

THE QUEST FOR MOSQUE ACCESSIBILITY IN ELITE ENVIRONMENTS: A FOCUS ON ILORIN

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Abstract

This article examines the emerging trend of restricted access to mosques within affluent areas of Ilorin, Nigeria, particularly focusing on Tanke and GRA neighborhoods. Traditionally, mosques serve as inclusive, communal spaces, integral to promoting social cohesion, unity, and spiritual development within the Muslim community. However, in recent years, a shift has occurred in certain elite Nigerian neighborhoods, where residential mosques are increasingly built as private spaces, restricting access to the families or residents who own them. This exclusivity marks a departure from the open-access model historically associated with mosques and raises questions about the alignment of these practices with traditional Islamic teachings that emphasize inclusivity and community support. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study explores the factors influencing this trend, including socioeconomic status, security and privacy concerns, and architectural preferences for more private, family-centered worship spaces. Socioeconomic influences are particularly notable, as wealthier individuals can afford to build private mosques that cater exclusively to their households, thus transforming the mosque's role from a communal institution to a personal, private space. Additionally, privacy and security concerns among affluent residents contribute to this restricted access, with private mosques perceived as safer and more manageable for family-only gatherings. The study also examines how these restricted-access mosques affect broader values of community cohesion, inclusivity, and unity central to Islamic teachings. Findings highlight the potential for social division within the Muslim community as communal worship becomes increasingly exclusive, limiting the ability of mosques to serve as unifying spaces across socioeconomic divides.

Keywords: Mosque Accessibility; Elite Neighborhoods; Islamic Inclusivity; Private Worship Spaces; Community Cohesion

INTRODUCTION

The mosque, or masjid, occupies a central place in Islamic society, serving not only as a site for ritual worship but also as a hub for fostering unity, community building, and social support (Abdel-Hady, 2010; Waines, 2020). Beyond its primary function of facilitating congregational prayers, the mosque historically operated as a multifunctional institution, providing educational opportunities, hosting community meetings, and serving as a platform for social justice and conflict resolution (Yusuf & Abdul-Raheem, 2013; Abbas & Brown, 2022). Mosques have traditionally brought Muslims together irrespective of their socioeconomic, cultural, or ethnic differences, promoting collective identity and solidarity through shared worship (Waines, 2020).

Congregational prayer in Islam underscores the role of the mosque as a unifying force. By standing shoulder to shoulder, worshippers demonstrate the equality and fraternity emphasized in Islamic teachings (Sabiq, 2005). This collective act transcends barriers of class, wealth, and ethnicity, reinforcing the idea that the mosque belongs to the entire Muslim community, not any specific group. However, this ideal has faced challenges, particularly in urban environments where socioeconomic disparities and evolving lifestyles have reshaped the functions and accessibility of mosques (Abbas et al., 2023).

In elite neighborhoods of Ilorin, particularly the Tanke and GRA areas, a trend toward private, family-only mosques has emerged. These "restricted mosques" are built on private residential properties and cater exclusively to the immediate families of the property owners. This trend diverges from the traditional model of mosques as open-access, communal spaces, raising concerns about its alignment with Islamic principles of inclusivity and community support. Unlike public mosques, which serve as centers for collective prayer and social interaction, restricted mosques often emphasize privacy and exclusivity, reflecting modern architectural and cultural influences (Hassan, 2021).

Several factors contribute to the rise of restricted mosques in elite areas. Socioeconomic dynamics play a significant role, as affluent individuals have the financial resources to construct private mosques tailored to their specific needs. These private mosques often reflect the owner's status and serve as symbols of wealth and exclusivity (Kuppinger, 2020). Additionally, concerns about privacy and security are prevalent among residents in these neighborhoods. Private mosques are perceived as safer and more manageable spaces, reducing exposure to strangers and potential threats (Mandaville, 2019). Cultural shifts also influence this trend. Modern urban lifestyles increasingly prioritize individualism and privacy, leading to architectural designs that cater to smaller, family-centered worship spaces. While these private spaces may meet the immediate needs of affluent families, they limit the mosque's traditional function as a communal hub for Muslims from diverse backgrounds (Hassan, 2021; Mourad, 2003).

The restricted access to mosques in elite neighborhoods has significant implications for social cohesion within the Muslim community. Traditionally, mosques are spaces where individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds converge, fostering connections and mutual understanding. By restricting access, private mosques contribute to the fragmentation of the Muslim community, reducing opportunities for interaction and shared worship experiences (Jawondo, 2015). This trend contradicts Islamic teachings on the communal nature of worship. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of maintaining mosques as accessible spaces for all Muslims, warning against actions that prevent others from using them (Qur'an 2:114). The Prophet Muhammad also encouraged inclusivity in mosque use, advocating for open doors that

welcome all believers (Sabiq, 2005). By restricting access, private mosques undermine these principles and risk fostering social divisions.

The rise of restricted mosques in Ilorin's elite neighborhoods highlights broader changes in religious practices influenced by urbanization and socioeconomic disparities. While these private mosques offer convenience and exclusivity for affluent families, they reflect a departure from the traditional Islamic emphasis on community and inclusivity. This shift raises questions about the long-term impact on the unity and collective identity of the Muslim community in Ilorin. Recent studies suggest that this trend is not unique to Ilorin but is part of a larger global phenomenon. Urban mosques in wealthy areas worldwide are increasingly designed to cater to specific communities or individuals, reflecting broader changes in religious architecture and practices (Abbas et al., 2023; Waines, 2020). These changes challenge the traditional role of mosques as public institutions and necessitate a reevaluation of how mosques can adapt to modern contexts while preserving their core values of inclusivity and unity.

This study underscores the need for a balanced approach to mosque construction and accessibility in elite neighborhoods. While private mosques may address the immediate needs of affluent families, their exclusivity risks undermining the communal functions central to Islamic teachings. Efforts should be made to promote awareness about the traditional role of mosques as inclusive spaces, encouraging practices that align with Islamic values of unity and community support. Future research could explore strategies for integrating private and public mosque functions to ensure that all Muslims, regardless of socioeconomic status, have access to spaces that foster shared worship and community building.

Literature Review

Historically, mosques have been revered as public institutions dedicated to fostering unity, inclusivity, and social cohesion among Muslims (Faysal, 2011; Mandaville, 2019). As central pillars of Islamic communities, mosques are designed to be accessible spaces that not only facilitate worship but also offer a platform for social engagement, education, and welfare activities (Sabiq, 2005). The Qur'an underscores the importance of accessibility, describing mosques as places where Allah's name is to be remembered openly, signifying their public and inclusive nature (Qur'an 2:114). Abdel-Hady (2010) echoes this sentiment, emphasizing that mosques serve the broader Muslim community and embody the Islamic values of unity, equality, and accessibility.

In classical Islamic jurisprudence, accessibility is considered a core principle of mosque construction and management. Jurists argue that mosques should remain open to Muslims from all backgrounds, enabling them to participate in communal prayers and benefit from the associated spiritual and social rewards (Yusuf & Abdul-Raheem, 2013). This principle aligns with the Islamic ethos of equality, as the mosque is intended to transcend societal divisions of wealth, ethnicity, or social standing (Waines, 2020). However, the concept of restricted mosque access has gained traction in recent decades, particularly in urban areas. Influenced by modern architectural designs and urban planning, this trend often emphasizes privacy and exclusivity, especially in affluent neighborhoods (Mourad, 2003; Hassan, 2021).

In the Nigerian context, mosques have traditionally played an integral role in fostering unity and serving as venues for communal decision-making and social cohesion. Jawondo (2015) notes that mosques in Ilorin historically functioned as community hubs where religious, social, and even political issues were addressed. The inclusivity of mosques facilitated interactions between Muslims of varying socioeconomic backgrounds, reinforcing a sense of

shared identity. Open-access mosque designs were particularly effective in enhancing community engagement and promoting collective worship, as highlighted by Kuppinger (2020). However, recent developments in elite Nigerian neighborhoods, such as Tanke and GRA in Ilorin, signify a departure from these traditions. The emergence of private, family-only mosques reflects a shift toward exclusivity, driven by broader socioeconomic changes and evolving cultural priorities (Oniyangi, 2014; Abbas et al., 2023).

The trend of restricted access mosques in affluent areas raises concerns about the impact on traditional Islamic practices. Socioeconomic dynamics in these neighborhoods often influence decisions around mosque construction, with wealthy individuals opting to build private mosques on their properties. These mosques, which primarily cater to the families or close associates of the property owners, often symbolize exclusivity and privacy rather than community service. While this setup may address personal preferences for convenience and security, it significantly diverges from the traditional model of open-access mosques (Hassan, 2021). The architecture of these private mosques typically prioritizes aesthetics and functionality for smaller groups, often neglecting the communal aspect central to Islamic worship spaces (Kuppinger, 2020).

In affluent neighborhoods, privacy concerns also play a pivotal role in limiting mosque accessibility. Wealthier individuals frequently cite security risks and a desire for controlled environments as reasons for restricting access to their private mosques (Mandaville, 2019). This trend is reflective of a broader cultural shift in urban spaces, where individualism and exclusivity are increasingly prioritized over collective engagement (Abbas et al., 2023). These factors collectively reshape the role of mosques in such areas, transforming them from inclusive community institutions into exclusive family spaces.

The implications of restricted mosque access for social cohesion and inclusivity are significant. Mosques have long been regarded as symbols of unity, where Muslims from diverse backgrounds gather for prayer, learning, and social interaction (Faysal, 2011; Yusuf & Abdul-Raheem, 2013). By limiting access to certain groups, private mosques reduce opportunities for cross-socioeconomic interactions, leading to a fragmentation of the Muslim community. This shift risks exacerbating divisions within the community and undermines the Islamic principle of equality in worship spaces (Qur'an 2:114; Sabiq, 2005).

Furthermore, the privatization of mosques challenges the concept of waqf, an Islamic endowment that traditionally underpins the construction and maintenance of mosques. Waqf is intended to serve public welfare, ensuring that resources such as mosques remain accessible to all Muslims. Restricted access mosques deviate from this principle, redirecting what could be communal benefits into private gains (Abdel-Hady, 2010; Waines, 2020). The tension between these private practices and Islamic values raises critical questions about the sustainability of inclusivity in mosque functions.

Recent studies also indicate that this trend is not limited to Nigeria but is part of a global shift in mosque architecture and management. Urban mosques in wealthy areas across the world increasingly cater to specific communities or individuals, reflecting broader socioeconomic and cultural changes (Hassan, 2021; Abbas et al., 2023). These changes challenge the traditional role of mosques as public institutions and necessitate a reevaluation of how mosques can adapt to modern contexts while preserving their foundational principles of accessibility and unity.

This study highlights the need for renewed awareness and policy efforts to address the implications of restricted mosque access in elite neighborhoods. While private mosques may offer convenience for affluent families, they risk undermining the communal functions that are central to Islamic teachings. Encouraging inclusive practices and revisiting the principles of waqf in mosque construction could help bridge the growing divide in accessibility. Future research could explore strategies for integrating the private and public functions of mosques to ensure that they remain spaces of unity and collective worship.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive understanding of mosque accessibility in Ilorin's elite neighborhoods. The use of multiple data collection and analysis techniques ensures a nuanced exploration of the factors influencing restricted mosque access and its implications for social cohesion and community dynamics. By combining surveys, interviews, and observational techniques, the study captures diverse perspectives and uncovers the complex interplay of socioeconomic, cultural, and architectural factors that shape mosque practices in these affluent areas.

Case Selection

To ensure a balanced and representative analysis, four mosques in the Tanke and GRA neighborhoods of Ilorin were purposively selected as case studies. These included two restricted mosques, which are private, family-only worship spaces, and two unrestricted mosques, accessible to the broader Muslim community. The selection process involved consultations with local mosque committee members, community leaders, and knowledgeable stakeholders to identify mosques that exemplify the trends under investigation. The restricted mosques were chosen based on their exclusivity and alignment with the growing trend of private worship spaces in elite areas. In contrast, the unrestricted mosques served as benchmarks for traditional, open-access practices. This dual selection allowed for a comparative analysis, shedding light on the divergent architectural designs, accessibility policies, and community dynamics between restricted and unrestricted mosques.

Data Collection

A multi-faceted approach was adopted for data collection to capture the full scope of mosque accessibility issues. A total of 60 participants were surveyed, with an equal distribution of 30 respondents from Tanke and GRA neighborhoods. The participants included mosque committee members, worshippers, and community leaders, representing a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Surveys were designed to gather quantitative data on participant demographics, worship preferences, and perceptions of mosque accessibility.

In addition to surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including mosque administrators, and religious scholars, and government agents involved in mosque design. These interviews provided qualitative insights into the motivations behind restricted access, the cultural and socioeconomic factors driving these practices, and the perceived implications for community cohesion. The use of open-ended questions allowed

participants to elaborate on their views, revealing underlying concerns and aspirations related to mosque accessibility.

Observational data were also collected to evaluate the physical characteristics and accessibility features of the selected mosques. Researchers documented the architectural designs, spatial layouts, signage, and access points of each mosque, comparing the inclusivity of these features between restricted and unrestricted sites. For example, observations noted the presence of barriers, gated entryways, or private signage at restricted mosques, contrasting with the open-door policies and communal spaces of unrestricted mosques. Secondary data from existing literature on mosque architecture, Islamic values of accessibility, and urban religious practices further contextualized the primary findings.

Data Analysis

The collected data were subjected to rigorous analysis to identify key themes and patterns. Quantitative survey data were statistically analyzed to uncover trends in participant demographics, worship practices, and attitudes toward mosque accessibility. This analysis provided a clear understanding of the general perceptions and experiences of worshippers in the two neighborhoods.

Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed thematically, using coding techniques to organize and interpret the information. Thematic analysis focused on identifying recurring themes such as the motivations for restricted access, privacy and security concerns, and the social implications of these practices. For instance, many interviewees emphasized that security fears and the desire for exclusivity were driving factors behind the construction of private mosques. Other themes highlighted the tension between modern architectural trends and the traditional Islamic ethos of inclusivity.

By triangulating data from surveys, interviews, and observations, the study ensured the validity and reliability of its findings. Patterns and discrepancies between restricted and unrestricted mosques were explored in depth, revealing how socioeconomic status and urban development influence mosque practices. Additionally, the analysis accounted for contextual factors such as the historical significance of mosque inclusivity in Ilorin and its evolution in response to modern challenges.

Outcomes and Relevance

The mixed-methods approach enabled the study to capture the multifaceted nature of mosque accessibility in Ilorin's elite neighborhoods. By examining both restricted and unrestricted mosques, the research provides a holistic understanding of how modern trends in privacy, urbanization, and socioeconomic disparities are reshaping Islamic religious practices. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on mosque architecture and community dynamics, offering valuable insights for policymakers, religious leaders, and urban planners interested in promoting inclusivity and unity within Muslim communities. Moreover, the methodology serves as a model for future research on similar issues in other urban contexts.

FINDINGS

1. Factors Influencing Restricted Access

Restricted mosques in affluent neighborhoods such as Tanke and GRA in Ilorin are primarily built within private residential compounds, catering exclusively to family members. Interviews with residents revealed that several factors drive this trend, including security concerns, privacy preferences, and socioeconomic status. Many residents cited security as a critical motivator, explaining that private mosques allow them to maintain control over their environment and limit access to unfamiliar individuals, which they perceive as potential security risks (Oniyangi, 2014; Abbas & Brown, 2022).

Modern urban values of privacy and exclusivity also play a substantial role. Residents in these affluent areas often prefer smaller, private spaces for intimate family gatherings, reflecting a shift away from the traditional communal model of mosque design (Hassan, 2021; Mourad, 2003). These preferences align with broader societal trends that emphasize individualized living arrangements and personal comfort over collective practices.

The financial capability of elite residents further contributes to this phenomenon. Wealthier individuals can afford to construct private mosques with high-end architectural designs, emphasizing aesthetics and exclusivity. These mosques often serve as status symbols, showcasing their owners' wealth and cultural sophistication (Yusuf & Abdul-Raheem, 2013; Kuppinger, 2020). However, this exclusivity raises concerns about social inequality within the Muslim community. By creating spaces that are accessible only to a select few, the traditional concept of mosques as communal and inclusive institutions is challenged, exacerbating the divide between elite and non-elite Muslims.

Recent studies support these findings, highlighting that the global trend of private worship spaces in elite neighborhoods reflects broader cultural and economic shifts. In many urban areas, privatized religious spaces are becoming increasingly common, mirroring changes in societal attitudes towards community engagement and public interaction (Abbas et al., 2023).

2. Impact on Community Cohesion

The trend of restricted mosque access has profound implications for social cohesion within Ilorin's Muslim community. Traditionally, mosques have played a central role in uniting Muslims, providing spaces where individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds can come together to pray, learn, and socialize. This inclusive environment reinforces Islamic values of brotherhood and equality, breaking down social barriers and fostering a sense of collective identity (Jawondo, 2015; Abdel-Hady, 2010).

Restricted mosques in elite neighborhoods disrupt this traditional role, creating an environment of exclusivity that isolates affluent Muslims from the larger community. Survey responses revealed significant concerns about this trend, with many worshippers expressing fears that it undermines the communal aspect of Islamic worship. Participants from unrestricted mosques emphasized that restricted access diminishes the unifying role of the mosque, fostering social divisions within the Muslim community (Waines, 2020).

This exclusivity is particularly troubling given the centrality of inclusivity in Islamic teachings. The Quran explicitly warns against actions that prevent individuals from worshipping in mosques, describing such behavior as unjust (Qur'an 2:114). By restricting access, private mosques contradict these principles, raising ethical and religious questions about their compatibility with Islamic values (Mandaville, 2019).

Furthermore, restricted access mosques reduce opportunities for interclass interactions, which are critical for maintaining social harmony. The lack of such interactions in affluent

neighborhoods exacerbates existing social disparities, contributing to the fragmentation of the Muslim community. This fragmentation risks undermining the collective identity and shared purpose that mosques have traditionally fostered.

3. Islamic Perspective on Accessibility

Islamic teachings strongly emphasize the importance of mosque accessibility, considering it essential to their function as communal spaces for prayer, learning, and social engagement. The Prophet Muhammad encouraged Muslims to gather in mosques for worship, fostering an environment of inclusion and community building (Sabiq, 2005). The Quran reinforces this principle by describing mosques as places of worship open to all Muslims and condemning actions that restrict access (Qur'an 2:114).

From a religious perspective, restricted mosque access challenges the foundational purpose of mosques as inclusive and communal institutions. Scholars argue that mosques are intended to serve the broader Muslim community, facilitating opportunities for collective worship and engagement. Private, restricted-access mosques, therefore, diverge from this purpose, posing ethical and religious concerns (Abbas & Brown, 2022; Abdel-Hady, 2010).

The rise of restricted mosques also raises questions about their impact on the Islamic concept of ummah, or the global Muslim community. The ummah is built on principles of inclusivity and unity, transcending socioeconomic and cultural divides. Restricted mosques, by their very nature, limit communal engagement and weaken the bonds that underpin the ummah (Kuppinger, 2020).

Moreover, Islamic endowment principles, such as waqf, traditionally underpin mosque construction and management. These principles emphasize that mosques should serve the public good, providing spaces that are accessible to all Muslims regardless of their socioeconomic status (Hassan, 2021). By prioritizing exclusivity, restricted-access mosques deviate from these principles, redirecting resources that could benefit the broader community toward private gains.

Recent research highlights the need for renewed efforts to align mosque practices with Islamic values of inclusivity and accessibility. Public awareness campaigns, policy interventions, and religious education initiatives could help address the growing divide between elite and non-elite Muslims, ensuring that mosques continue to serve as unifying institutions (Abbas et al., 2023).

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that the trend of restricted mosque access in Ilorin's affluent neighborhoods signifies a notable shift from the traditional Islamic principles of inclusivity and communal unity towards a preference for privacy and exclusivity, influenced largely by socioeconomic factors. This development represents a significant departure from the historical role of mosques, which have long served as spaces that foster social cohesion and collective identity among Muslims. Instead, private mosques in elite areas are increasingly contributing to social fragmentation, undermining the mosque's function as a unifying institution within the Islamic tradition.

One major driver of this trend is the prioritization of privacy and security, reflecting a broader societal inclination towards individualism. Residents of affluent neighborhoods often

value private, family-only mosques for the control and protection they offer against external risks (Hassan, 2021). While these considerations address practical concerns for affluent worshippers, they conflict with Islamic teachings, which advocate for open and accessible mosques as central to fostering unity within the Muslim community (Qur'an 2:114). By restricting access, such mosques create an exclusivity that challenges their intended communal purpose.

Socioeconomic disparities further amplify this trend. The financial resources available to elite individuals enable the construction of private mosques that serve as both worship spaces and symbols of social status. While this practice highlights the autonomy and architectural preferences of affluent Muslims, it exacerbates social divisions by limiting interaction between elite and non-elite Muslims. This exclusivity directly contrasts with the Islamic ideal of mosques as spaces where believers of all backgrounds can come together, reinforcing the values of equality and collective worship (Yusuf & Abdul-Raheem, 2013; Kuppinger, 2020).

Additionally, this phenomenon reflects a global pattern in urban religious practices, where the privatization of religious spaces mirrors contemporary values of individualism and modernity. Studies reveal that similar trends in other urban areas prioritize exclusivity, comfort, and security, often at the expense of community engagement and inclusivity (Abbas et al., 2023; Mandaville, 2019). In the context of Ilorin, this global trend highlights the influence of modern urbanization on Islamic worship practices, necessitating context-specific solutions to address the implications of restricted mosque access.

While private mosques may offer benefits such as convenience and security for affluent worshippers, they also reduce opportunities for collective worship and shared religious experiences, which are vital to the mosque's role in promoting social cohesion. The absence of such communal interactions contributes to the fragmentation of the Muslim community, creating divides that undermine the inclusivity and unity that mosques have traditionally fostered (Waines, 2020). These concerns emphasize the need to strike a balance between accommodating individual preferences and preserving the mosque's communal role.

The study underscores the importance of initiating public awareness campaigns and policy interventions to realign mosque practices with Islamic values of inclusivity. Efforts to educate communities on the ethical and religious importance of mosque accessibility could address misconceptions about exclusivity. Policymakers and religious leaders might also explore strategies to encourage the construction of inclusive mosques in affluent areas, ensuring that worship spaces remain accessible to all Muslims, regardless of their socioeconomic standing.

Furthermore, revisiting the Islamic principle of waqf (endowment) could help reinforce the communal nature of mosque construction and management. Traditionally, waqf ensures that mosques are designed to serve the collective good, benefiting the broader community rather than individual families (Abdel-Hady, 2010). Reintegrating this principle into contemporary mosque practices could restore their role as unifying institutions and promote inclusivity even in elite neighborhoods.

Ultimately, these findings contribute to the growing discourse on the intersection of urbanization, socioeconomic disparities, and religious practices. While the trend of restricted mosque access in Ilorin mirrors broader global shifts, its local consequences demand tailored interventions that uphold the values of communal worship and equality central to Islam. Future research could explore innovative approaches to integrating private and public mosque functions, ensuring that worship spaces remain inclusive and reflective of Islamic teachings on unity and community engagement.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of restricted mosque access in affluent areas like Tanke and GRA in Ilorin represents a significant shift from the traditional role of mosques as inclusive spaces open to all Muslims. While private mosques may cater to the preferences of wealthy individuals seeking exclusivity and privacy, this practice undermines the communal purpose that mosques are designed to fulfill. Islamic teachings prioritize accessibility and promote mosques as hubs of unity, social support, and community interaction (Abdel-Hady, 2010; Abbas & Brown, 2022). Restricting access contradicts these principles, contributing to social fragmentation within the Muslim community.

The study highlights the urgent need to prioritize inclusivity in mosque practices, particularly in affluent neighborhoods where private, restricted mosques are becoming more prevalent. Bridging the growing gap between elite and non-elite Muslims requires initiatives such as public awareness campaigns, religious education, and targeted community outreach programs. Reaffirming the importance of communal worship can help rebuild unity and strengthen the collective identity within Ilorin's Muslim population.

Future research should focus on exploring the phenomenon of restricted mosque access in other urban areas in Nigeria and internationally. Such studies could provide deeper insights into how socioeconomic dynamics shape mosque practices and their impact on Islamic community structures. Additionally, investigating innovative mosque designs that harmonize privacy with inclusivity could offer viable solutions, accommodating individual worship preferences while preserving the mosque's communal and unifying role in Islam.

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