
Innovation of Islamic *wasathiyah* education methods: Transformation of da'wah in the contemporary era

IMAM SYAFI'I*

Abstract

This study examined the innovative Islamic *wasathiyah* learning methods at Al-Akbar Mosque, Surabaya, which emphasize moderation, balance, and inclusiveness, and integrate the values of tolerance and anti-extremism. Qualitative-descriptive method with participatory observation techniques, in-depth interviews, and document studies was used. The educational approach at Al-Akbar Mosque involved various methods, ranging from one-way teaching to multi-directional discussions, maintaining local traditions that align with Islamic teachings. Worship practices such as congregational dhikr, congregational prayers, and commemoration of Islamic holidays were used, GenZi studies that reflect the constructive spirit of Islamic *wasathiyah*, and supporting facilities such as eco-green playmates, general poly, dental poly, cupping therapy, and Islamic education institutions (PAUD, MI, Madrasah Aliyah and Ma'had Ali). Other facilities, such as urban farming, Civilization Park, Asmaul Husna Park, Healthy Heart Club, and Gen Z Park were used, which support social, health, and educational activities, hope to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of adaptive mosque da'wah and strengthen Islamic *wasathiyah* in Indonesia.

Keywords

Inclusive Islam, non-formal da'wah forum, transformation of educational strategies

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*Universitas Terbuka, Banten, Indonesia, Corresponding author: imam.syafi'i@ecampus.ut.ac.id

Introduction

Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world (Prameswari et al., 2022), bears a great responsibility to represent the teachings of Islam, which are full of the values of justice (Chadidjah et al., 2021), affection, and tenderness as rahmatan lil 'alamin (Ridwan et al., 2022). However, efforts to build a moral society according to the principles of *wasathiyah* (moderate) Islamic still face various challenges (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024), including conflicts in the political, social, and sensitive realms such as ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations (Kuntarto et al., 2021).

In response to today's complex social realities, the need for innovation in moderate Islamic education teaching methods is becoming increasingly relevant (Zuhri, 2022). This education is expected to instill a broad understanding of religion and form a noble character, attitude, and personality (Marta et al., 2024) that uphold the values of humanity and togetherness (Ramdhan & Arifin, 2025). Through innovative approaches (Khair et al., 2024), Islamic education can embrace all levels of society, opening up an inclusive dialogue space, and inculcate the values of democracy, equality, and justice constructively (Maulana et al., 2024).

A concrete form of such efforts can be found in the role of the Ta'lim Council as a non-formal educational institution (Fadli, 2023). Based on Minister of Religion Regulation No. 29 of 2019, the Ta'lim Council is recognized as having a strategic role in instilling moderate Islamic values in Indonesia (Choirin et al., 2024). In various urban areas, the Ta'lim Assembly functions as a means of worship. It becomes a center for learning and developing Islamic understanding that encourages an internal dialogue among Muslims (Agustina et al., 2024), strengthens tolerance, and instills the spirit of Islam that respects diversity (Ramdhan & Arifin, 2025). With an innovative learning approach, the Ta'lim Council significantly strengthens religious moderation (Rizkiyah, 2023). It becomes one of the main pillars in social harmony (Maulana et al., 2024).

The findings of the initial observations in Surabaya strengthen the evidence that the Ta'lim Council plays an important role in internalizing the values of religious moderation in the community. The administrators of the Ta'lim Council have a strategic position as agents to spread the values of tolerance, diversity, and social empathy (Fadli, 2023). The Ta'lim Council has become a model for strengthening Islamic *wasathiyah* education, as demonstrated by the Al-Akbar Mosque's Ta'lim Council in Surabaya, which consistently teaches tolerant, inclusive, and balanced Islamic teachings.

The Ta'lim Council of Al-Akbar Mosque Surabaya has become a real example of disseminating moderate Islamic teachings through innovative learning approaches (Panggabean & Zainun, 2024). Based on the observations, the implementation of religious education at the Ta'lim Assembly shows extraordinary quality, which is reflected in the high participation of pilgrims who reach thousands of people from various levels of society, ranging from children and teenagers to adults, including community leaders and officials. Such behavior reflects the public's enthusiasm for religious learning, which is loaded with moderate values, such as tolerance (Syafi'i & Rofi'i, 2023), openness, and respect for differences.

The routine activities include daily recitation after the Maghrib and Fajr prayers and commemorating Islamic holidays such as the Prophet's Birthday, 1 Muharram, and Isra' Mi'raj. In addition, special programs such as the monthly study "GenZi" (Islamic Generation Z) are aimed at young people. Another unique feature of the Ta'lim Assembly is its use of digital

media such as radio, Instagram, and YouTube as a da'wah. This digital platform expands teaching reach and makes the messages of Islamic moderation more accessible to the broader community (Hadiyanto et al., 2025), especially the younger generation.

Several previous studies have discussed Islamic *wasathiyah* from various perspectives. For example, Amirullah (2024) examined the role of mosques as centers for *wasathiyah* da'wah, Kader et al. (2024) described the strategy of religious moderation education at the Converts Council, Panggabean and Zainun (2024) highlighted the management of the Taklim Council contact institution in improving the religious literacy of mothers in Medan, and Rosidin et al. (2024) described the religious moderation programs. However, few studies have specifically examined innovations in Islamic *wasathiyah* teaching methods within the Majelis Ta'lim (Islamic study group), particularly in metropolitan areas like Surabaya. This research highlights the transformation of moderate learning methods within the Majelis Ta'lim as part of a relevant da'wah strategy in the contemporary era.

Methodology

Research design, location, and participants

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive approach to describe innovative learning methods for Islamic *wasathiyah* at the Al-Akbar National Mosque in Surabaya. This approach was chosen because it enabled the exploration of meaning, values, and practices within the real-life context of religious and social life.

The research location was the Al-Akbar National Mosque in Surabaya, one of the largest mosques in Indonesia, known for its diverse religious, educational, and social activities that reflect the values of moderate Islam (Wasathiyah). This site was selected purposively due to its success in implementing Islamic moderation principles within a heterogeneous urban society. The participants in this study consisted of six male individuals, selected using purposive sampling based on their active involvement in the Majelis Taklim (Islamic study gatherings) and educational management at the mosque. They included key administrators, imams, guest speakers, active congregants, and field implementers. The selection criteria for participants were as follows.

- Actively involved in mosque educational and da'wah (Islamic preaching) activities for at least three years.
- Having a clear understanding of the concept of Islamic *wasathiyah*.
- Directly involved in the innovation of learning methods within the mosque environment.

Table 1. *Participants' profile*

Code	Initials	Role/Position	Interview date	Interviewer
I1	M.S	Head of the Executive and Management Board of Al-Akbar National Mosque Surabaya	October 2, 2024	Imam
I2	K.I	Executive and Manager of Al-Akbar National Mosque Surabaya	October 2, 2024	Imam
I3	A.M	Permanent Imam and Speaker for <i>Nasaihul 'Ibad</i> Book Study	October 1, 2024	Imam

Code	Initials	Role/Position	Interview date	Interviewer
I4	A.N.H	Permanent Imam and Speaker for Qur'anic Tafsir Study	October 8, 2024	Imam
I5	A.B	Speaker for the Subuh (Dawn) Study Session	October 22, 2024	Imam
I6	M.T	Speaker for <i>Tahsin al-Qur'an</i> Study	October 18, 2024	Imam

Data were collected using the following primary method: In-depth interviews with seven key informants were guided by semi-structured interview questions to encourage openness and depth of information. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving identifying meaningful patterns, grouping data based on central themes, and connecting these themes to relevant theories and contextual insights from the field. Additionally, this analysis was conducted systematically through data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and drawing conclusions.

Findings and Discussion

Islamic wasathiyah at the Al-Akbar mosque in Surabaya

The Al-Akbar National Mosque Surabaya (MAS) was established on August 4, 1995, on the initiative of the former Mayor of Surabaya, H. Soenarto Soemoprawiro. Vice President Try Sutrisno carried out the groundbreaking. After experiencing several obstacles, including the monetary crisis, this mosque was finally inaugurated by President KH Abdurrahman Wahid on November 10, 2000. MAS has a distinctive architecture with one large dome surrounded by four small pyramid-shaped domes, representing the pillars of Islam. The 99-meter-high tower in this mosque symbolizes the 99 names of Allah (*Asmaul Husna*). Seven towers were planned to be built, but due to the economic crisis of 1997, only one tower was realized (Puspaningtyas et al., 2024).

The implementation of *wasathiyah* (moderate) Islam at Al-Akbar National Mosque Surabaya is reflected in various aspects of its religious activities, which emphasize values of balance, tolerance, and inclusivity. Through regular Islamic study sessions (*kajian*), congregational prayers, and celebrating Islamic holidays, the mosque promotes a peaceful and welcoming approach, steering clear of any extremism.

This spirit of moderation is also evident in the management of *majelis taklim* (Islamic study forums), which are open to people from all walks of life. Religious teachings delivered in these forums are not exclusive or rigid but aim to unite diverse perspectives within the *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) framework. Beyond religious instruction, the mosque's commitment to *wasathiyah* is also seen in its social and educational initiatives. Al-Akbar Mosque functions as a place of worship and a community service center, providing programs such as health counseling, children's education, and inclusive spaces for interfaith dialogue.

With its warm and open atmosphere, Al-Akbar Mosque has become a symbol of moderate Islamic preaching, deeply rooted in humanitarian values and the Islamic teaching of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation). This perspective was articulated during an interview with K.I., the coordinator of the *majelis taklim* at Al-Akbar National Mosque, who emphasized how these values guide the structure and content of the mosque's religious and social programs.

The *Majelis Taklim* at Al-Akbar Mosque in Surabaya is founded upon the spirit of Islamic *wasathiyah*—a form of Islam that is moderate and unifying. It is often likened to a large house with multiple rooms representing key aspects of Islamic life, such as worship, da'wah, social engagement, and education. This spirit is rooted in the Qur'anic teaching in *Surah Al-Baqarah* (2:143), emphasizing balance and justice. The *Majelis Taklim* is committed to fostering an inclusive, high-quality Islamic education widely accepted by the community. This commitment is based on the Ash'ariyah creed, adheres to the jurisprudential traditions of the four majors in Sunni schools (Hanafiyah, Malikiyah, Syafi'iyah, and Hanabilah), and aligns with government programs by defined Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The religious practices conducted at the *Majelis Taklim* of Al-Akbar National Mosque—including congregational *dhiker*, *wirid*, *shalawat*, celebrations of the Prophet's Birthday (*Maulid Nabi*), Isra' Mi'raj, 20-rak'ah *Tarawih* prayer followed by 3-rak'ah *Witir*, congregational *Tabajjud*, and *Tasbih* prayer—reflect a deep commitment to the calm, moderate teachings of *Ablussunnah wal Jamaah*.

These activities are carried out under strict guidelines, including prohibitions against radical behavior, avoiding divisive conflicts or provocative debates (*ikehtilaf*), and emphasizing mutual respect, particularly the principle of not disparaging other groups. Moreover, the mosque's activities are designed to support national policies, representing a model of Islam that is constructive, peaceful, and harmonious within the context of national life.'

A reinforcing statement about Islamic *wasathiyah* was also conveyed by the speaker, M.Z., who explained that *wasathiyah* moderation is an essential characteristic and inherent nature of Islamic education. It reflects the innate balance (*fitrah*) of Islam, avoiding both extremes: not excessive like the Christians nor belittling like the Jews. Islam stands in the middle, between excess and neglect, enabling a broad and balanced worldview that can objectively observe both the right and the left, without falling into far-right or far-left extremism.

He emphasized that Islamic *wasathiyah* is open to contemporary paradigms, discourses, and insights if they are aligned with the Qur'an and Sunnah, and it upholds the fatwas issued by authoritative scholars who possess legitimate religious authority.



Characteristics of participants and strategies for innovation in Islamic wasathiyah education

Based on the interview findings, the implementation of Islamic *wasathiyah* education at Al-Akbar Mosque emphasizes the principles of moderation, tolerance, and diversity. The congregation of the *Majelis Taklim* consists of individuals from various age groups and professional backgrounds, demonstrating broad acceptance of an inclusive and peaceful

approach. This aligns with the statement made by M.S., the head of the mosque's management, who highlighted the mosque's commitment to these values.

Islamic *wasathiyah* education is implemented and embodied through an approach that views Islam as a rahmatan lil 'alamin (a mercy to all creation), which embraces without coercion, is kind without anger, and respects differences of opinion, both internally within Islamic teachings and externally. In Islamic education, differences in usuliyah (fundamental principles), such as the number of rak'ahs in prayer, are maintained uniformly, such as the two rak'ahs of the Subuh prayer, which is consistent worldwide. Meanwhile, differences are respected and not contested in matters of furuiyah (secondary issues), such as qunut or the way of dhikr after prayer. Although members and administrators predominantly lead the management of this institution from Nahdlatul Ulama, the *Majelis Taklim* at Al-Akbar remains **inclusive**, welcoming contributions from various *pentausiyah* (speakers) and *khatib* (preachers) without claiming ownership by any one specific organization. In line with the Imam of the Al-Akbar National Mosque, with the initials A.M., revealed,

“The innovation in Islamic *wasathiyah* education methods has unique characteristics that integrate worship practices with mosque institutions, including implementing prayers that do not burden the congregation. Even when long verses are recited, they are done in a measured manner. In the *Majelis Taklim*, beneficial local traditions are preserved without contradicting the core teachings of *ushuluddin*, *shari'ah*, and religious principles, while instilling the value of tolerance (*tasamuh*), which fosters harmonious relationships with diverse groups. Based on the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah creed, this *Majelis Taklim* encourages moderate, balanced, and inclusive Islamic *wasathiyah*, capable of addressing all aspects of life—whether in public society, politics, bureaucracy, or daily activities. The implementation of Islamic *wasathiyah* at the Al-Akbar National Mosque's *Majelis Taklim* is reflected in attitudes of smiling, greeting others warmly, and strengthening silaturahmi (social bonds), such as shaking hands after prayer. Congregants are invited to engage in congregational dhikr to support those still learning about religious teachings, thus creating an inclusive learning atmosphere. Tolerance is applied to both fellow Muslims and non-Muslims, as long as it remains within the boundaries aligned with religious teachings, positioning Islam as a mercy to all humankind. This perspective is expressed by the Imam Rawatib of Al-Akbar Mosque, who is also a *pentausiyah*, a media resource person, and a preacher at various mosques in Surabaya.”

Methods of delivering Islamic wasathiyah at Al-Akbar Mosque Surabaya

The methods of delivering Islamic *wasathiyah* at Al-Akbar Mosque Surabaya are carried out through interactive sermons, thematic studies, and digital media such as YouTube and Instagram (promoting openness). This approach emphasizes the values of moderation, tolerance, and openness, delivered by competent speakers referencing the Qur'an, Hadith, and authoritative schools of thought, making it accessible and acceptable to all groups. The methods of Islamic *wasathiyah* in the *Majelis Taklim* at Al-Akbar National Mosque are implemented with the principle of openness, without prioritizing or promoting the interests of any specific organization. Although most management comes from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), bringing any organization's flag or prioritizing a particular group's agenda is not permissible. This *Majelis* also involves khatib and pentausiyah from Muhammadiyah, who are committed to providing an Islamic education that is tolerant, merciful, and inclusive of all groups. In the

learning process, Islam is taught in a way that avoids blaming others, does not justify a single truth, but focuses on spreading values that are soothing and inclusive.

The learning approach is not one-sided but incorporates interactive discussions and multi-directional methods, including the congregation's involvement in asking questions, engaging in dialogue, and expressing opinions. Below is the answer from the interview with **A.B.**

‘Islamic *wasathiyah* education in the *Majelis Taklim* at Al-Akbar Mosque combines various approaches, from one-way and two-way to multi-directional discussions, where every input from the congregation is welcomed and considered. The education delivered is complete with rahmah (mercy) and compassion, particularly in showcasing the behavior and noble character of the salafussholih scholars, which everyone, including non-Muslims, can observe. Their conduct reflects moderate Islam, which prioritizes love for others, especially fellow Muslims, and demonstrates excellent character towards guests, including non-Muslims such as mosque staff and security. This respectful behavior teaches that noble character can serve as a means of hidayah (guidance). This Islamic *wasathiyah* education emphasizes that Islam is not a religion of force, but one that attracts people's sympathy, as was the case in Madinah before the arrival of Islam.’

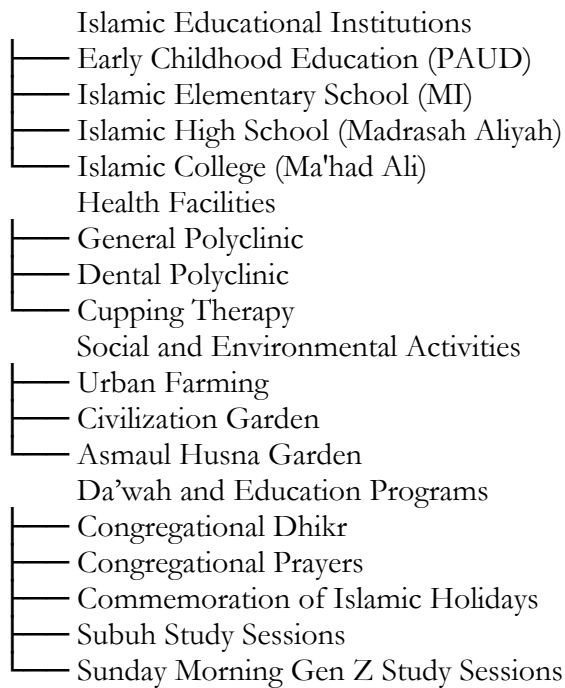
The innovations in Islamic *wasathiyah* education at Al-Akbar Mosque Surabaya include,

- Digital media platforms, including YouTube, WhatsApp, and various social media sites, disseminate da'wah (Islamic preaching).
- Gamification of learning, such as Islamic quizzes, door prizes, and Gen Z study rewards.
- A contextual approach, addressing contemporary issues such as the environment, Islamic economics, and peaceful Islamic politics.
- The delivery of soothing materials emphasizes the importance of positive character, tolerance (*tasamuh*), and compassion.
- Social-educational activities supporting moderate Islam's values include urban farming, civilization gardens, and Taman Asmaul Husna.

All of these activities demonstrate that Al-Akbar Mosque is not just a place of worship, but also an innovative and adaptive center for Islamic education in response to the challenges of the times.

M.T., an active member of the *Majelis Taklim* at Al-Akbar Mosque, emphasizes moderate education, considering its benefits and potential negative impacts. It is not solely based on personal, group, or factional interests. The management of this mosque is oriented toward protecting and guiding the community, bearing in mind that Al-Akbar Mosque is a national institution under strict government supervision. For example, during the pandemic, the mosque fully supported government programs by issuing circulars to the congregation regarding health protocols and vaccination, making it a model highlighted by the media. In the educational context, materials such as Hadith and Tafsir are delivered by competent and recognized scholars, using appropriate instruments and ensuring that no explanation is based on personal desires or interests.

Figure 1. *Organizational structure and programs of MAS*



Source: MAS Documentation and Researcher's Observation

The washatiyah approach in Islamic education

Islamic education has a central role in shaping the character of the moderate ummah (wasathiyah) (Marta et al., 2024), because the fundamental values of Islamic teachings are justice, balance, and goodness in all aspects of life (Rohman et al., 2022). The concept of Islamic *wasathiyah* developed by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia is understood as an inclusive and adaptive approach to religious education in the pluralistic reality of Indonesian society (Ramdhan & Arifin, 2025), without ignoring the purity of Islamic teachings sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith as the main foothold (Farhan & Subagio, 2024).

This approach teaches how Islamic values can be contextualized with dynamic social realities (Nasution, 2025), using reason and revelation in harmony to answer the challenges of the times (Nugroho et al., 2024), while at the same time avoiding the abuse of religion as a tool of justification in the political (Azca, 2024), social (Agustina et al., 2024), and economic (Panggabean & Zainun, 2024) realms.

Wahbah al-Zuhaily said that moderate character includes balance in three main dimensions: faith, amaliah (worship behavior), and akhlak (morality) (Kustiadi, 2024). In line with that, Salik groups the principles of moderation in Islam into three pillars, namely moderation in belief (tauhid), in carrying out the sharia (Islamic law) (Salik, 2024), and in social life as individuals and citizens (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024).

Responding to the importance of strengthening the value of moderation, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) formulated ten main characteristics of Islamic *wasathiyah* as the foundation of educational jihad, namely, tawassuth (middle attitude), tawazun (balance), i'tidal (firm and straight), tasamuh (tolerance), musawah (equality), shura (deliberation), islah

(improvement), awlawiyah (priority), tathawwur wa ibtikar (innovation and creativity), and tahaddhur (civilization and manners) (Yuminah, 2024).

Through the integration between the vision of ukhrawi (the hereafter) and readiness to face the life of the world (Purwanto et al., 2023), Islamic *wasathiyah* education is directed to create a peaceful, harmonious, and mutually respectful social order, both in the context of religion and nationality (Maulana et al., 2024). This kind of education is relevant in maintaining harmony and the foundation for building a just, inclusive, and ethical civilization amid Indonesia's plurality (Hefner, 2020).

Innovation of Islamic education methods in the Ta'lim council

The Ta'lim Council, as a non-formal educational institution, has a strategic role in conveying Islamic teachings to the community (Diba et al., 2024). In facing the challenges of the times and the increasingly complex development of the needs of pilgrims, innovation in learning methods must be applied (Fricitarani et al., 2023). The primary purpose of this innovation is to increase the religious understanding, motivation, and participation of pilgrims in the activities of the Ta'lim Assembly (Widoyo et al., 2024), especially in conveying the values of Islamic *wasathiyah*, which are moderate, tolerant, and inclusive (Ajizah, 2023).

One form of innovation that can be done is to utilize digital technology in the learning process (Dewi et al., 2023). Social media and online conferencing platforms such as YouTube, Zoom, Instagram, or WhatsApp allow worshippers to stay connected and access religious materials even when they are not present in person (Fricitarani et al., 2023). In addition to expanding the reach, this technology also clarifies information regarding the schedule of activities, the materials discussed, and the speakers who will attend, so pilgrims can more easily plan their participation.

Additionally, the interactive lecture method represents a significant innovation in delivery. In this approach, pilgrims are passive listeners invited to actively discuss, ask questions, and express opinions (Church, 2021). This two-way interaction provides a space for pilgrims to understand the material more deeply and contextually with the reality of their lives. This active engagement also reinforces a more reflective and meaningful learning experience (Howell, 2021).

The Ta'lim Council can also apply gamification elements, a learning approach that integrates game features to enhance the enthusiasm and involvement of worshippers (Rivera & Garden, 2021). Islamic quizzes with simple prizes, door prize draws, the provision of free consumption, and motivational programs like Umrah prizes for active participants are examples of how gamification can be applied. For children and adolescents, activities such as competitions for memorizing Qur'anic verses or educational games can build interest (Bouchrika et al., 2021) in the study.

Furthermore, the study materials in the Ta'lim Assembly need to be designed contextually based on the actual issues in the society (Susanti et al., 2021). Themes such as health, Islamic entrepreneurship, fiqh muamalah, environmental issues, and other social phenomena can be studied with a solution-oriented and relevant Islamic approach. Concrete examples, such as studies on waste management based on Islamic values or discussions on market transactions from the perspective of fiqh muamalah, will help the congregation relate religious teachings to their daily lives.

To improve the quality and scope of da'wah, the Majelis Ta'lim can also expand cooperation with various parties, such as formal and non-formal educational institutions,

community organizations, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies (Anas, 2023). This collaboration allows for the presence of competent speakers, such as academics or professional practitioners, who can enrich the learning material and provide a broader perspective to the congregation. With strong synergy, the Majelis Ta'lim can transform into an inclusive, contextual, and transformative space for Islamic preaching and education amidst dynamic social changes (Widoyo et al., 2024).

Al-Akbar Mosque Surabaya implements the principles of Islamic *wasathiyah* by emphasizing moderation, tolerance, and inclusivity. This is reflected in various programs such as adaptive religious studies, using digital media to reach congregations, and applying gamification to increase participation. The Subuh study sessions and the involvement of competent speakers help broaden the congregation's understanding of Islamic teachings relevant to the times. In addition, the mosque is also active in social and environmental activities, such as urban farming and environmental management education, which support values of tolerance and cooperation. Therefore, the Al-Akbar Mosque serves as a place of worship and a center for da'wah and education, contributing to developing a peaceful, just, and inclusive society.

Conclusion

This study indicates that Al-Akbar Mosque Surabaya has successfully developed innovative methods of teaching Islamic *wasathiyah*, emphasizing moderation, balance, and inclusiveness. Through a qualitative-descriptive approach with participatory observation and in-depth interviews, it was found that the mosque integrates various teaching methods, from one-way lectures to interactive discussions, while maintaining local traditions in alignment with Islamic teachings.

Regular worship activities and study programs, like GenZi, embody the constructive and anti-extremist spirit of Islamic *wasathiyah*. Supported by various social, educational, and health facilities such as PAUD, MI, Madrasah Aliyah, Ma'had Ali, thematic gardens, health services, and urban farming, Al-Akbar Mosque serves as an inclusive learning and empowerment center. Theoretically and practically, this model can serve as a reference for developing adaptive mosque-based da'wah and strengthening Islamic *wasathiyah* values in Indonesia.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

Use of AI Statement

The authors declared that they had not used any AI tools in their manuscript preparation and submission.

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Biographical Note

IMAM SYAFI'I is a lecturer at Universitas Terbuka, Banten, Indonesia.