

CRITERIA FOR A MOSQUE IMAM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MOSQUE TAKMIR, HOUSING AND THE VIEWS OF THE SALAF ULAMA

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ABSTRACT

Imam masjid memiliki peran strategis tidak hanya sebagai pemimpin shalat berjamaah, tetapi juga sebagai pembimbing spiritual, teladan moral, dan penggerak kehidupan sosial keagamaan jamaah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kriteria imam masjid menurut perspektif takmir masjid perumahan serta membandingkannya dengan pandangan ulama salaf. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode eksploratif. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap delapan takmir masjid perumahan di wilayah Sidoarjo dan Gresik. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan dan verifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa takmir masjid menempatkan kemampuan membaca Al-Qur'an sesuai kaidah tajwid, pemahaman fiqh shalat, akhlak yang baik, kedisiplinan, kemampuan komunikasi, dan kepedulian sosial sebagai kriteria utama imam masjid. Di antara seluruh kriteria tersebut, akhlak dan keteladanan menjadi aspek yang paling diprioritaskan. Temuan penelitian juga menunjukkan adanya kesesuaian antara perspektif takmir dengan pandangan ulama salaf yang menekankan pentingnya al-quwwah (kompetensi) dan al-amanah (integritas) dalam pemilihan imam. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat menjadi rujukan praktis bagi pengelola masjid dalam menentukan standar imam yang sesuai dengan kebutuhan masyarakat perumahan modern.

Keywords : Kriteria imam masjid, takmir masjid, masjid perumahan

ABSTRAK

The mosque imam plays a strategic role not only as the leader of congregational prayers but also as a spiritual guide, moral role model, and facilitator of the religious and social life of the congregation. This study aims to analyze the criteria of mosque imams from the perspective of residential mosque caretakers (takmir) and compare them with the views of salaf scholars. The research employed a qualitative approach using an exploratory method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with

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eight caretakers of residential mosques in Sidoarjo and Gresik. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification. The findings indicate that mosque caretakers prioritize several criteria in selecting imams, including proper Qur'anic recitation according to tajwid rules, understanding of prayer jurisprudence, good moral character, discipline, communication skills, and social concern for the congregation. Among these criteria, moral character and exemplary conduct were considered the most important aspects. The study also reveals a strong alignment between the perspectives of mosque caretakers and the views of salaf scholars, who emphasize the principles of *al-quwwah* (competence) and *al-amanah* (integrity) in imam selection. This study is expected to serve as a practical reference for mosque management in determining appropriate standards for imams in modern residential communities.

Kata kunci: mosque imam criteria, mosque caretaker, residential mosque

INTRODUCTION

Mosques play a central role in the lives of Muslims, serving not only as places for ritual worship but also as centers for social development, education, and the strengthening of religious values within the community. In the context of modern society, mosques increasingly function as spaces for social interaction, strengthening relationships among worshippers and providing a means for moral development. The success of these functions is greatly influenced by the quality of mosque management, including the presence of an imam as a central figure in the congregation's religious activities (Miyanto et al., 2023).

The imam of a mosque holds a strategic position in the lives of Muslims. His role extends beyond leading congregational prayers to spiritual guidance, setting a good example, and strengthening social relationships within the community. Wahbah Az-Zuhaili (2011) explains that the imam is both a leader of the congregation in carrying out worship and a guide for the community's religious life. In practice, the imam often serves as a reference for the congregation issues of worship and daily social life. Therefore, the quality of

an imam greatly determines the quality of religious guidance within the mosque.

In Islam, the selection of an imam has received significant attention since the early days of the Muslim community. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized that the person most qualified to be an imam is the one who best recite the Quran and understands religious teachings. This view was later reinforced by early scholars such as Imam Malik, Imam Shafi'i, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and Imam An-Nawawi, who emphasized the importance of scholarly competence, understanding of the jurisprudence of prayer, noble character, and moral integrity in selecting a mosque imam. These early scholars also emphasized that an imam must possess the principles of *al-quwwah* (competence) and *al-amanah* (integrity) to maintain the quality of worship and harmony within the congregation.

However, on-the-ground observations indicate that the process of appointing mosque imams is not always based on ideal competence and moral qualities. In some cases, imams are selected based on age, personal closeness, social status, or simply availability of time, rather than on religious competence and leadership capacity (Arwanda & Pramana, 2023). This situation has the potential to impact the quality of congregational worship, the comfort of the congregation, and even social harmony within the mosque environment. Hidayatullah et al. (2019) explain that inaccurate appointments of imams can result in a decline in the quality of community development and a weakening of the mosque's social function within the community.

This issue becomes even more significant in the context of residential mosques, which have heterogeneous congregations. Residential mosque congregations generally come from diverse educational backgrounds, professions, ages, and religious understandings. This situation demands an imam who is not only able to lead worship effectively but also possesses social communication skills, a moderate attitude, and the ability to build harmonious relationships with the congregation. Mutiarawati and Dema (2023) state that mosque imams in modern society must be able to balance both religious and social functions.

In the process of selecting an imam, the mosque committee plays a crucial role because they directly understand the needs and dynamics of the congregation.

The committee is responsible for maintaining The continuity of mosque activities and ensuring that the selected imam is able to meet the expectations of the congregation and the needs of the surrounding community. Arwanda and Pramana (2023) explain that the takmir's authority in appointing an imam significantly influences the quality of religious life in the mosque community. Therefore, the takmir's perspective on the criteria for an imam is important to examine in more depth.

Several previous studies have discussed the competencies of mosque imams, such as the ability to read the Quran, understand Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), and religious leadership (Aminudin, 2019; Oktoliano & Fitriani, 2023). Other studies have also highlighted the role of imams in strengthening community socialization and preventing extremism (Ammad-ul-Haque, 2021; Tuanany et al., 2022). However, research specifically addressing the criteria for mosque imams based on the perspective of residential mosque administrators and comparing them with the views of early Islamic scholars remains relatively limited. Most previous studies have focused on the technical aspects of imam competence without delving into the social construction and subjective considerations of mosque administrators in determining the ideal imam.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the criteria for mosque imams from the perspective of mosque administrators in residential areas in the Sidoarjo and Gresik areas and compare them with the views of traditional Islamic scholars. This research is important because it can provide an overview of the standards for imams considered ideal by mosque administrators in the context of modern residential communities. Furthermore, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of mosque management studies and serve as a practical reference for mosque administrators in determining an imam who aligns with the needs of the congregation and the values of Islamic law.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Etymologically, the word imam comes from the Arabic *amma-yaummu*, meaning to lead or to be a role model. In the Islamic context, an imam is a figure who leads worship and serves as a role model for the community in religious life. An imam is understood not only as a leader of congregational prayer but also as a figure with moral and social authority within the community. congregation (Arifin, 2023; Anam et al., 2022). The position of the imam in Islam is very important because it is directly related to the quality of worship and the development of the congregation.

The Quran explains the concept of an imam's leadership as a figure capable of providing guidance to society. In Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 124, it is stated that the Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was appointed as an imam for mankind because of his success in carrying out Allah's commands. This verse shows that leadership in Islam is closely related to integrity, patience, and exemplary behavior. Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also emphasized the importance of the qualities of an imam through a hadith narrated by Muslim, stating that the person most entitled to be an imam is the one who best reads the Quran and best understands the Prophet's Sunnah.

Salaf scholars pay great attention to the criteria for imams in congregational prayers. Imam Malik in *Al-Muwatta* explains that the imam should be chosen from the person with the best religion and knowledge among the congregation. Meanwhile, Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal emphasized the importance of understanding the *fiqh* of prayer so that the imam is able to lead worship according to the guidance of the Shari'a (Ibn Qudamah, 1968). Imam An-Nawawi also explained that the imam's main priority is the quality of reading the Koran and understanding the laws of prayer. The views of these scholars show that the ideal priest must have a balance between scientific competence and moral integrity.

In the context of modern society, the role of the imam has expanded. Imams are not only tasked with leading worship but also serve as spiritual guides, social mediators, and promoters of *da'wah* and community education activities. Laksono (2021) explains that imams are responsible for fostering a harmonious religious atmosphere and maintaining congregational unity. Therefore, imams

are required to possess excellent communication skills, leadership skills, and social role models.

The mosque committee is a group of individuals entrusted with the management, maintenance, and prosperity of the mosque in various aspects, including worship, education, social activities, and organizational administration. Hamid (2018) explains that the committee is responsible for ensuring the mosque functions optimally as a center for worship and community development. In practice,

The mosque committee plays an important role in determining the direction of mosque management, including in appointing an imam who suits the needs of the congregation.

As mosque administrators, the mosque committee has the authority to regulate various religious and social activities in the community. Arwanda and Pramana (2023) explain that the mosque committee not only functions as mosque administrators but also has significant influence on the religious life of the surrounding community. Therefore, the mosque committee's decision to appoint an imam is heavily influenced by social conditions, the character of the congregation, and the needs of the surrounding community.

In the context of residential mosques, the role of the mosque administrator becomes increasingly complex, as they must deal with a heterogeneous congregation from various social and educational backgrounds. The administrator must consider the congregation's worship skills, morals, communication skills, and social acceptance when selecting an imam. Therefore, the administrator's perspective on the ideal imam is not only based on religious norms but also takes into account the social realities of the residential community.

Takmir's Perspective on Imam Criteria

Perspective is a person's perspective on a phenomenon based on their experiences, values, and social environment. Creswell (2012) explains that perspective is formed through social construction influenced by individual experiences and social interactions within their environment. In this study, the

takmir perspective is understood as the mosque administrators' views on the criteria for an ideal imam based on the needs of the congregation and their experience in mosque management.

The formation of the takmir's perspective on the imam is influenced by several factors, such as experience interacting with the congregation, observations of the imam's qualities, and the religious values held by the mosque administrators. Fatimah and Hidayat (2002) explain that assessments of a person are formed through observation, social experience, and evaluation of the individual's behavior in daily life. Therefore, the takmir's assessment of the imam is based not only on the technical ability to read the Quran, but also on attitude, discipline, interaction skills, and social role model.

Azwar (1995) explains that a person's perspective can be understood through three main dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive dimension relates to the takmir's understanding and beliefs regarding the ideal imam. The affective dimension

The behavioral dimension relates to emotional assessments of the imam's behavior, while the behavioral dimension relates to the takmir's tendencies in selecting and appointing the mosque imam. These three dimensions form the basis for understanding how takmirs develop imam criteria according to the needs of the residential community.

Criteria for Imams According to Salaf Scholars

Early scholars placed great emphasis on the qualities of an imam, as he is the worship leader whom the congregation will follow. The primary basis for selecting an imam is the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), narrated by Muslim, which states that the person most qualified to be an imam is the one with the best recitation of the Quran, the best understanding of the Sunnah, and the most mature religious experience.

Imam Malik emphasized that an imam must possess good religious and moral qualities because he serves as a role model for the community in daily life. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal added that an imam must understand the laws of prayer to be able to lead worship correctly according to Islamic law. Meanwhile, Imam An-Nawawi explained that the ability to read the Quran well

and understand the jurisprudence of prayer are the main priorities in selecting an imam.

According to the views of early scholars, there are several key criteria for a mosque imam, namely the ability to recite the Quran correctly and in a tartil manner, an understanding of the jurisprudence of worship, noble character, moral integrity, and the ability to serve as a role model for the congregation. All of these criteria reflect two key principles of Islamic leadership: competence (*al-quwwah*) and integrity (*al-amanah*). These principles are essential for determining an imam who is capable of maintaining the quality of worship while fostering social harmony within the mosque community.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at several residential mosques in the Sidoarjo and Gresik areas, involving eight mosque administrators as key informants. The research focused on the administrators' understanding of the criteria for an ideal mosque imam, the role of the imam in the lives of the congregation, and the process of appointing an imam in residential mosques. Based on the interviews, it was found that

Each mosque has its own characteristics and considerations in determining the imam, although in general there is a common view regarding the importance of religious competence and exemplary morals.

In general, the mosque administrators consider the ability to read the Quran well as a primary requirement for an imam. A clear recitation, in accordance with the rules of *tajwid*, and with a clear voice are considered capable of creating a sense of devotion among the congregation during congregational prayer. The administrator of the Al-Hidayah Oma Pesona Mosque in Buduran, Sidoarjo, explained that the quality of the imam's recitation greatly influences the comfort of the congregation during worship. The congregation tends to feel calmer and more focused when the imam has a correct and unhurried recitation. A similar situation was also found at the Baiturrahman Mosque in the TNI AL Jalagriya Sugihwaras Candi Complex,

Sidoarjo, where good recitation of the Quran is seen as a primary indicator of an imam's suitability.

These findings indicate that the takmir's perspective aligns with the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which states that the person most entitled to be an imam is the one with the best recitation of the Quran. This view also aligns with the opinion of Imam An-Nawawi, who explained that the quality of Quran recitation is the primary priority in determining an imam. Thus, the ability to recite the Quran is not merely understood as a technical skill, but also as a symbol of an imam's scholarly capacity and spiritual responsibility.

In addition to the quality of Quran recitation, understanding the jurisprudence of prayer is also a crucial aspect in assessing imams. Most informants stated that imams must understand the pillars, requirements, and procedures of prayer correctly to be able to lead the congregation according to Islamic law. The imam believes that mistakes made by the imam during prayer can impact the comfort of the congregation and raise doubts about the perfection of congregational worship. Therefore, understanding the jurisprudence of prayer is a prerequisite.

This finding is in line with the view of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal who emphasized that imams must have a deep understanding of the laws of prayer. According to Ibn Qudamah (1968), an imam's fiqh ability is very important so that he is able to carry out his worship leadership duties correctly. In the context of residential mosques, understanding fiqh is not only related to the validity of worship, but also related to the imam's ability to answer the congregation's religious problems in everyday life.

Although the ability to read the Quran and understand Islamic jurisprudence are primary requirements, research results show that morals and exemplary behavior are the aspects most prioritized by mosque administrators. Almost all informants emphasized that imams must have good behavior, be humble, and be disciplined.

and able to maintain harmonious relations with the congregation. The caretaker of the Al-Millah Mosque in Pagerwojo, Buduran, Sidoarjo, explained

that the imam is a figure who is always looked up to by the congregation, so the imam's attitude and behavior will greatly influence the religious atmosphere within the mosque.

The imam's exemplary behavior is considered crucial because residential communities experience intense social interaction. Imams who are friendly and easy to interact with are considered capable of strengthening the brotherhood and creating a comfortable mosque atmosphere for the congregation. Conversely, imams who are less able to maintain social relationships have the potential to create tension within the community. This situation demonstrates that the imam's role in residential mosques is not only ritual, but also social and cultural.

This view aligns with the Islamic concept of leadership, which places morality as the primary foundation of a leader. Imam Malik explained that the imam should be chosen from among the congregation with the best religious and moral character. Furthermore, Al-Ghazali emphasized that the imam must be a role model in daily life and reflect Islamic values in his social behavior. Thus, the imam's exemplary conduct is crucial for maintaining harmony within the mosque community.

The research also shows that communication skills are a crucial consideration in appointing a mosque imam. The mosque administrators (takmir) believe that an imam who can communicate well will more easily build rapport with the congregation. This ability is evident in the way the imam provides direction, imparts advice, and interacts with the community around the mosque. In the context of a heterogeneous residential community, communication skills are crucial for maintaining harmonious social relations.

These findings demonstrate the evolving role of imams in modern society. Imams are no longer understood solely as worship leaders, but also as social guides and religious mediators within the community. Mutiarawati and Dema (2023) explain that imams in modern society are required to be able to balance both religious and social functions. Therefore, communication skills and social awareness are essential components of the criteria for a modern imam.

In the process of appointing an imam, all mosques studied used a committee deliberation mechanism. The imam's appointment was based on observations of the candidate's reading ability, morals, discipline, and the congregation's acceptance of the candidate. Most mosques lacked written standards for imam criteria; rather, decisions were typically made through consensus among the management based on the needs of the congregation and the social conditions of the surrounding community.

This deliberative approach shows that the process of selecting an imam in a residential mosque is contextual and takes social realities into account.

congregation. The mosque administrators consider not only the normative aspects of religion but also the comfort of the congregation and the social stability of the mosque environment. This demonstrates the social construction that shapes the mosque administrators' perspectives on the ideal imam. This perspective is formed through experience in mosque management, interactions with the congregation, and the social needs of the residential community.

When compared with the views of Salaf scholars, the research results show a strong agreement. Takmirs essentially place two main principles in selecting an imam: competence and integrity. Competence is reflected in the ability to read the Quran, understand Islamic jurisprudence, and lead worship, while integrity is seen in the imam's morals, discipline, and social example. Both aspects align with the concepts of *al-quwwah* and *al-amanah*, which are the foundations of leadership according to Salaf scholars.

However, there are some contextual adjustments in the perspective of residential mosque administrators. Salafist scholars place greater emphasis on scholarly knowledge and the quality of worship, while residential mosque administrators also consider social skills, communication skills, and community acceptance of the imam. These adjustments occur because imams in modern residential communities face more complex social needs than in classical communities. Thus, the criteria for imams have evolved in line with changing social conditions.

Based on the overall research findings, it is clear that mosque imams in residential areas are viewed as both religious and social figures. Mosque administrators not only desire imams who are able to lead prayers effectively, but also those who maintain harmony within the congregation and serve as role models in their daily lives. Therefore, the criteria for an imam, from the perspective of mosque administrators in residential areas, encompass a combination of religious competence, moral integrity, and social skills, tailored to the needs of modern society.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the criteria for a mosque imam according to the perspective of the mosque administrators in the Sidoarjo and Gresik areas do not only focus on the ability to lead prayers, but also include aspects of morality, exemplary behavior, discipline, communication skills, and social concern for the congregation. The ability to read the Qur'an according to the rules of tajwid and an understanding of the fiqh of prayer remain the main requirements, but morality and exemplary behavior are seen as the most prioritized aspects because the imam is a role model in the community's life. The research results also show that the perspective of the mosque administrators

This is in line with the views of early scholars who emphasized the importance of al-quwwah (competence) and al-amanah (integrity) in selecting an imam. However, in the context of modern housing societies, mosque administrators also consider social skills and the congregation's acceptance of the imam as an important part of the process of appointing a mosque imam. Therefore, mosque administrators are expected to develop more focused criteria for imams and provide ongoing development so that imams are not only competent in aspects of worship but also able to build good social relationships and maintain harmony within the mosque community.

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