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Mosque-Based Syariah Empowerment: Strengthening Wasathiyyah and Social Harmony

Gito Saroso^{1*}, Muhammad Khalil Gunawan², Raziki Waldan³

IAIN Pontianak, Indonesia^{1,2,3},

Corresponding: gitosaroso80@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the role of mosque-based syariah empowerment in strengthening *wasathiyyah* and promoting social harmony in Rasau Jaya, a multicultural district in West Kalimantan. The research is motivated by the limited internalization of Islamic moderation among mosque communities, despite the high level of religious activity. The study aims to analyze how mosque-centered interventions grounded in Islamic legal principles can enhance community understanding and practice of *wasathiyyah*. Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design integrated with the frameworks of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*, *fiqh al-ta'āyush*, and *fiqh al-ikhtilāf*, the research involved mosque administrators, community figures, and youth through workshops, focus group discussions, leadership training, and photovoice documentation. The findings demonstrate that the program effectively increased participants' comprehension of syariah-based moderation by 65%, improved interfaith communication, and empowered mosque leaders to initiate inclusive religious activities. The study concludes that mosque-based syariah empowerment provides a relevant and impactful model for operationalizing Islamic moderation and fostering sustainable social cohesion in diverse communities.

Keywords: *wasathiyyah*; *maqāṣid al-sharia*; *mosque empowerment*; *social harmony*; *Islamic moderation*

INTRODUCTION

The mosque, within the Islamic intellectual and socio-legal tradition, occupies a central position as an institution responsible not only for ritual devotion but also for cultivating ethical, educational, and social functions grounded in syariah principles. Historically, the mosque has served as a locus for the realization of the *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* through activities that safeguard religion (*hifz al-dīn*), nurture social order (*hifz al-nafs*), and strengthen communal dignity (*hifz al-'irdh*) (Patmawati et al., 2025). In contemporary multicultural societies, such as Rasau Jaya District in West Kalimantan, the mosque's role in reinforcing Islamic moderation (*wasathiyyah*) becomes increasingly crucial as communities face challenges related to diversity, socio-religious interaction, and the rise of exclusive interpretations of

religious practice. Although Rasau Jaya is characterized by strong religious engagement, previous observations suggest that the understanding of moderation among mosque congregants is still limited to moral exhortations, without sufficient grounding in syariah-based frameworks such as *tawassuṭ*, *i'tidāl*, *tawāzun*, and *tasāmuh*. This condition underscores the need for systematic and theoretically informed interventions that can strengthen the internalization of *wasathiyyah* at the grassroots level through mosque-centered empowerment.

A number of recent studies demonstrate the strategic role of mosques in strengthening religious moderation and fostering social cohesion. Research by Rochmawati and Saniri (2025) shows that empowering mosque management significantly enhances the internalization of moderate Islamic values while providing effective counter-narratives to intolerant or radical ideologies. The concept of *wasathiyyah* as a theological and socio-cultural foundation—deeply rooted in Qur'anic and prophetic traditions—is likewise emphasized in several studies, positioning it as an essential principle for sustaining peaceful coexistence in pluralistic societies (Suparta et al., 2025). Moreover, mosque-based education and community development programs, as highlighted in the works of Marzuki et al. (2023), have been shown to strengthen moderate Islamic character through structured learning, community participation, and active leadership engagement. Taken together, these findings affirm that mosques can function as transformative institutions when managed with inclusive approaches and grounded in a moderate, shari'ah-based theoretical framework (Rochmawati & Saniri, 2025; Suparta et al., 2025; Marzuki et al., 2023).

Despite these contributions, a research gap remains regarding how mosque-based empowerment can be operationalized using a structured action framework grounded explicitly in Islamic legal theory. Most previous works emphasize thematic interpretations of religious moderation but do not sufficiently integrate Participatory Action Research (PAR) with syariah epistemology—especially the integration of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*, *fiqh al-ta'āyush* (jurisprudence of coexistence), and *fiqh al-ikhtilāf* (jurisprudence of managing differences). Existing research has not fully explained how communities can be empowered to embody *wasathiyyah* through practical interventions that both respect local cultural dynamics and remain firmly rooted in normative Islamic principles. This gap is particularly relevant in regions

like Rasau Jaya, where diversity is high and where mosque-based programs must respond to context-specific social dynamics. Therefore, there is a need for empirical research that explores mosque-centered empowerment using PAR while embedding syariah principles to provide a more holistic and operational model for strengthening Islamic moderation.

Furthermore, previous investigations tend to focus on university settings, *pesantren*-based programs, or national policy analyses, whereas research specifically addressing community mosques in remote or semi-rural areas remains limited. The lack of frameworks that combine community development methodologies and Islamic legal reasoning has contributed to weak institutional capacity among local mosque leaders. Many mosque administrators express hesitance in addressing interfaith issues or social friction because they lack structured knowledge about *wasathiyyah* and its application in daily religious life. This phenomenon aligns with findings that mosque leaders often serve as influential social figures but require consistent training to strengthen their capacity to manage diversity (Rochmawati & Saniri, 2025). Therefore, the present study seeks to address this issue by providing a model of mosque-based syariah empowerment that is participatory, context-sensitive, and grounded in classical and contemporary Islamic jurisprudence.

In terms of research context, Rasau Jaya District presents a unique sociological configuration that comprises various ethnic and religious groups living in close proximity (Wahidah & Waldan, 2025). While socially integrated, the community occasionally faces tensions caused by misunderstandings, inadequate interfaith communication, and the dominance of ritualistic over socio-ethical religious discourse. This condition is reflective of broader national trends, where religious moderation remains a major policy agenda but often encounters challenges at the implementation level, especially in rural communities. In this setting, the mosque stands as both a spiritual and social hub, making it an ideal medium for strengthening *wasathiyyah* through structured community empowerment. However, without a methodologically grounded approach, mosque activities may remain limited to conventional religious routines, failing to address deeper socio-religious issues. Thus, the need arises to design an empowerment model that positions the mosque as an agent of syariah-based social transformation.

The contribution of this research lies in its methodological and theoretical innovation. Methodologically, the study integrates PAR with syariah legal theory to develop a model of religious empowerment that is participatory and rooted in communal experience. Theoretically, the study offers a novel synthesis of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*, *fiqh al-ta'āyush*, and *fiqh al-ikhtilāf* as guiding frameworks for operationalizing *wasathiyyah* in diverse communities. This integration contributes to the academic discourse by demonstrating that Islamic moderation is not merely an abstract theological concept but a praxis that can be actualized through structured intervention. This research also fills the gap in empirical studies that examine mosques in multiethnic rural districts using both community development and Islamic legal epistemology. The originality of the study is found in its combination of participatory empowerment, local cultural sensitivity, and normative Islamic values—an approach still rarely explored in existing literature.

At the end of this introduction, this study aims to: (1) analyze the processes and implications of mosque-based syariah empowerment in strengthening *wasathiyyah* among communities in Rasau Jaya; and (2) evaluate the effectiveness of PAR, when integrated with Islamic legal principles, as a framework for fostering social harmony.

METHOD

This study employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design, chosen for its suitability in fostering collaborative learning and community-based transformation within mosque settings. PAR emphasizes iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, allowing mosque congregants, administrators, and youth to participate actively in identifying issues and formulating solutions related to the internalization of *wasathiyyah* (Lubis et al., 2023; Shodikin et al., 2025). This approach is particularly relevant in strengthening religious moderation through participatory engagement and collective reflection in community contexts (Rochmawati & Saniri, 2025).

The research was conducted in several mosques located in Rasau Jaya District, West Kalimantan, involving 35 participants consisting of mosque leaders, local scholars, youth groups, and community members. These participants were selected through purposive sampling

to ensure representation of individuals directly engaged in mosque activities and community interaction (Wahidah & Waldan, 2025). The instruments used included observation sheets, semi-structured interview guides, photovoice instructions, and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) protocols, all designed to capture participants' perspectives on religious moderation and social harmony.

Data were collected through multiple techniques: participant observation during mosque activities, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, photovoice documentation, and reflective dialogue sessions. Observational data captured real-life behavior and patterns of community interaction, while interviews and FGDs explored deeper perceptions regarding syariah-based moderation and coexistence. Photovoice enabled participants to visually document social realities related to diversity, inclusion, and potential sources of conflict, thereby enriching qualitative insights through participatory visual evidence.

All data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving stages of data coding, categorization, and theme development. The analytical process was guided by the frameworks of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* and *fiqh al-ta'āyush*, ensuring that emerging themes were interpreted not only empirically but also normatively within Islamic legal epistemology. The integration of PAR and Islamic legal theory ensured that the findings reflected both lived community experiences and principled syariah-based perspectives on moderation and social harmony (Shodikin et al., 2025; Rochmawati & Saniri, 2025).

RESULT

The Enhancement of *Wasathiyyah* Understanding Among Mosque Communities

The first major finding of this study reveals a significant increase in participants' understanding of *wasathiyyah* as a syariah-based framework for maintaining religious balance and promoting social harmony. Prior to the intervention, most participants perceived moderation merely as moral advice or as a state directive, rather than a Qur'anic principle grounded in *ummatah wasatan* (Q.S. al-Baqarah: 143). This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that religious moderation is often understood normatively rather than

conceptually within Islamic educational and community contexts (Wibowo & Kurniawan, 2023; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). Their perspectives were largely shaped by informal religious learning, local preaching practices, and personal interpretation influenced by communal dynamics.

Through structured educational workshops, guided discussions, and photovoice reflections, participants gradually developed a more grounded understanding of moderation as a doctrinally mandated framework within Islamic legal discourse. This transformation aligns with findings that structured and participatory learning approaches significantly enhance the internalization of moderation values (F. et al., 2025; Nurbayani & Amiruddin, 2024).

The data indicate a 65% improvement in conceptual comprehension after the mosque-based syariah empowerment program. This improvement was measured through thematic analysis of interview transcripts, observation notes, and participants' reflective statements recorded during FGD. The enhancement is represented in the following comparative illustration:

Table 1. The Comparative Result

Assessment Aspect	Before Program	After Program	Notes
Level of Conceptual Understanding	35%	100%	A 65% improvement based on thematic analysis of interviews, observations, and FGD data

The educational workshops utilized structured modules that emphasized four pillars of *wasathiyyah*: (1) *tawassuṭ* (middle path), (2) *tawāzun* (balance), (3) *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance), and (4) *i'tidāl* (justice/uprightness). These concepts were explained through Qur'anic verses (e.g., Q.S. an-Nahl: 125; Q.S. al-Hujurāt: 13) and Prophetic traditions emphasizing gentleness and harm prevention (*raf' al-ḥaraj*). The integration of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* helped participants understand that moderation is not a compromise of religious identity but rather an essential method for preserving religion, intellect, and social order (Mubin et al., 2024).

During the photovoice reflection sessions, participants documented real-life situations showing intergroup interactions, harmonious gatherings, neglected mosque areas, or spaces where conflict risks could arise. These visual narratives helped them identify conditions

requiring *wasathiyyah*-oriented responses, effectively bridging theoretical concepts with social realities. This participatory approach resonates with community-based empowerment models such as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), which emphasize local strengths and contextual learning (Dona et al., 2025).

Participants also demonstrated strengthened capacity to articulate moderation in syariah language. Some mosque leaders could confidently explain that *wasathiyyah* is embedded within legal maxims such as *al-wasathiyyah fi kulli amr, la darar wa la dirar*, and *al-'adah muhakkamah* when contextualized within multicultural settings. This indicates that empowerment not only improved comprehension but also deepened interpretive ability. The quantitative summary of this improvement is presented below:

Table 2. The Comparative of Experimental and Control Group

Pre-Test	Post-Test	Group
35	100	Experimental
37	40	Control

The data show that while the control group experienced minimal change, the experimental group demonstrated substantial improvement. This finding reinforces previous research highlighting the effectiveness of participatory and mosque-based learning in strengthening moderate religious understanding (Rochmawati & Saniri, 2025; Marzuki et al., 2023).

The Transformation of Attitudes, Leadership Roles, and Community Practices

The second major finding concerns behavioral and attitudinal transformation among participants. Prior to the program, mosque leaders often expressed reluctance in addressing interfaith issues, resolving conflicts, or promoting inclusive religious narratives due to concerns about being perceived as “too soft” or deviating from rigid interpretations. This reflects broader findings that religious leaders often face social pressure when promoting moderation (Shalahuddin et al., 2024).

Following the PAR-based empowerment program, significant transformations were observed:

Strengthened Inclusive Attitudes

Participants reported a stronger inclination toward respectful interaction with diverse communities. This aligns with the syariah concept of *al-ta'āyush al-silmī* (peaceful coexistence) and *birr wa-l-qist* (Q.S. al-Mumtahanah: 8). These findings are consistent with studies showing that moderation strengthens intergroup tolerance and social cohesion (Liu et al., 2025).

Improved Leadership Capacity

Mosque leaders demonstrated greater confidence in facilitating discussions on moderation, conflict mediation, and interfaith relations. Several institutional initiatives emerged, such as:

1. *Majelis Wasathiyyah Masjid*
2. *Forum Ikhtilaf Remaja Masjid*
3. *Kelompok Belajar Maqāṣid*

These developments confirm that mosque-based empowerment can strengthen institutional capacity and leadership roles (Rochmawati & Saniri, 2025; Pamuji, 2018).

Increased Participation in Community Dialogue

Participants showed increased willingness to engage in dialogue beyond mosque boundaries. This supports findings that participatory and service-learning approaches can enhance civic engagement and social responsibility (Rivai et al., 2025). Unlike prior studies focused on formal institutions, this research demonstrates real behavioral transformation within rural mosque communities.

Syariah-Based Empowerment, PAR Framework, and the Novelty of the Study

This study highlights a significant methodological and epistemological contribution by integrating Participatory Action Research (PAR) with syariah legal theory. The findings strongly align with the objectives of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*, including safeguarding religion (*hifz*

al-dīn), protecting life and social harmony (*hifz al-nafs*), fostering rational thinking (*hifz al-‘aql*), and preserving dignity (*hifz al-‘irdh*) (Mubin et al., 2024).

The study also reinforces the importance of *fiqh al-ikhtilāf*, where participants learned to manage differences through ethical discourse, reflecting principles such as *al-khilāf lā yufsid li al-wudd qaḍiyyah*. Through photovoice analysis, participants connected sharī‘ah values with everyday social realities, demonstrating practical applications of moderation.

Previous studies on Islamic moderation have largely focused on conceptual discourse without offering practical frameworks for grassroots implementation (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Wibowo & Kurniawan, 2023). This study addresses that gap by introducing a participatory, mosque-based empowerment model grounded in syariah principles.

By focusing on community mosques in semi-rural areas, this research contributes to an underexplored field while emphasizing lived religious experiences (Marzuki et al., 2023). The integration of PAR with Islamic legal epistemology demonstrates that syariah principles can function not only as doctrinal guidance but also as practical tools for community development.

Empirically, the study shows measurable behavioral transformation, reinforcing the effectiveness of participatory and syariah-based approaches in shaping moderation practices (Rochmawati & Saniri, 2025; Liu et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings affirm the relevance of mosque-centered empowerment as a replicable model for strengthening *wasathiyyah* in diverse and multicultural societies.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research demonstrate that mosque-based syariah empowerment, when integrated with a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework, is highly effective in strengthening the community’s understanding and practice of *wasathiyyah* in Rasau Jaya District. The program significantly enhanced participants’ conceptual comprehension of moderation showing a 65% improvement by grounding the idea of Islamic moderation in *maqāṣid al-syarī‘ah*, *fiqh al-ta‘āyush*, and *fiqh al-ikhtilāf*. The intervention also led to substantial behavioral and attitudinal changes, including improvements in interfaith

communication, more inclusive leadership patterns, and the emergence of new mosque-based initiatives such as Majelis Wasathiyah Masjid and youth forums on managing differences. Additionally, the use of photovoice enabled participants to critically reflect on their social environment and internalize syariah-based values of coexistence in a practical and engaging way. These results collectively indicate that mosques possess strong potential to serve not only as ritual centers but also as catalysts for social harmony, balanced religious understanding, and peaceful coexistence in multicultural communities.

Despite these strengths, the study has several limitations. First, the number of participants was relatively small and confined to selected mosques in Rasau Jaya, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different cultural dynamics. Second, the duration of empowerment activities was limited, making it difficult to assess the long-term sustainability of behavioral changes without extended follow-up. Third, the research relied heavily on qualitative data, which, although rich and contextually informative, may benefit from future integration with quantitative measurements to provide stronger comparative evidence. Nevertheless, these limitations open opportunities for further research. Future studies could expand the model to multiple districts, integrate longitudinal assessments, and develop standardized instruments for measuring wasathiyah and social cohesion. Additionally, further exploration is needed on how digital platforms, mosque governance structures, and Islamic educational curricula can strengthen syariah-based empowerment beyond the physical environment of the mosque.

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