

# Survivability of Malaysian Mosques During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review

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## ABSTRACT

*The COVID-19 pandemic has affected numerous institutions and facilities in Malaysia, impacting religious events and mosques. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the Malaysian government to issue a Movement Control Order (MCO) and standard operating procedure (SOP) for congregational prayer during the pandemic as a safety measure to curb the spread of the pandemic. However, this decision affects the mosque's economy. Due to the lack of systematic review on the survivability of Malaysian mosques during the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper will undertake this topic. Several databases were used to amass research papers using the PRISMA method. Finally, 16 research papers were collected. Four themes were then drawn from all the research, with mosque management ranking the best, followed by worship's standard operating procedure (SOP), communities' role, and digital application. The results reveal numerous studies on mosque management to adapt with SOP, but a lack of guidelines in ensuring the sustainability of mosque finance during the pandemic. This study alerts the authorities to solve this issue so they will be more prepared if MCO happens again.*



**Keywords:** COVID-19, finance, Malaysia, mosque, movement control

## INTRODUCTION

A mosque is a place of worship for Muslims as mentioned in the Quran surah al-Jinn: 18;

*“And that the mosques are Allah’s, therefore call not upon anyone with Allah”*

(al-Jinn, 72: 18)

Allah also decrees that those who continue to visit the mosque are those with good character.

*“Only those who believe in God, the Day of Judgment, perform their prayers, pay the zakat, and have fear of God alone have the right to establish and patronize the mosque of God so that perhaps they will have the right guidance”*

(al-Taubah, 9: 18)

Hence, the mosque serves as a significant venue for Muslims to pray in congregation, particularly the five daily prayers that are required, and to give Friday’s sermons before doing a congregational noon prayer. An area that does not have congregational prayer without any reasonable excuses is forbidden in Islam. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

*There are no three people in a town or encampment among whom prayer is not established, but the Shaitan takes control of them. Therefore, stick to the congregation, for the wolf eats the sheep that strays off on its own.*

(Abu Dawud, no. 547)

The initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia concerned a large religious gathering of *Jamaah al-Tabligh* at Sri Petaling Mosque. The medical alarm was detected after the International Health Regulations (IHR) of Brunei contacted its counterpart in Malaysia regarding a positive case that had been validated and confirmed following the attendance of its national at the meeting from February 27 to March 1, 2020 (Md Shah et al., 2020). However, the case subsequently led to a high surge in new cases, with over 50% of cases associated with the gathering participants or close contacts, and it also generated a new cluster of local transmission (Abdullah, 2019).

As a result of the case, a new cluster was developed, and it was established that gatherings for religious purposes at mosque institutions have the potential to spread the deadly virus. Due to this situation, the Malaysian government ordered the suspension of all religious activities at mosques nationwide through the issuance of a Movement Control Order (MCO) known as *Perintah Kawalan Pergerakan* (PKP), which has sparked legal discussion concerning its applicability to Malaysia's Muslim population. Despite this, the Malaysian government has permitted mosques to open and established standard operating procedures (SOP) for congregational prayer during the pandemic. The SOP limits the worshipper from attending mosques which directly affects the mosque's economy. In an interview with one of the mosque committee of Masjid Jamek Sultan Abdul Samad in Wilayah Persekutuan, he said:

*Macam sebelum PKP tu, kita punya pendapatan seminggu lebih kurang, setiap Jumaat lah, dalam empat belas ribu. Sekarang ni dah mula PKP, dah start PKP, lepas PKP ni dah slow dalam sepuluh, kadang-kadang sembilan, lapan (ribu).*

(31 January, 2023)

Translation:

*Before the MCO, our income for every week was about fourteen thousand. But currently after MCO, our income has become less in about nine or eight (thousand).*

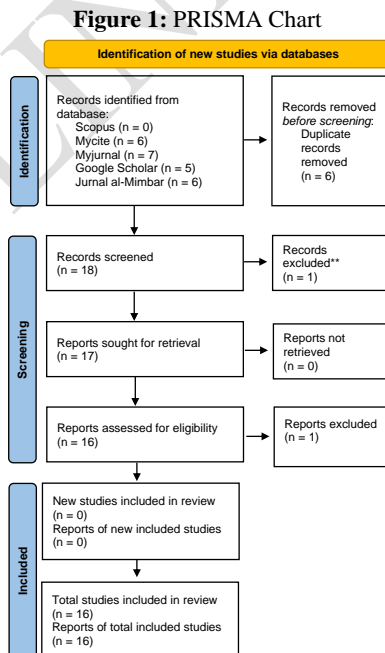
Some articles of systematic review have been written on mosques such as the sustainable design approach for mosques (Sobri et al., 2021), the mosques management model in Indonesia and Malaysia (Sahad et al., 2022), and the state-of-the-art knowledge, techniques, and simulation programs for quantifying human visual comfort in mosque buildings (Ali & Faris, 2023). All of these research papers have not discussed issues regarding mosques in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Only one article of a systematic review discusses the place of worship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bert et al. (2022) wrote a systematic review of 36 articles aimed to describe what has been published on COVID-19 outbreaks originating from indoor places of worship. But this article focuses on general worship places including churches. The research gap that can be concluded is there are no systematic review papers on the survivability of Malaysian mosques during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the aim of this paper is to examine all the studies related to mosques during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia to find out how mosque survives especially in financial problems.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology, whereby the data collection is retrieved from the databases before being thoroughly evaluated using the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* (PRISMA) method. This is to determine whether they should be included in the review or not. Several databases were used to find relevant articles for this topic, including two Malaysian databases (MyJurnal and MyCite). Scopus and Google Scholar were also used to search relevant mosque and Coronavirus publications. A non-indexed Malaysian journal, the International Journal of Mosque, Zakat and Waqaf Management @ Jurnal al-Mimbar, was also included in this search because it gathered numerous research publications on mosques. The search keywords ‘mosque AND covid’, ‘*masjid* AND covid’, ‘mosque AND movement control order’, and ‘*masjid* AND *perintah kawalan pergerakan*’ were used to find the relevant research papers.

## RESULTS

A total of 16 articles were selected for the systematic review. However, no relevant article could be found in Scopus. Figure 1 illustrates the PRISMA flow chart, while Table 1 indicates a brief summary of the articles selected for the review.



**Table 1:** Summary of articles related to mosques in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic

Author	Main Aim	Method	Result
Ikhmal et al., 2020	To assess the efficiency of the E-mosque application's navigation usability, design usability, and content usability.	Quantitative survey using a questionnaire e. 100 respondents.	In terms of navigation usability, the author explains the definition in detail. In terms of design usability, Abdullah Fahim Mosque's E-Mosque application employs a special symbol to make the app more user-friendly. The COVID-19 icon is a new icon in the app that will help the parishioners seek any necessary help from the mosque management. In terms of content usability, it is critical that all messages reach the neighbourhood surrounding the Abdullah Fahim Mosque. A clear message on the availability of basic food aid for the affected parishioners is displayed. The application also has further information on COVID-19 as well as other government aid.
Harun et al., 2020	To assess the MCO's implementation and rationale for restricting religious activity in mosque in accordance with Islamic law and the <i>maqāsid al-sharī'ah</i> 's (higher objective of sharia).	Qualitative, literary research.	The restriction of congregational prayer is consistent with the boundaries of the <i>maqāsid al-sharī'ah</i> , which comes before the <i>maṣlahah</i> , i.e., the benefits of life ( <i>darūrī</i> , i.e., necessity) rather than the benefits of religion ( <i>hājīyyāt</i> , i.e., wants).
Kamaruddin et al., 2021	To assess the guidelines linked to physical separation in congregational prayers in mosques during MCO according to	Qualitative, literary research.	Physical separation between worshippers during congregational prayers in mosques was in accordance with <i>maqāsid al-sharī'ah</i> , notably in terms of preserving religion and protecting lives. This is based on the opinions of <i>ahl al-khibrāh</i> i.e., scientists in this context, the application of Islamic legal

	<i>maqāṣid al-sharī'ah</i> in the concept of <i>daruriyyat</i> (necessity), Islamic legal maxims, and <i>ahl al-khibrah</i> (expertise).		maxims, and the assessment of <i>maslahah</i> (benefits) between <i>daruriyyat</i> and <i>tahsiniyyat</i> (amelioration).
Ishamuddin & Salleh, 2021	To describe the mosque's role as a preaching institution during the COVID-19 pandemic using Temin Mosque as a sample.	Qualitative. Interview & observation. Three mosque officials as informants.	Mosques play an important role in preaching to society using proper techniques in favour of the current COVID-19 situation. The preaching approaches used to entice the congregation include congregational Friday prayers, and the use of social media, including the WhatsApp app, by providing information to ensure that the local community is always aware of what is going on. The activities that occur inside the mosque are only small-scale.
Salleh et al., 2021	To examine the community's perceptions of mosques' position in the state of Melaka during the implementation of MCO.	A quantitative survey using a questionnaire. 384 respondents.	The vast majority of parishioners concurred that mosques in their local neighbourhoods had effectively assisted parishioners in the aspect of communication, suitability concerning aid, and mosque performance. Only 30.9% gave negative responses.
Nordin, 2021	To examine the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on the congregational prayer in mosques among the Muslim community in Simpang Renggam, Johor, and to assess the importance of	A quantitative survey using a questionnaire. 50 respondents.	First, the impact of MCO on congregational prayer practice had a positive result of 84% and the highest impact on the head of the family's ability to fulfil their responsibilities by leading prayers in their home during the MCO. Second, most respondents agreed on the value of congregational prayer in mosques, with a total mean of 4.93 and a standard deviation of 0.18. Finally, the vast majority of respondents agreed with the government-mandated standard operating procedures for the mosque, with a total mean of

	congregational prayer in the mosque.		4.44 and a standard deviation of 0.86.
Hamzah et al., 2021	To examine the issues experienced by mosques during the COVID-19 outbreak using al-Rahman Pulau Perhentian Mosque as a case study.	A qualitative case study. Observation and interview with one informant.	Al-Rahman Mosque followed strict standard operating procedures as stipulated by the Terengganu Council of Islam and Malay Tradition (MAIDAM), whether for parishioners or tourists. Visitors should take their temperature, write their name or scan the QR code, bring their own prayer mat, and wear a face mask as regular protocol. Due to the tourism sector's closure, the mosque has been visited by approximately 60 young people for a series of al-Quran learning programmes.
Saleh, 2021	To examine the role of mosques in receiving and delivering welfare support to parishioners during the temporary closure of mosques due to the COVID-19 pandemic's MCO.	Qualitative literary research.	During the temporary closure of the mosque due to the MCO of the COVID-19 pandemic, the mosque may still receive and provide financial support to parishioners using the new norm technique and numerous creative efforts. The mosque's temporary closure during the period when the MCO was in effect did not stop the mosque's previous welfare aid programme, such as food banks for parishioners.
Bakar et al., 2021	To examine the problems and challenges that Muslim women have when participating in programmes that enliven the mosque during the MCO season.	Qualitative. Document analysis.	The biggest barrier that Muslim women faced was the restrictions from visiting the mosque during the MCO, only Muslim male worshippers were allowed. They also face some challenges when it comes to engaging in online programmes since some of them have poor internet connections.
Salim et al., 2021	To review how the COVID-19	Qualitative literary research.	The pandemic has led to a reduction in the degree of activism at mosques, thus

	<p>pandemic has affected the mosque institutions' activism, financial health, and digital well-being.</p>		<p>impacting the mosque's financial resources via fundraising. The pandemic also exposed Islamic institutions' lack of readiness in terms of digital literacy, resources, and accessibility. Nevertheless, mosques found creative ways to benefit society in response to their incapacity to perform fundamental functions.</p>
<p>Majid et al., 2022</p>	<p>To determine how satisfied mosque worshipers are with the KUIPSAS (Sultan Ahmad Shah Pahang Islamic College University) Mosque during the MCO.</p>	<p>A quantitative survey using a questionnaire. 83 respondents.</p>	<p>There was a high level of satisfaction with the 16 aspects of mosque management, ranging from 92.5% to 97.5%. This study was able to give a preliminary impression of the worshipers' satisfaction with congregational prayers during the MCO.</p>
<p>Din &amp; Yusak, 2021</p>	<p>To investigate the efforts and determination of the father's role in reviving the mosque's spirit in Muslim families and ensuring the development of long-lasting social capital during MCO in Ramadan.</p>	<p>Qualitative, literary research.</p>	<p>The house has become the most significant venue of worship and the implementation of moral behaviour throughout the lockdown period. Mothers, as fathers' helpers, need to encourage their children more, as well as foster a love of religion and worship in their hearts.</p>
<p>Bodruzzaman &amp; Nurunnabi, 2021</p>	<p>To examine the Islamic Sharia law on three matters of congregational prayers during</p>	<p>Qualitative, literary research.</p>	<p>Firstly, it is acceptable to skip Friday and daily congregational prayers out of fear of the deadly virus. Secondly, as it is a serious sin to cause harm to others, people who had the COVID-19 virus were not permitted to participate in any</p>



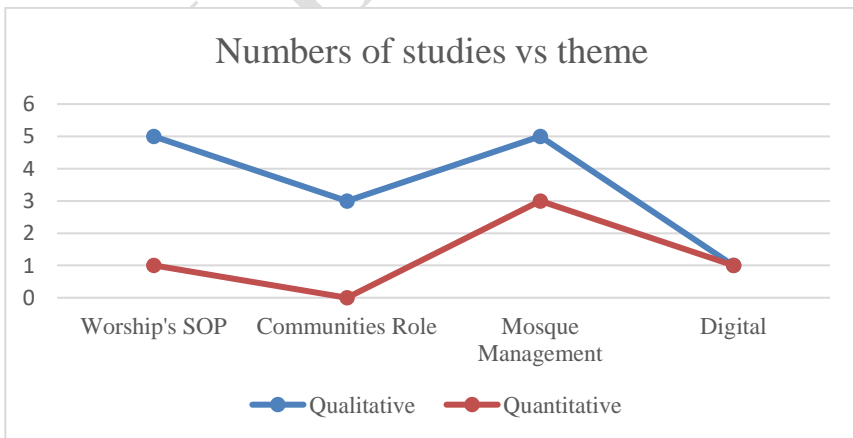
	<p>COVID-19. Firstly, attending Friday and daily congregational prayers. Secondly, attending Friday and daily congregational prayers for those who are already affected. Thirdly, attending Friday and daily congregational prayers in the mosques by following preventive measures.</p>		<p>congregational prayers. Thirdly, it is acceptable to pray while wearing a mask and with physical distance. All of these rulings are based on <i>qiyas</i> (analogy from other rulings) and the views of Islamic scholars.</p>
Omar et al., 2022	To study and analyse the procedures of congregational prayer during MCO and the limitation of its implementation from the perspective of Islamic law.	Qualitative literary research.	It is still within the scope of Islamic scholars' previous opinions to permit Friday congregational prayer to no more than 40 persons. Any procedures set by the authority to deal with COVID-19 in relation to the mosque's prayer activities are in accordance with the spirit of Islam.
Rofie et al., 2022	To explore the role of Kedah Islamic Religious Council (MAIK) management in creating the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) policy	A qualitative interview with one informant.	In order to address the demands of the Muslim community in regard to the administration of Islamic religious matters during the COVID-19 pandemic, MAIK had executed its position as a policy maker. However, MAIK's mission was not solely focused on the aspect of worship; it also functioned as an institution that assisted Muslims in the community on a socioeconomic level, providing

	during the COVID-19 pandemic.		assistance to those in need and other requirements of society.
Remly et al., 2022	To describe the steps that must be taken to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak on the part of the mosque management and congregation members.	A qualitative, literary research.	The mosque staff's responsibilities included educating the congregation about SOP, disseminating da'wah through various channels, and helping the parishioners. On the other hand, the congregation members' roles were to rekindle the mosque's spirit in their own homes, follow the government's SOP for worship, and work with the mosque staff to follow the mosque's SOP.

## DISCUSSION

Four themes are drawn from the various research including mosque management, worship's SOP, communities' roles, and digital application. The number of qualitative and quantitative studies versus the four themes is depicted in Figure 2. In addition, research papers with multiple themes are included in the statistics below.

**Figure 2:** Number of studies vs. themes



## Mosques Management

The study that attracted the most attention was on the management of mosques during the pandemic. Due to the MCO, attendance at the mosque decreased, causing an impact on the mosque funds, which mainly depend on donations (Salim et al., 2021). In addition, some mosques that open their doors to the tourism sector also needed to be closed (Hamzah et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, a mosque is still responsible for preaching religious teachings through various platforms, educating the community about SOP, and helping worshippers facing difficulties (Remly et al., 2022).

According to the findings of field research, mosques continued to offer financial aid to eligible worshippers through various platforms, even during the MCO (Saleh, 2021). Likewise, in matters of knowledge dissemination, mosques utilized diverse ways including *Whatsapp*, *Facebook*, *YouTube*, and other means of communication for preaching purposes (Ishamuddin & Salleh, 2021; Salim et al., 2021). When the MCO rules were slightly relaxed, mosques, such as the Al-Rahman Mosque, were visited by approximately 60 people for a series of al-Quran study programmes (Hamzah et al., 2021). The community was generally satisfied with the function of the mosque in helping the needy (Salleh et al., 2021) and their management during the MCO (Majid et al., 2022).

Concerning the methodology, Hamzah et al. (2021) collected data through observation and interviews, and the data were analysed using Atlas.ti software. However, the size of the informant sample was not specified, and it appeared that the researcher only interviewed one informant. Additionally, despite the author referencing the Atlas.ti software, there was no theme table or word cloud that displayed the results of its use.

## Worship's Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

The SOP of worship during MCO included physical distancing during prayer, limitation of congregation members, wearing masks during prayer, bringing private prayer mats, and others. Only Rofie et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative field study on the administration of the Islamic Council. Most of them are qualitative literature studies focused on the perspective of sharia or *maqasid* (Harun et al., 2020; Kamaruddin et al., 2021; Bodruzzaman & Nurunnabi, 2021; Omar et al., 2022). All of them agreed that the SOP applied in the mosque is in accordance with Islamic Sharia. In contrast, Nordin (2021) conducted a quantitative study that proved that the majority of people accepted the prescribed SOP. On concerns about the methodology employed, Nordin (2021) failed to explain the justification for the sample size. The results of the first

objective are provided as percentages. However, the results of the second and third objectives are presented as standard deviations.

## **Communities Role**

During the MCO, women found it most restricted in terms of their attendance at the mosque because of the SOP guidelines. They could only follow mosque programmes online, and some had poor internet connections (Bakar et al., 2021). During the lockdown, the home became a significant place to revive the spirit of the mosque (Remly et al., 2022). The most important role was for the father and mother to implement good values in children at that time (Din & Yusak, 2021). While at the mosque, members of the congregation played the role of helping the mosque by complying with the government's SOP (Remly et al., 2022). Based on these literature studies and document analysis, the respondents agreed that the community needed to comply with the SOP of worship outlined by the government and suggested that the spirit of the mosque could instead be revived in their own homes.

On the methodological issue, Bakar et al. (2021) briefly mentioned the methodology they employed in the abstract but did not go into detail in the body of the text. Furthermore, the study made no mention of the source of the document or how the researcher obtained it. Consequently, it became unclear how this study was conducted.

## **Digital Application**

This pandemic showed that some mosques had experienced digital literacy but responded with improvised strategies (Salim et al., 2021), as highlighted by several studies reviewed in this paper (Ishamuddin & Salleh, 2021; Salim et al., 2021). For example, the Abdullah Fahim Mosque created a mobile application for usage by their parishioners before the MCO era. The COVID-19 button or icon was a new addition to the apps that allow users to access information from the government or, if they desire, to seek assistance from the mosque (Ikhmal et al., 2020). In Malaysia, there is a severe paucity of research on digital technology and mosques. This validates the necessity for Malaysia to actively develop the use of digital technology by mosques.

## **CONCLUSION**

According to this systematic review, the majority of studies are qualitative, particularly those using the literary method. Nevertheless, these earlier studies demonstrate the necessity to establish guidelines for mosques in Malaysia so

that management, particularly with regard to finances, can be maintained, especially during a pandemic or anything similar. Also, mosques in Malaysia must actively use digital appliances to facilitate the affairs of mosques and worshippers. All of these are to sustain the public health of Malaysian communities by continuing to practice spiritual worship. The responsible authorities should take advanced steps on these issues before it happen again. Even though this initiative had not been done by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) during his lifetime, but all of these are for the comfort of worshippers (Husin et al., 2022).

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## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare no competing interests such as financial or personal relationship regarding the writing of this article.

## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

Author 1 gathered the literature and wrote the article. Co-author 1 designed the study. Co-author 2 reviewed the article.

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