



Mosque Officer and Religiosity Authority: A Case Study in Pekanbaru, Indonesia

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Abstract

The authority in religion is a crucial issue in Indonesia. At the certain level, the authority will refer to religious organization and leaders. And also it can occur in mosques, which are not only places of worship but also of social activities. This research explores information on how authority in religion might occur in the mosque environment, with the subject of mosque officers (called Marbots or Takmir). This study aims to determine the role of mosque officers in building the authority in the mosque. This research uses a qualitative method with data collection through in-depth interviews with informants of several takmir in Pekanbaru (the capital of Riau Province). This study found that mosque officers play an important role in mobilizing activities in the mosque, including daily worship, educational and recitation activities, and Mosque-Based Social Activities (MBSA). Although mosque officers can build authority in religion, they cannot impose certain religious preferences to influence community preferences. However, mosque officers or Takmir are required to be moderate in a community with heterogeneous preferences in religion. For this reason, mosque officers are chosen from among those who do not have fanaticism so that religious life is harmony.

Keywords: *Religiosity Authority; Mosque officers; Tolerance*

Introduction

The mosque should be utilized as a place for the development of Muslims with various community activity programs. The mosque, formerly were used as a various social activities place and of deliberation to formulate activities concerning common interests. But currently mosques do in various places only function as places of ritual worship, such as five daily prayers, Friday prayer, *ied fitr* (Islamic celebration) and *adha* prayer, and also religious lecture activities. To improve the function of the mosque to be more beneficial for the quality of life for Muslims, the mosque must be managed professionally. As in the period of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be up on him), the mosque was the center of worship,

community activities, and of Islamic religious education. To realize the ideal mosque function, it requires a mosque manager who has a broad vision.

People generally do not understand the function of the mosque. They know that the mosque is only used as a place to carry out the daily worship, and outside of worship activities the mosque is often empty. Therefore, improving the function of the mosque is to make the mosque an educational institution such as the Qoranic Education Park, an Islamic studies, and a center for developing sharia-based community economic activities. And then, to optimize the function of the mosque, mosques generally appoint a mosque officer (called *marbots* or *takmir*). The *takmir* of the mosque helps run the program that has been run by the mosque management. The *takmir* is tasked with reviving the function of the mosque, namely not only used as a place of worship, but also for community activities. For this reason, *takmir* plays an important role in various community religious activities; namely providing ideas, planning activities and implementing activities. So, in various religious activities makes *takmir* have religious authority around the mosque.

Islamic authority in Indonesia is spread in various layers, both in religious institutions or state institutions and local figures. Religious institutions such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), *Muhammadiyah* and *Persis* have fatwa institutions to provide guidance to their followers in various religious matters. Likewise, the Indonesian *Ulama* Council (MUI) through its Fatwa Commission regularly issues a number of fatwas. The existence of various fatwa institutions is actually evidence of the pluralism of understanding and interpretation of Islam in Indonesia. MUI is then considered as the highest religious authority in Indonesia (Rumadi, 2012).

Religiosity authority is an issue that is always debated. Previously, religiosity authority was only owned by scholars such as *musyrid* and religious teachers, and the government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, today religiosity authority is embraced by new media that appear impersonal and based on information networks. Thus, religiosity authority is no longer held by authoritative and credible *Ulama* (Hefni, 2020). However, according to (Muhammad, 2021), the development of the media does not always weaken the previous religiosity authority, because of its ability to adapt to new media, it proves that the existence of old religiosity actors can be strengthened even across local boundaries with the existence of different times. This makes them not only known in the local scope, but also at the same time the religiosity messages they convey can be easily enjoyed by a global audience thanks to the existence of new media.

Religiosity authority previously discussed the emergence of new religious authorities. For example, if the NU, the *Muhammadiyah* and MUI were the national religiosity authorities, now new figures and institutions namely NU and *Muhammadiyah* have emerged. There are new center of religiosity authority in Indonesia such as Abdul Somad, Adi Hidayat and Gus Baha (Burhani, 2016). In the context of the unstoppable development of the technological world, religiosity authority often shifts from personal to impersonal. As a result, religious life hardens based on each other's beliefs without signs. In seeing the different sides, there is only fanaticism which then gives birth to intolerance (Hefni, 2020). Social media is not only a new place to convey the content of religiosity messages from a preacher, but also as a medium that has an impact on the dynamics of increasingly complex changes in religiosity authority (Muhammad, 2021). Religiosity authority among social media users has an impact on the ethical crisis in online interactions with the rise of wars among social media users due to differences in opinion from the figures they follow (Randani, Jalimah Zulfah Latuconsina, & Mukhsin Achmad, 2022).

Religiosity minorities often discuss the role of the state, religiosity institutions, community organizations, and leaders. However, there are not many studies that discuss the micro scope. In the micro scope, what is usually studied is Habib, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad who has the ability to transmit religious knowledge. Habib is seen as having the power to form a congregation such as *majelis*

taklim (a group of Islamic teachings). It's organized by Habib tends to have many followers. The community places Habib as a preacher, leader of *majelis taklim*, cultural broker, philanthropist, and consoler. *Habib* has religiosity authority in spreading the power through the recitation of *majelis taklim* assemblies in attracting sympathy from the Muslim community (Najamudin & Abdullah, 2022). *Habib* is quite grounded among the ulama and the community. A role that is usually developed in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in delivering da'wah and developing Islamic teachings as an its vision and mission (Saepudin, 2019).

The study of religiosity authority in the micro scope that has not been widely studied is the role of mosque officers. Mosque officers actually have an important role in building religiosity authority in the mosque environment they manage. This happens because of the mosque officer who organizes religiosity activities in the mosque every day. In addition, to routine worship activities such as the five daily prayers, mosque officials also determine the study which is usually held at the mosque at least once a week. The mosque officer's involvement with the mosque management includes determining the theme and appointing religious figures who are invited to provide recitation material. Authority can occur if the appointed figure is a person who has a spiritual religious closeness to the mosque officer.

Research related to religiosity authority about mosque officers is interesting. It was conducted in Pekanbaru City, Riau Province, Indonesia. The mosque officers almost are the students in university. The reason students work as mosque attendants is because they want to find an environment that can maintain worship routines, to get additional income and to live independently (Elhakim & Masykur, 2020; Rahmayani & Hidir, 2020). The mosque official provides rewards and facilities for the mosque officers thank to their maintenance of the mosque and its performance (Baasithurahim & Zaki, 2020).

This study is interesting to conduct in Pekanbaru because religiosity authority is an important issue in building harmony in community life. Moreover, Setara Institute's research on 94 cities throughout Indonesia placed Pekanbaru as one of the 10 cities with the lowest tolerance index in Indonesia (Dihni, 2022). In building a tolerant society, one of them requires a moderate religiosity authority. For this reason, research in the micro scope with the subject of mosque officers needs to be carried out to see how they are in religiosity authority in the mosque environment. This study aims to determine the role of mosque officers in building religiosity authority in the mosque.

Research Method

This research uses a constructivist paradigm with a qualitative method, which develops subjective meanings from the experiences of research informants (Creswell, 2016). Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with informants of several mosque officers in Pekanbaru city. The results of interviews and supporting data collected were then processed and analyzed by using an interactive model with three steps, namely data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/ verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The research findings were then discussed in depth in relation to other research and phenomena in line with the research theme.

Results and Discussion

Mosques in Pekanbaru generally have mosque officers who are in charge of running the mosque's activity program. Mosque officers have religiosity authority, namely as mediators and community advisors in problems that occur in the community related to religious matters. Most mosque officers in Pekanbaru are students who are looking for additional income. In addition to receiving income from the mosque management, mosque officers are usually given a place to live within the mosque complex. The

goal is that mosque officers can carry out mosque activities every day. Mosque management generally choose students to become mosque officers because they have an adequate education, are not tied to work, and are good discussion partners for mosque management in designing mosque activity programs. The selected students also generally have adequate religious backgrounds such as madrasah (Islamic school) or Islamic boarding school alumni. This religious and academic educational background makes mosque officers have the opportunity to influence religiosity authority in the all mosques.

Existence of Mosque Officers

Mosque officers (called *marbots*, the term in the research location *takmir*) are not the rulers of the mosque, but as servants for the congregation. For this reason, mosque officers must be able to pay attention to the community, especially those who directly related to efforts to prosper the mosque. For this reason, the mosque officer together with the mosque management should design a strategic activity to enliven the mosque so that it does not seem crowded only when there are worship activities. However, the mosque should not burden the congregation, but instead needs to prosper and empower it. For this, mosque officers need to provide guidance and empowerment of the people, as well as the benefit of the congregation.

Informant T, a mosque officer who has been carrying out this activity for three years, revealed that the role of mosque officers is very important because he is the spearhead who must deal directly with the community. Moreover, the mosque he manages is in a residential area, so many residents ask for help in religious matters, such as leading *wirid yasin* (reading *surah Yasin* together), leading funeral arrangements, leading *tahlilan* (reciting a prayer), and so on. Thus, mosque officers must have knowledge and skills in religious rituals and practices so that they are always ready when asked to lead religious activities in the mosque.

The role of mosque officers is very important nowadays. Not only managing the five daily prayers but also contributing and playing a role in community social activities. Because the community really have trusted and believed the existence of the mosque officers. (Interviewed with T).

The mosque officer has the task of maintaining and prospering the mosque in his neighbourhood and making the mosque a means for people to remind each other of the importance of worship as the foundation of religious life (Interviewed with FA).

Informant AT explained that mosque officers generally also act as imam (preacher) for the five daily prayers. The existence of mosque officers is recognized by the surrounding community, especially in implementing the activities in the community. Around the mosque where AT serves, there are many children who need religious education. This provides an opportunity for mosque officers to expand their contribution to religious education by teaching the Quran to them.

You know, not only he teach children the Quran, but he also participates in community religious activities, and also appointed as a leader, coach, and direction giver related to the agenda made by the community and the agenda in the mosque (Interviewed with AT).

From the informant H information, the existence of mosque officers in Pekanbaru is needed by the community. Especially mosque officers who those are students, they are still energetic and have high enthusiasm for carrying out religious and community activities because of the religious background makes them recognized and respected by the society. In this, they are needed in religious activities to prepare lectures, the commemoration of religious holidays, as well as the months of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr (Islamic celebration).

The mosque officers will affect the religious life of the society. The functioning of the mosque as a place of worship and a center for community development is determined by their creativity in carrying out social and religious activities in the mosque. Most informants revealed that one of the important roles of mosque officers is to prepare religious lecture activities with the mosque management. Invited speakers generally have an inclusive religiosity understanding and are in line with the religious values of the community. While lecture activities, for example lectures after dawn prayer, when there is no preacher, the lecture activities are filled by the mosque officers themselves. Thus, they are also required to be able to convey lecture material to the congregation. For example, fiqh studies, interpretation of the Quran, interpretation of Hadith, and so on. Likewise, if the *khatib* (Friday prayer preacher) is absent, the mosque officer also often acts as a substitute.

Apart from being responsible for the cleanliness and tidiness of the mosque and religious activities, he is also responsible for everything related to worship activities in the mosque. Such as the azan (calling for prayer) for the five daily prayers, being the prayer leader, or being a backup khatib if he is unable to attend (Interviewed with IS).

Seeing the large role of mosque officers in mosque management and religious activities in the mosque, the existence of mosque officers is still very much needed. This shows that mosque management cannot be done alone by the community or mosque administrators, but requires officers who focus on handling mosque management for 24 hours a day. Mosque officers are generally given a place to live in the mosque complex so that they can carry out religious activities quickly so as not to disappoint the congregation. As compensation, mosque officers usually receive monthly salary and additional incentives if they double as Quran teachers at the mosque.

Based on interviews and observations, researchers find that mosque officers in Pekanbaru are generally involved in religious education activities organized by mosques, such as: (1) *Majelis Ta'lim*, which is a religious recitation in the mosque conducted in the form of halaqah or religious lectures; (2) Qur'anic Education Park (TPA), which is an out-of-school religious education institution that functions as a place to teach the basics of religion for children; (3) Qur'anic *Tahsin* Study, which is a coaching activity for worshipers who want to deepen their recitation of the Qur'an and get to know *Tajweed* Science through practical methods.

Religiosity Authority of Mosque Officers

Religiosity authority is an arena for contestation of various religious groups. By holding authority, it is not uncommon for authoritarian actions to be exhibited by judging other groups that are considered to deviate from religious rails that are considered established. Authority is often used to control adherents of other religions, namely controlling their behavior of other religions who are feared to threaten the religion of the owner of the authority. By holding authority, God seems to reside in that person. His words and actions are considered to represent God's words and actions (Rumadi, 2012). The depiction of religiosity authority shows that authority becomes something frightening for different parties. However, in this study the author does not discuss religiosity authority at a macro level, but a more "soft" authority at a micro level, namely the role of mosque officers in holding religiosity authority in the mosque they manage.

The informants of this study generally explained that the main task of mosque officers is to help with daily mosque activities such as cleaning the mosque, carrying out five daily congregational prayers, and becoming a substitute *imam* or preacher if needed. On the other hand, mosque officers have the potential to have religiosity authority if they are given a big role in planning religiosity activities in the mosque and become opinion leaders for the surrounding community. Authority can be possessed by

mosque officers if they have qualified religious knowledge in order to be able to provide solutions to problems or questions related to religion from worshipers.

The takmir of mosques in Pekanbaru have the authority in religion around the mosque management, both in providing direction, criticizing, advising, or fostering people who are still unfamiliar with religious knowledge (Interviewed with T).

In determining religious activities in the mosque, the takmir is obliged to carry out religiosity activities properly by organizing all these activities with efforts as the guidance of Muslim youth in these activities (Interviewed with FA).

The religiosity authority of a mosque officer in fostering and assisting the community in religious matters is sometimes unknown to the mosque congregation. Some information say that researchers get many people or worshipers ask mosque officers about religious issues, the family problems, the economy in Islam, and how to foster and care for children properly. From there it can be taken that being a mosque officer is not a job that everyone can do, but only people who have adequate religious knowledge. With his religious authority, a mosque officer can help the community or congregation according to his religious background. However, if the people in the surrounding environment tend to have different religious preferences, then mosque officers must be able to adapt to these differences. In this context, the mosque officer's religiosity authority is actually elastic, not rigid to certain religious preferences. Thus, the *takmir* must have a moderate religious views. Someone who has a certain view of religious fanaticism is difficult to become a mosque officer in a heterogeneous environment.

Being a takmir in the mosque can socialize and provide examples to the congregation for the importance of respecting differences, so that religious harmony in the mosque and its environment are stronger, and there is no uproar due to differences of opinion in the scope of worship and social (Interviewed with IS).

To build a sense of tolerance and harmony in the mosque environment, gharim must be able to tolerate each other, namely by not imposing their own wishes in society, not demeaning others, respecting other people's opinions, and maintaining mutual friendship with the community in the mosque environment (Interview with FA).

Although mosque officers are seen as having religiosity authority in the mosque which is actually influenced by the mosque management. Especially if the mosque administrators are people who have religious intellectual circles, such as teachers, lecturers, and so on. These people usually become the main opinion leaders in the mosque environment, because their religious understanding is deeper than mosque officials. Especially if they have experience in leading religious activities. Thus, the influence of their religiosity authority is stronger and can even influence mosque officials.

Being a mosque officer, of course, the religiosity authority he has is in accordance with what the mosque management instructs us to do, because whatever he does is of course also based on the direction of the mosque management (Interviewed with IS).

But however, role of mosque officers is limited. In some activities they are not involved, because those are the role of the worship department in the management of the mosque. Takmir just stays, cleans the mosque facilities and looks after the goods (Interviewed with ZN).

To determine preachers or religious leaders in religious activities, only the management has the authority, takmir only follows what is appointed by the management (Interviewed with FA).

The findings show that in a mosque with the dominant religiosity authority of the mosque management, the mosque officers only play an implementing role. However, the role of mosque officers is still very important because mosque administrators are generally more involved in planning, while the technical implementation is coordinated by mosque officers. For this reason, good cooperation between the mosque management and *takmir* is needed so that religious activities in the mosque run well to create a harmonious life.

Conclusion

The mosque officer is needed in religious activities in the mosque. He plays an important role in prospering the mosque through daily worship activities, educational activities, and mosque-based social activities. Here, mosque officer can also act as community opinion leader in religious matters, so one of the requirements for becoming mosque officers must have good religious knowledge, so most of them are the alumni of Islamic school. The religiosity authority of *takmir* can actually influence religious activities in the mosque, but generally the mosque and its environment are inhabited by people with heterogeneous religious preferences, so mosque officers must be able to be moderate and is not fanatic in certain religious preferences. Meanwhile, if the mosque management has dominant religiosity authority, the mosque staff only acts as executor. An important finding related to religiosity authority in the mosque in the research location is the existence of efforts to build a tolerant and harmonious religious life.

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