by the ninth respondent (E9). Such supports are provided in a number of forms. Firstly, financial support that comes in the forms of charity such as *zakat*, *sadaqah*, and other forms of donations. This was also supported by another expert (E5) emphasising the role of mosque in fulfilling societal needs through charity distribution. In fact, mosques can become the centre of *zakat* and other charity management for a community as stated by one of the interviewees:

"If someone wants to run a charity or welfare program, the mosque can function to collect sadaqah or Zakhat-related activities, donations, and possibly distribute the resources to the needy." (E4)

Mosques also play a crucial role during natural calamities such as flood and cyclone by providing a place of temporary shelter to the displaced people and take part in the support programs by the government.

“...in disaster management, in the various developmental works or programs that the government takes for social development, or when an accident occurs in society, mosque can play a significant role in such case.” (E2)

Such practice is often observed in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. The second respondent further emphasised the role of a mosque to provide health care support during crisis period of a community or nation. As stated by the expert:

“... programs for medical aid or mental health related services can be introduced” (E4)

Simultaneously, mosques should provide shelter for the travellers who travel from one place to another (sometimes from one country to another) to spread the message of Islam (*dawah*) and for tourists who want to know about Islam.

Masjids should have rooms for travellers who want to know about Islam. (E3)

Mosques have historically functioned as centres for social support, addressing the needs of the underprivileged and fostering communal solidarity. In this regard, one of the concerns raised by the experts was about addressing the needs of the broader socioeconomic, educational, and psychological needs of the diverse communities such as the minority groups, often the non-Muslims in a Muslim majority nation (E7). Similar concern was raised by another expert as follows:

Since the mosque is the main centre of society, mosque management should pay special attention to the minority people of the society. (E1)

Overall, with its several sub-dimensions, including charity and donations, temporary shelter, and healthcare support, the "Social-welfare and Support" dimension exemplifies the mosque's function as a hub for community assistance and humanitarian relief.

Education and knowledge dissemination

Historically, mosques have been pivotal in nurturing intellectual and spiritual growth, serving as the first university in the world (Hardaker & Sabki, 2012). Starting from the time of the Prophet (pbuh) till today, we can see the practice of learning *Quran* inside the mosque. Hence mosques are also centre of education as stated by the experts:

“Beyond these spiritual activities, mosques are also educational centres, providing teachings on Islamic principles, ethics, and values.” (E8)

As a Muslim child, he should get as much religious knowledge from the mosque as he needs to lead his social life or worldly life. (E1)

In many cases, there are *madhrasas* (Islamic schools) for education for the children as well as for the youth. The mosques can also be a place for public lecture to create awareness on any issue and educate people to realise the roles of a mosque, said by the experts:

“Mosque also function as a place for a religious education by setting a madrasah, and a mosque could also serve as a place for a public lecture and so on.” (E4)

“The continuous effort on the awareness about the role of mosque in the community will attract more people to be close to the mosque.” (E10)

However, the education and teachings provided in these mosques and *madhrasas* should not be limited to religious education only. Islam is a religion for the mankind for all time. Hence the education should be adapted to all civilisation, stated by another expert:

“Muslim education or Islamic education is not just religious education; it is the education of civilization of which a significant part can be organised in mosque.” (E2)

This was further emphasised by another expert by stating the importance of incorporating conventional subjects alongside religious teachings in the curriculum, as stated by another expert:

“Historically, mosques have been pivotal in fostering unity within the community, offering a platform for religious learning, disseminating Islamic values, and addressing socio-economic issues. mosques must enhance their educational initiatives by incorporating contemporary subjects alongside Islamic teachings.” (E7)

For this, people from all over the world should have the same understanding and similar perspective of Islamic education and knowledge dissemination. In this regard, the personnel (*imams, muadhdhins*, and leaders) should be trained, appropriate educational and skill development programs should be introduced, other experts added:

“So, we want the all the mosques across the whole world will have the same understanding of the knowledge of Islam and how to interact with non-Muslims.” (E3)

“Create awareness for the people to use the mosque properly and identify the roles of it.” (E9)

“Mosque also is a centre for Dawah spreading Islamic teachings and values throughout the world. Emphasize both spiritual and worldly welfare; train imams, muadhdhin and administrators in management, education, and counselling skills; initiate programs addressing youth challenges, sports activities, and skill development” (E5)

Overall, "Education and Knowledge Dissemination" is a crucial aspect that highlights the mosque's function as a hub for education, training, and the side spreading of Islamic teachings. Several sub-dimensions have been identified under this role that are: education, training, *dawah* (preaching), and research initiatives.

Management and transparency

The "Management and transparency" dimension underscores the critical importance of human resources to ensure structured management and responsible operations in the mosque. First of all, there should be a well-defined management roles and transparent governance for the mosque, stated by one expert:

“I think they should come up with the infrastructure in terms of financial and then what actually the mosque should be turned into as a role model.” (E3)

Then, selection of personnel for these management roles, including *imams* and *muadhdhins*, should be done wisely and carefully. Because they will be responsible for not only in the management and operations but also for representing Islam. This concern was emphasised by the expert saying:

“...the management of the mosque or the care of the mosque will be done by those who have clean image, transparent and free from all forms of socialism, politics, capitalism and all others.” (E1)

Experts emphasised the significance of an appropriate management body when queried about the mosque's inefficacy in fulfilling its roles. Several factors were identified, including insufficient strategic planning, absence of visionary leadership and trained personnel, lack of knowledgeable *imams* and educators, and inadequate community involvement in decision-making processes. These factors underscore the imperative for competent management and operational staff within the mosque.

“Lack of strategic planning and community participation in decision-making also some of the reasons of inefficient roles of mosques.” (E5)

“Lack of visionary leadership or trained personnel capable of addressing contemporary challenges is one of the reasons behind the inability of certain mosques to perform their roles.” (E7)

“Several factors can contribute to the non-performance of mosques including lack of qualified human resources such as knowledgeable Imams and teachers, insufficient commitment from mosque management.” (E8)

“Lack of expert and knowledgeable officials, lack of resourceful and capable preachers and imams are responsible for the the inability of certain mosques to perform their roles.” (E9)

Hence, it is crucial to provide them appropriate training and prepare them to serve the ummah (mankind) effectively and efficiently. By investing in the development of leadership skills, right knowledge, and delivering impactful sermons, transparent financial management, and identifying and solving problems in the community, mosques can better fulfil their roles. The essence of trained management and operational body is reflected in the following statements by the experts.

“...leadership matters in terms of adequate skills... good leadership and governance are needed to have certain vision and goals for long term sustainability of the mosque itself. ...there should be a transparent management in terms of financial management.” (E4)

“We should train the imams, the leaders, and management on identifying problems in the society, solving the problems, delivering impactful sermons.” (E6)

“Successfully performing the roles depend on the leadership in managing the mosque. They must equip themselves with the right knowledge and understanding about their role and function of the mosque, key knowledge and skills in management and a supportive team.” (E10)

Finally, one expert highlighted the importance of coordinating the management of the mosque with social power, such as the local government, that can lead to greater impact and positive change within the community.

“What you need to do is to coordinate the management of the mosque with social power, state power, patronage power, and the internal power of managing the mosque.” (E2)

Overall, mosques, as community institutions, must have a well-defined management structure and skilful and knowledgeable personnel to ensure transparency and integrity in resource utilisation and decision-making processes. Sub-dimensions deduced under this role are well-defined management committee, transparent financial practices, ethical conduct, and effective communication with the public.

Economic aspect

The last identified dimension signifies the economic role of a mosque to maintain financial stability. There are operational and maintenance costs for a mosque to play its roles efficiently. Inadequate financial capacity is one of the major obstacles faced by the mosques for becoming inefficient in playing their role and contributing to the society. Experts were agreed to this concern saying:

“One of the reasons behind mosque’ inefficient role is very low budget for the masjid management for which they cannot start any program.” (E6)

“The inability of certain mosques to perform their roles attributed to a combination of factors, including inadequate financial resources.” (E7)

In this regard, a mosque should diversify its sources of funds instead of relying solely on donations. One of the sources can be establishing a business entity in the forms of a business shop of mosque market. Such shops or market are often common in many mosques around the world. A mosque should be built as a complex building where a multipurpose hall can be another source of finance. As stated by one expert:

“Masjids can generate income by having a multipurpose hall that can be rented out to hold social events and programmes such as marriage ceremony, various days such as Victory Day, Language Day, conference, business expo, etc.” (E1)

Additionally, as a centre of education, mosques can offer certain training and skill development programs by charging a fair amount of fees for the participants. Public programs may include training on Muslim-friendly tour guide, *zakat* management, *Quran* learning programs, *dawah* training, *halal* entrepreneurship training, and others as suggested by some experts:

“Multidimensional programs need to be taken on the mosque by the state that can also be income-generating for the mosque.” (E2)

“Certain skills training such as awareness of how to manage zakat effectively, dawah training, and entrepreneurship programs can generate income for the mosque.” (E4)

Another suggestion was given by one of the experts was to introduce mosque-stay service for the tourists. This service is quite popular in South-Korea where Muslim tourists can rent designated rooms of a mosque for their stay (2-3 days) and explore religious tourism. This can be another source of generating income for the mosque.

“...masjids play a very important role as a one stop centre for the social interaction, the education and the economy.....So, these knowledge seeking travellers can stay in the mosques, and in fact, the mosques can even generate income from here.” (E3)

Raising revenues in the form of rents of strategic spaces, rooms, various business entities, educational, and skill building programs shows that Mosques have the potential to be financially sustainable and simultaneously, enhance community engagement. Sub-dimensions including income generating entities, and training programs show possibility of mosques to have sources other than donation to sustain themselves.

5. DISCUSSION

Combined with prayer and devotion, especially the congregation's worship, the mosque is drawn back to the thought of its mission of bringing people together by faith and practice. Rahman *et al.* (2015) take note of the mosque's congregational prayers as an important component to spirituality promotion. Counselling is offered at the mosque through Muslim imams and other religious authorities assist members to deal with personal or communal problems, as well as address their needs for spirituality and services. As Karim *et al.* (2017) pointed out, apart from the mere religious rituals, the mosque offers spiritual-ethical resource in the form of moral guidance and encouragement. The protection of religious values in modern society is one way in which a spiritual component affects the community's morality and spirit. Through counselling, mosques help people solve modern problems in compliance with the Islamic guidelines and rules. According to MaktabaIslamia Publications (2016), the mosque act as a centre of prayer. One of the important aspects of Islamic activities, the mosque encourages its people to pray, and offer counselling, education, ethical guidance, and a never-ending array of services to help its members remain relevant and engaged as it fulfils their overall needs.

As places of worship, mosques also serve as meeting places for people of different faiths and backgrounds, where they may learn about one another's traditions and customs and socialise. They not just help keep up social bonds amongst Muslim community, at the same time develop bridges with the people from other religions, creating admiration and union in multicultural societies. Mooslem *et al.* (2019), Haraty *et al.* (2019) and MaktabaIslamia Publications (2016) in their studies emphasised the role of mosques as playing community engagement regarding societal cohesion and mutual understanding. Additionally, mosques serve as paradigms for tourism, the exhibition of Islamic heritage and architects as responsible for the absorption of the cultural appreciation and global understanding as they stand. Community engagement helps in growing mosques to be dynamic

institutions that could answer spiritual or social needs, making them key stones for the development of community life and culture. As reported by Haraty *et al.* (2019) in the context of Malaysia and Singapore where mosques serve as hybrid spaces, combining worship with tourism to showcase cultural understanding, tolerance, and Islamic history.

Design and facility dimension assert the architectural functionality and inclusivity of mosques that should be reflected through physical appearance, arts, and technological advancement as found in this study and exemplified by Mokhtar and Ph (2009) and Muin *et al.* (2016). A mosque which is thoughtfully designed is one that creates a space which is welcoming not only for spiritual experiences but also for broader community involvement. This findings also align with the recent study by Alnaim and Noaime (2023) that urges mosques to integrate safety measures, aesthetic aspects, and green spaces to enhance versatile public attractions. Features like accessible infrastructure, multipurpose spaces, make mosques accommodate all need, including the needs of women, children, and the disabled. It also brings integration of modern technology such as live stream sermons and digital platforms for the announcements to update the mosques' interaction with both the local and global population in the fast digital world. Mosques can still play an important role as places of worship and community hub, whilst meeting current needs, by incorporating such traditional architectural elements with contemporary sensibility.

These functions under social welfare and support underscore the role of a mosque beyond its spiritual functions encompassing broader societal responsibility. Mosques are an important part of community health improvement because they help providing fundamental needs such as sheltering homeless and people in crisis, medical care for the sick, as well as financial aid for the poor. These correspond to the functions that MaktabaIslamia Publications (2016) suggest that the mosque is best suited for healthcare, shelters, relaxation and siesta, feeding the hungry and needy, and for other social welfare and community services. Integrating social welfare services help to bind the mosque closer with the local community, developing trust and dependency between the populations. Mosques were historically centres that received all sorts of charities to contribute to the development of society and the community (Omar *et al.*, 2019; Ab Rahman *et al.*, 2019). These efforts also encourage social cohesion; communities coming together, raising funds for charitable causes conducted in mosques. By recognising that mosques can serve a social welfare services, mosques will be able to sustain in their roles as a comprehensive part of society as understood by Islamic teachings and to respond to ongoing problems of social inequality and exclusion.

In the current times, with increasing challenges towards the preservation of the communities' religious and cultural identity, education and dissemination of knowledge of Islam are of paramount importance. According to Rahman *et al.* (2015), mosques satisfy the need for both spiritual enrichment and practical skills development through their provision of structurally educated program and resources. Imams and leaders who should possess right knowledge and training for effective spread of Islamic teachings worldwide. Also, the mosque activities should be integrated with research and training which generates a culture of lifelong learning and adaptive education. This is in line with Islamic principles of obligation on all believers to search for knowledge. On one hand it recognises the important educational role mosques have always played, on the other hand, it recognises them in a vital role in building such informed, ethical, socially responsible, and modern communities.

It is the management committee and leaders of a mosque who make all of its roles alive by ensuring that all activities and services are in action. The ability of a mosque to attract retain its congregation and external stakeholders' support largely depends on the extent of this dimension of a mosque. Conflicts are eliminated and fair resource allocation is ensured through clear and ethical practices of management. Religious institutions that embrace perception of fairness and transparency strengthen community bonds and create a feeling that every one person is harbouring responsibility. Putting emphasis on management and transparency, the leaders can do more effectively what is to their religious and social obligation and become exemplary models of ethical stewardship and effective leadership. Past studies (Rahman *et al.*, 2015; Ab Rahman *et al.*, 2019; Mokhtar & Ph, 2009; Muin *et*

al., 2016; Muslim, 2017; Karim *et al.*, 2017) have also emphasised all these aspects of management and operations of a mosque to be practiced.

Of economic importance, mosques play the role of ensuring the institutional sustainability and empowering the local community. In fact, mosques can play an important role in economic empowerment by facilitating, among other things, skill development seminars, bazaars, and microfinance programs. Past research backs up this idea by demonstrating that economic programs are often the foundation on which mosques create improved community wellbeing: promoting entrepreneurship and financial literacy. Muslim (2017) inducts the conducive environment for economic empowerment, development of honest and trustworthy entrepreneurs. The mosque as a multipurpose functional unit was also stressed by Mokhtar and Ph (2009) and Muin *et al.* (2016). Economic integration in mosques is never about financial returns but is about financial gains complemented with adherence to the Islamic principles of collective benefit and social equity; this is a crucial aspect beyond their contemporary roles.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research contributes theoretically to Islamic studies and institutional theory by clarifying mosque as dynamic institution that adapts to the needs of its community. More practically, these findings allow mosque administrators, policymakers, and mosque stakeholders to better leverage mosques to drive community development. Furthermore, this study achieves its objective by identifying seven key dimensions that define the mosque's contributions to Muslim society and Ummah development. These dimensions are Spiritual excellence, Community Engagement, Design & Facilities, Social Welfare and Support, Education and Knowledge Dissemination, Management and Transparency, and Economic Aspect. Different facets of the role of mosques are represented through these dimensions and their sub dimensions as they stretch beyond the traditional functions of mosques as places of worship. In addition to promoting ethical leadership and educational programs within Muslim communities, the results highlight the role of mosques as hubs for spiritual direction, social integration, and economic development. The findings of these dimensions are significant to develop a framework for better understanding the untapped roles of mosque in addressing societal needs and misunderstanding regarding Islamic teachings.

Limitations of the study are its qualitative data from experts and subjective interpretation of themes. Future studies should use mixed-methods techniques and investigate regional differences in the functions of mosques to confirm and expand upon these results. Future study can be furthered applying quantitative methodology such as Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to prioritise the dimensions and develop a mosque excellence hierarchy model.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge the financial assistance obtained from Department of Business Administration grant. The Grant number is IIUM/504/G/14/3/1/1/DEBA23-020-0026.

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