Architectural Dimensions and Beyond

www.adb.reapress.com

Arch. Dim. Bey. Vol. 2, No. 2 (2025) 91–110.

Paper Type: Original Article

Reviving the Cultural and Social Role and Prominent Status of the Mosque in the Modern Era (With a Contextual Architecture Approach)

Fatemeh Elyasy[1,*], Farzaneh Elyasi[1]

[1] Department of Architecture, Qazvin Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qazvin, Iran; elyasyfatemeh@gmail.com; farzaneh.elyasi@yahoo.com.

Citation:

Received: 10 September 2024 *Revised: 11 November 2024* *Accepted: 09 January 2025*	Elyasy, F., & Elyasi, F. (2025). Reviving the cultural and social role and prominent status of the mosque in the modern era (With a contextual architecture approach). *Architectural dimensions and beyond,* 2(2), 91-110.

Abstract

The mosque is one of the manifestations of Islamic art and has long held a special place in Muslim societies, serving as a cultural, social, religious, and even political hub. It has historically been one of the most important centers of social interaction and one of the most prominent urban elements. However, over time, various factors—such as prioritizing form over meaning, lack of sufficient knowledge and awareness of Iranian-Islamic architecture and culture (Especially in the construction of traditional buildings like mosques), and the insistence on blending modern and traditional architecture without a proper understanding of their foundations—have led to the decline of this role. As a result, the mosque has been reduced to a space merely for performing prayers or holding mourning and occasional celebratory ceremonies. This deterioration can negatively impact social interactions and, consequently, social vitality. In today's world, every society, drawing on its own culture and diverse elements, seeks to enhance social and cultural engagement among its members, thereby boosting collective enthusiasm and vitality. Therefore, there is a clear need to change the perception of mosques and to revive their role, identity, and function in contemporary conditions in order to reestablish the historical connection between mosques and people. Thus, through field and library research and using descriptive-analytical methods, this study first examines the reasons behind the decline of mosques in the modern era. Then, by posing questions such as: How can the past relationship between people and the mosque be restored using today's standards? And what are the principles for designing a mosque today, considering societal needs? We aim to propose strategies for revival. Ultimately, we conclude that restoring the mosque's former role and status requires proper site selection and a form of architectural design that aligns with the culture and demands of the present time.

Keywords: Mosque, Form over meaning, Social and cultural interactions, Architecture, Modern era.

1 | Introduction

Places of worship in various religions serve as the embodiment and manifestation of all artistic expression by their creators, and this principle is equally evident in Islam. From the east to the west of the Islamic world, more than in any other domain, the genius of Islamic artists has been dedicated to artistic creations—

Corresponding Author: elyasyfatemeh@gmail.com

particularly in the field of architecture and especially in the design of mosques [1]. For this reason, mosques are often referred to as a complete reflection of Islamic art and architecture. This artistic aspect, alongside their religious and spiritual function, has turned mosques into one of the most significant urban elements with a revered and special status among the people. Historically as well, mosques have been considered as social, cultural, and political hubs, facilitating broad public interactions.

However, in recent years, this vital role and elevated status of mosques has, unfortunately, declined for various reasons that will be addressed in this study. People's connection with mosques is fading, which serves as a serious warning signal. It is essential to investigate the reasons behind this decline and to assess possible solutions. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the issue and present proposals and strategies that will be discussed in the following sections.

2 | Statement of the Problem

The mosque is one of the most prominent and magnificent expressions of Islamic art and architecture. The elements used in its design represent some of the finest examples and are considered a treasure trove of our architectural and cultural heritage. Additionally, the mosque is the greatest spiritual and religious institution in the Islamic world and holds a highly esteemed status among the public. These characteristics have led the mosque to be recognized as a significant and symbolic urban element in Islamic territories, serving as a hub for public gatherings and social, cultural, and political interaction [2].

This underscores the fact that the mosque's function in people's lives has historically been meaningful and influential.

Therefore, in order to maintain this function in the modern era—with all its distractions and everyday busyness—it is necessary to carefully examine the form, function, and location of the mosque, as these are crucial aspects both architecturally and socially.

As we know, the advancement of any society is dependent upon the progress of its individual elements. One cannot expect societal development without the evolution of these components. Given that the mosque is a key element in our society, it can be said that our progress also depends on a shift in perspective and the revitalization of the mosque and other societal elements.

Moreover, considering the mosque's historical significance and vibrant past, we recognize that uncritical imitation and transformation of its elements throughout history have led to a decline in its functionality and a weakened connection between the mosque and the people in contemporary times. Today, the prevailing perception of the mosque has unfortunately been reduced to merely a place for prayer, mourning ceremonies, or occasionally celebratory gatherings. In contrast, in the past, it played a central and highly influential role in social change, the promotion of community spirit, and public interaction.

Therefore, reviving the identity of the mosque to foster social vitality—based on its historically rich performance—is a necessity. Achieving this goal is only possible through an understanding of society's current needs, examining behavioral patterns, and designing spaces that respond to both the physical and spiritual needs of individuals.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

I. To revive the role and status of the mosque as a crucial urban element in Iran.

II. To enhance social and cultural interaction and reinvigorate public vitality through the revival of the mosque's functional role.

III. To promote collective spirit and a culture of cooperation, strengthening community unity through the renewed vibrancy of mosque life.

IV. Achieving appropriate methods and approaches for designing a significant urban element (The mosque) by revisiting its essence and taking into account the needs of contemporary society.

V. Identifying the needs of modern humans and reviving the connection between people and the mosque as it once was.

In light of the issues discussed, several research questions arise:

I. How can the historical relationship between people and the mosque be revived using today's standards?

II. Is it possible to design a mosque with a modern identity while preserving and continuing its spiritual connection?

III. In designing a mosque with a new identity, which elements can make it stand out as a prominent urban landmark?

IV. What are the foundational design principles for today's mosques, considering contemporary societal needs?

3 | Research Background

Studying the background of a research project is essential, as it provides the researcher with access to the achievements of others up to that point. It can also help resolve many challenges and address key research questions. Therefore, we have acknowledged the importance of this step and undertaken a review of relevant studies.

These reviews show that, so far, numerous studies have been conducted on mosques, covering a variety of topics and examining different aspects of their architecture and function. However, most of the research has focused primarily on the geometry, architectural elements, and decorative aspects of mosques. Comparatively, fewer studies have addressed the modernization of mosques, and even in those cases, the proposed solutions often leave room for improvement. This gap underlines the need for increased attention to this area of study.

3.1 | The Evolution of Mosque Structures

In the past, places of worship were the most prominent buildings in all villages and ancient cities. After the advent of Islam, mosques became the most important buildings in cities. These structures were designed and built in such a way that they could be seen from afar [3].

3.1.1 | The first mosques in Islamic history

In the history of Islam, the first mosque that was built was the Quba Mosque, located outside the city of Medina. It was constructed in the first year of the Hijrah (Migration) during the Prophet Muhammad's journey to this city in a village bearing the same name. The structure of this mosque was straightforward and made of sun-dried bricks [3].

However, the mosque that is considered the prototype for the construction of early mosques is the Mosque of Medina (Masjid al-Nabawi), which was established a few days after the Prophet arrived in the city. This mosque is recognized as the second mosque ever built in Islamic history.

3.2 | The Architecture and Structure of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina (Masjid al-Nabawi) As a Model for Other Mosques

As historical accounts state, the location of the mosque was chosen by the Prophet's camel. The Prophet then ordered stones to be taken from the nearest mountain, and these rough stones were used to construct mortarless walls, stacked dry (Without binding materials) to a height equal to that of the tallest Arab man standing with his hands raised toward the sky [4].

After the perimeter wall was built, a portion of the area was roofed. This roofing was temporary and constructed using materials such as animal hides to provide shade from the scorching sun. For beams and columns, palm trunks (Called Pedah or dried date palms) and unfruitful trees were used. A dried palm trunk served as a column, and its branches were used as beams (Farsab). After placing reeds over the beams, animal hides were stretched across the top.

The Prophet's mosque had both an open-air and a covered section. The covered area or prayer hall (Shabestan) measured approximately 7.5 x 8 meters. In front of it was an open courtyard (Miansara) so that people could benefit from the open space and not feel crowded when their numbers increased.

Next to the Shabestan, a modest and straightforward residential space was built for the Prophet's devoted companions and humble spiritual seekers. The open courtyard in front of the Shabestan was leveled and smoothed, and it was separated from the surrounding alleyways and pathways by a low wall [5].

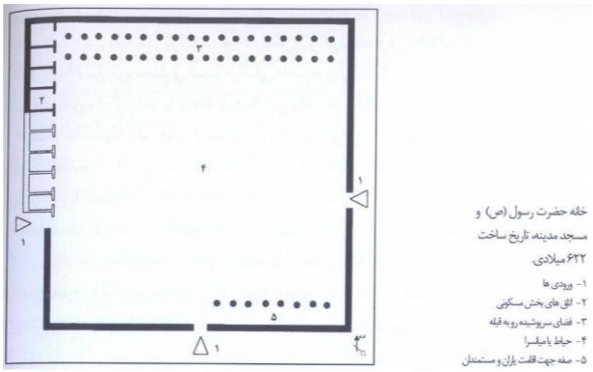

Fig. 1. Plan of the mosque of Medina and the house of the prophet of Islam [5].

3.2.1|Examples of the earliest mosques built based on the model of the prophet's mosque in Medina

As previously mentioned, the Prophet's mosque served as the architectural model for mosque construction throughout the Islamic world during the early years of the Hijrah. Among these early examples are:

I. The Basra mosque (14 AH)

II. The Kufa mosque (17 AH)

III. The Fustat mosque (21 AH)

IV. Early mosques in Iran, such as the Fahraj Mosque (First half of the 1st century AH)

3.2.2|The beginning of structural changes in mosques (During the caliphate rule)

As stated earlier, during the initial years of Islam, mosques were constructed according to the original model—the Prophet's mosque. However, with the establishment of Islam and the rise of the Umayyad dynasty, the form and structure of mosques began to deviate from their original simplicity. Architectural styles from the conquered advanced civilizations, such as Byzantine Rome and Sassanid Iran, were incorporated into mosque designs [6].

The first significant transformation occurred during the reign of the fifth Umayyad caliph when he ordered the complete demolition of the Prophet's mosque. At his request, the Byzantine emperor sent a large number of Byzantine architects and workers along with their native construction materials (Such as stone, wood, marble, gold plates, and special stones for mosaics) to rebuild the mosque in Medina.

As a result, the mosque was reconstructed using decorated stones and Roman marble. The roof was covered with mud plaster, and the interior walls were polished with gold water [7].

This action laid the foundation for future modifications in the form and structure of mosques. From that point onward, transformations in mosque architecture became evident.

Architectural changes under the abbasids and ottomans

With the rise of the Abbasid dynasty and the transfer of the capital to Baghdad, architectural practices from the Sassanid era gained new importance in building design [8].

During the Ottoman sultans' rule, mosque architecture underwent even more drastic changes, evolving toward what we now recognize as the modern mosque form. One significant cause of these changes was a major fire that destroyed almost the entire mosque except for the sacred tomb (Rawdah al-Mutahharah) [6].

3.3 | Evolution of Mosque Structures in Iran

With the introduction of Islam in Iran, there arose an urgent need for prayer spaces for congregational and Friday prayers. This necessity led to the construction of the first mosques in Islamic Iran. Generally, the evolution of mosque architecture in Iran followed three main paths:

I. Construction of mosques following the style and methods of early Islamic mosques in Arabia [9].

II. Conversion and reconstruction of pre-Islamic religious sites (Such as fire temples) into mosques, where possible.

III. The beginning of a distinct Islamic architectural movement in Iran [10].

Initially, Iranian and Muslim architects experienced a pause in designing religious spaces using Iranian styles for divine purposes. This pause allowed them to study the goals and spiritual needs of Islamic architecture [9].
As a result, two differing perspectives have emerged regarding the mosques of this period:

I. The first view holds that these mosques were simple constructions based on the Prophet's Mosque model in Medina and refers to them as "Arab mosques in Iran."

II. The second view considers this label to be unfounded, calling them instead "Shabestani Mosques" and attributing their structure to pre-Islamic Iranian architecture.

For instance, the prominent Iranian scholar Pirnia [11] remarked:

"Shabestani mosques—how did they even come to be called Arab mosques?"

Regardless of the naming, what matters is that both labels refer to the same type of mosque, and the naming does not affect their classification.

3.4 | Structural Classification of Mosques in Iran

In general, early Iranian architects began constructing mosques by enclosing an area with adobe (Mudbrick) walls. A canopy made of wood and reed was placed over this enclosure. Over time, this simple structure evolved:

I. A flat roof of woven reed supported by wooden beams was placed on stone, brick, or adobe columns.

II. Eventually, the flat roof was replaced by vaulted brick ceilings (Known as Taq-e-Zarbi), and the Shabestan or "Forty-column hall" with rows of vaulted coverings became a widespread model [12].

III. An important point to note is that Iran's earliest mosques were often built on the ruins of Zoroastrian fire temples and other pre-Islamic religious buildings that had been partially or entirely destroyed during the Arab conquest. These mosques were typically constructed using the same available materials.

For this reason, Pirnia [13] refers to the Jameh Mosque of Fahraj as the first purpose-built mosque in Iran, meaning it was constructed from the outset as a mosque [12].

He notes:

Otherwise, in other Iranian cities—whose people embraced Islam before those of Fahraj—existing or damaged buildings were reused or renovated for prayer and worship of the one God.

Some examples of mosques built following the Prophet's Mosque model include the Mosque of Yazd Khasht, Jameh Mosque of Boroujerd, Neyriz Mosque, and the Serkoocheh Muhammadieh Mosque in Nayin [11].

Thus, based on this understanding, we will focus only on mosques that were initially constructed as mosques, such as the Jameh Mosque of Fahraj, and will classify them accordingly.

3.4.1 | First category: Shabestani mosques

Generally, these mosques often had a rectangular plan with a central courtyard featuring a large open courtyard and portico, surrounded by Shabestans (Prayer halls) with vaulted ceilings. The materials used in their construction were primarily local materials (Such as mudbrick, native mortars, etc.), and the roofing was determined based on the climate and available materials (Such as vaulted ceilings, etc.).

An important point about these mosques is that they show characteristics of the Khurasani style, which retains influences from pre-Islamic Iranian architecture. Therefore, the following features can be considered for them:

I. Simplicity in design.

II. Avoidance of excessiveness or unnecessary embellishment.

III. Accessibility to the people.

Use of local building materials [7].

Some of the mosques built in the Shabestani style include:

I. Jameh Mosque of Fahraj (Perhaps the oldest mosque in Iran).

II. Tarikhaneh Mosque in Damghan.

III. Jameh Mosque of Isfahan (In its early form).

IV. Early Jameh Mosque of Saveh.

V. Nayin Mosque, and others.

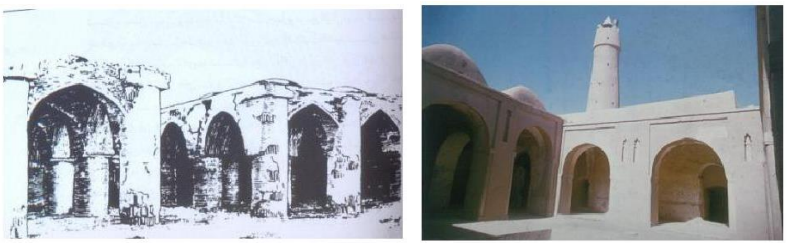

Fig. 2. Fahraj mosque [5], [9].

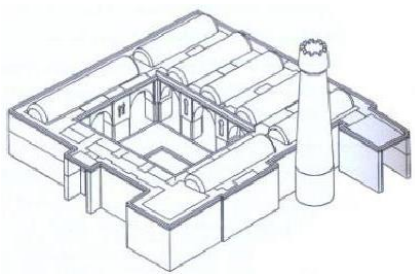

Fig. 3. Tarikhaneh mosque plan [5].

Another point is that these mosques, until the first and second centuries of the Hijra, were built following the same simple pattern, with simple structures. It wasn't until the early third century of the Hijra that Abu Muslim Khurasani constructed a vast and magnificent mosque in his base, Nishapur. After this, mosques like Abu Muslim's mosque, and perhaps even under his order, with smaller sizes, were established not only in Nishapur but also in many famous cities and villages of Iran. Thus, from the third century until the beginning of the

fifth century of the Hijra, most mosques in Iran were constructed in this manner, with each mosque's beauty and elegance continually enhanced [5].

3.4.2 | Second category: Dome-style mosques

As we know, the four-arch or dome-style architecture is related to pre-Islamic Iranian architecture, which began during the Parthian era and reached its peak during the Sassanian period. It features a square base with a dome-shaped roof consisting of four supports and a central dome arch. It was widely used in the construction of fire temples and places of worship in pre-Islamic Iran.

With the arrival of Islam in Iran, these places of worship were either destroyed or their entrances facing the Qibla were closed off, and a mihrab (Niche) was added, transforming them into mosques. However, most of them were not initially independent mosques. As mentioned, mosques built in the early centuries were often simple, based on the model of mosques from that period. This does not mean that the use of domes and four-arch designs was abandoned in mosque construction for a time.

Although grand and large mosques were built in most cities from the early third century of the Hijra, the dome structure (Gombadkhaneh), porticoes (Iwan), and long covered halls (Tanabi) that had been created by modifying and adapting fire temples and Mithraic sanctuaries (Places of worship for followers of Mithraism) were never abandoned. Instead, these elements, along with the addition of forty-columned halls (Chahār-sotūn), gradually found their place in Iranian mosques. This is because the four-arched dome structure, with its square base and right-angle corners, was a suitable and appropriate plan for prayer halls, with the only modification being the closing off of the entrance facing the Qibla [11].

Thus, in these types of mosques, we witness a combination of the night prayer halls (Shabestan), porticoes (Iwan), and four-arched domes, and as we see, this combination in Iranian mosque architecture brought about another type of mosque, which was widely accepted.

Examples of mosques in this category (Dome-style) include:

The Yazd Khast Mosque, the Bujnurd Grand Mosque, the Golpayegan Grand Mosque (At the beginning), the Saweh Square Mosque, the Friday Mosque of Ardabil, and more.

Fig. 4. Yazd Khast mosque [14].

Fig. 5. Friday mosque of Ardabil [15].

However, the best examples of domed mosques, which are also considered among the finest mosques, are the Blue Mosque in Tabriz (Turquoise Islam) and the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan.

3.4.3 | Category three: Iwan mosques (Iwans)

An iwan is a rectangular hall constructed along one of the sides (Or along two, three, or all four sides) of a courtyard or hall perpendicular to it. The origin of the iwan is believed to be the tribal dwellings of people living between the Aral and Caspian seas. The Parthians were the first to bring this skill to Mesopotamia, using it in the palaces of Ashur, Tisre, and Hatra, and it was later transferred to Sassanian architecture [16].

Therefore, it was an element that was well-established and widely used in pre-Islamic Iranian architecture.

This background led to its continued use after the arrival of Islam, including in mosques. Initially, three sides of the mosque would be enclosed, with one side, typically facing away from the sun (Modeled after the summer iwan), left open. An iwan would be constructed in this open space. Thus, "single-iwan mosques" were formed, such as the mosques of Niyriz, Gonabad, Ferdows, and Ali Shah Gilani.

Later on, gradually, another iwan was built opposite the first one, leading to the formation of "double-iwan mosques."

In these mosques, the main element is the iwan. This means a space with a rectangular plan and a vaulted arch, with two iwans facing each other and aligned symmetrically towards the courtyard. The same conditions that led to the creation of a single iwan in single-iwan mosques also played a key role in the creation of the second iwan in double-iwan mosques. Some believe that the use of shade and fresh air in the summer was the reason for the existence of the southern iwan, while the use of sunlight and fresh air in the winter was the reason for the existence of the northern iwan [17].

If we are to give examples of these mosques, we can mention the Jameh Mosques of Faryomad, Malek Zowzan, and Gonabad [9].

Fig. 6. From right to left: Neyriz Mosque, Gonabad Mosque, Malek Zowzan Mosque, Faryomad Mosque.

After the two-iwan mosques, we have the four-iwan mosques, which were created by adding two more iwans on the remaining two sides (Resulting in four iwans in four directions). The general layout of the four-iwan mosques is as follows:

I. A square or rectangular courtyard (Or prayer hall).

II. Four iwans with vaulted arches placed along the longitudinal and transverse axes of the courtyard.

III. Building sections between the four iwans that surround the courtyard and connect the iwans like a frame.

IV. A columned hall or prayer hall, typically located on the sides or behind the iwans.

Examples of four-iwan mosques include:

I. Zowareh Grand Mosque (The first four-iwan mosque).

II. Shah (Imam) Mosque in Isfahan.

III. Jameh Mosque of Ardestan (Originally not four-iwan).

IV. Jameh Mosque of Varamin.

V. Many others.

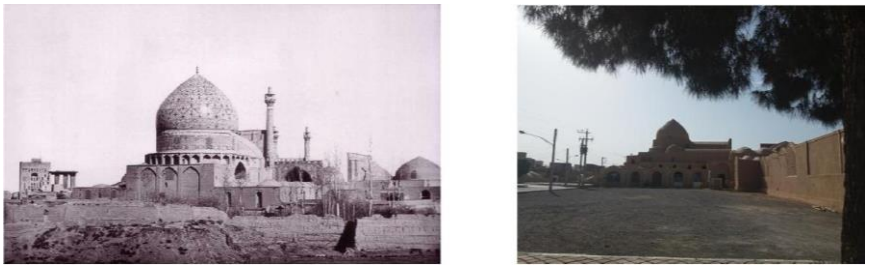

Fig. 7. Zowareh Mosque (On the right) Shah (Imam) mosque of Isfahan (On the left, photo: 1873 AD).

An important point to note here is that after the 7th century AH, most mosques became four-iwan mosques, and from then on, the four-iwan mosque became so familiar that if a mosque were not built in this style, it would be considered lacking [11].

3.4.4 | Fourth category: Tanabi-shaped mosques

A Tanabi is a tall, spacious hall that, in ancient times, served as a model for the old Mithraic temples. The Tanabi-shaped or vaulted covered structures have a large central archway and several smaller iwans on either side, which could be one or two stories high or feature a mid-arch (A partition in the middle of a space to divide it into two levels). This design was primarily used in the construction of the prayer halls, but there are also complete mosques built exclusively in the Tanabi style. A good example is the mosque in the Padrak neighborhood of Mohammadieh, Naein, where the entire mosque has a Tanabi-like space. Another example is the Arsen Bistam Mosque, where the large prayer hall is designed in the Tanabi style [5].

An important point here is that Tanabi sometimes appears as a standalone mosque style, which can be seen in places like Isfahan, Yazd, Naein, and Natanz, and at times, it is used in combination with other elements.

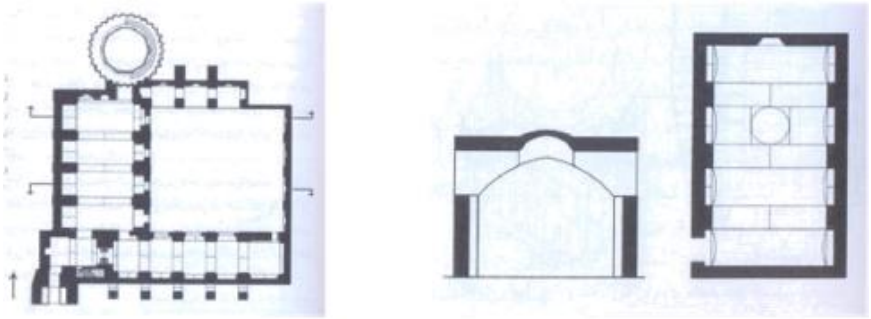

Fig. 8. Jameh Mosque of Padrakht, Naein (Right side) and Jameh Mosque of Arsan, Bastam [5].

4 | The Beginning of Stagnation and the Structural Decline of Mosque Architecture

After the evolutionary development of mosque structures reached a certain point, it seems that our architecture suddenly became devoid of ideas and creativity. Not only were there no longer any significant structural changes in mosque design, but the process also fell into stagnation and repetition. It can be said with confidence that most of the changes from that point onward were limited to decorative and secondary elements, with little to no attention given to the structure itself [18].

Unfortunately, soon after that, even the decorations and secondary elements ceased to evolve and fell into stagnation. Artistic creativity in these aspects also came to an end. From this period onward, we witness a complete imitation of past styles, and the further this trend progressed, the more blind and unthinking the imitation became—along with deeper stagnation. To the extent that, in the public mind, the mosque has

transformed into an old and repetitive element that belongs to the past. The result was nothing less than a noticeable decline in the mosque's status within society. A decline that is the direct outcome of our negligence and inattention to the values and role of this essential urban element [19].

This issue became even more serious with the arrival of modernity and the emergence of new cultural institutions such as museums and cultural centers. In this context, it is essential to thoroughly re-examine the principles and values of traditional culture through a technical lens and—considering the requirements of the modern era—take the necessary steps to ensure compatibility with contemporary conditions. Unfortunately, in this crucial matter, we are witnessing widespread weakness and neglect—weaknesses that fall into two equally damaging categories:

The first type of weakness comes from a group of architects and designers—as well as certain urban and rural officials—who are often not specialists in the field. These individuals, without considering the conditions of the modern era, in which there is a pressing need for fresh and updated design approaches in all areas, condemn any modification to the centuries-old structure of mosques as an unforgivable sin. They insist on repeating the same designs with the same old forms and structures, turning them into a taboo—and naturally, few dare to challenge or break that taboo.

On the other hand, there is another group who consider themselves modernists. In their view, all traditional principles and design models must be set aside. Under the banner of modern design and the contemporary age, they create forms that are merely modern-looking and flashy—even if they evoke no sense or impression of a mosque for the audience. They label these designs with names such as Deconstruction and so on. Unfortunately, most of these individuals neither truly understand the principles and foundations of modern architecture nor do they have any real knowledge of their own cultural and architectural heritage [20].

These individuals have neither correctly understood the principles and foundations of modern architecture nor do they know much about their own architectural and cultural identity. The unfortunate proof of this harsh reality is evident in the designs they present.

That said, there are a few rare individuals who do call out the correct path—but because they are so few, no one hears their voices. Unfortunately, they are also given no position or authority in urban or rural planning affairs.

Based on these statements, we can conclude that the flaw of the first group is their refusal to accept constructive change, which is a necessity of the modern era. They mistakenly believe that change equals the destruction of values. The flaw of the second group, however, is that they are distorted, and they have become confused and genuinely do not know what is right or wrong, and at times they insist on their opinions without justification. This is a plague that has afflicted our contemporary architecture, eating away at it like a destructive disease. If no solution or remedy is found, it will lead to serious consequences.

This issue is particularly critical in the design of buildings like mosques, which hold a unique status in terms of social, cultural, and identity-related significance—more so than other types of buildings. Any shortcoming in their design directly undermines their function and status, and as a result, they fail to leave the intended impression on the public.

Designing a mosque is fundamentally different from designing other types of buildings, and this is a point that must always be kept in mind [21].

5 | The Distinctive Nature of the Mosque Compared to Other Buildings

A significant point that must be considered in mosque design is its form and physical structure. A mosque is not like a museum or other buildings where any form can be applied. The most significant feature of a mosque is its ability to evoke a sense of worship and spirituality within the individual. As we know, the form and structure of any building are the primary factors in generating emotional responses toward it—something

that, in modern architecture, is referred to as the "sense of place." This concept means that every space must convey its intended function to the viewer and evoke the appropriate feeling [20].

This implies that the form and structure of a mosque must be such that they create a sense of "mosqueness" and, consequently, a sense of worship and spirituality in the audience. It can be confidently stated that any form or structure that fails to generate such a feeling can never be perceived by the public as a mosque.

On the other hand, evoking such a feeling depends on elements that symbolize the function of the building. In other words, a mosque structurally possesses specific characteristics and elements by which it is recognized. These elements are inseparable components of mosque architecture, and removing them in the name of modernism essentially amounts to removing the mosque's identity and symbolism [20].

For example, whenever we see a dome, we immediately think of a mosque. The first thing that comes to mind is that the place is probably a mosque. Similarly, when we see minarets or even a guiding tower, we once again recall the image of a mosque. This symbolic association is so strong and defined that it can confidently be said that no element evokes the sense of a mosque as powerfully as the dome and the minaret. Their presence in mosque architecture is deeply rooted in the collective memory of Muslims, and their absence in any mosque is considered a fundamental flaw. For a Muslim whose historical memory is closely tied to these elements, it is difficult to accept a place as a mosque if they are missing.

With this explanation, we are now better prepared to examine and analyze mosque construction in the modern era. Through such analysis, and within the scope of our knowledge and abilities, we can contribute to the improvement of mosque design. Therefore, in the following section, we will review and evaluate examples of modern mosques from various parts of the world.

6 | Analysis and Discussion

Since this study pertains to architecture, it should move beyond purely historical research and focus more on architectural aspects. The process should begin by understanding the needs of contemporary society and the expectations of mosque users, identifying the gaps and shortcomings in current mosque designs, and working toward discovering parameters for principled and appropriate architectural solutions.

Considering these factors and the existing conditions, the research methodology adopted in this study is both field-based and library-based, utilizing specialized books, architectural journals, and previous studies. The findings have been presented analytically and descriptively.

By carefully examining the current situation and taking today's circumstances into account, it can be concluded that throughout history, mosques have undergone numerous transformations driven by the evolving needs of society. These changes themselves played a role in shaping the very fabric of the community.

However, the precedence of form over meaning—such as the blind imitation of architectural elements like minarets and domes—along with a lack of creativity, dynamism, and innovation in the use of elements, the mismatch between design thinking and contemporary conditions and technologies, and the failure of mosques to adapt to modern human needs and contexts, have all contributed to a disconnection between mosque architecture and its original sacred and idealistic concepts. As a result, this has severed the mosque's relationship with the community and the people.

In the contemporary era, the foundational principles of mosque design have the potential to be re-evaluated through a deeper and more critical lens in order to better respond to its role and function in today's society.

6.1 | Analysis of Modern Mosques Around the World with Examples

Table 1. The mosque of the faculty of theology, Marmara University – Turkey.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	✓	✓	_	✓	✓	✓	✓	2015
	This mosque is considered one of the successful buildings because it has managed to enhance its richness with a modern, parametric approach and with intricate geometric decorations.							Discussion

Table 2. Cologne mosque – Ready.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	_	✓	✓	✓	✓	2012
	It may highlight the face of the mosque, but it is a part of a whole, and in the absence of that whole, it appears unsuccessful.							Discussion

Table 3. Qolşärif Mosque, Kazan - Russia.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2005
	This mosque is one of the successful buildings, where the pointed arches, minarets, and dome have organically grown from one another and are intertwined. The dome rises toward the sky as a manifestation of the unity of all these elements.							Discussion

Table 4. Sultan Qaboos Mosque - Oman.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2001
	This mosque is among the successful structures, with each of its prominent elements forming a complete shape on its own, while together, they create a unified and spiritual form.							Discussion

Table 5. Al Noor Mosque, Sharjah-UAE.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	✓	✓	_	✓	✓	✓	✓	2005
	This mosque is among the successful structures and derives much of its spiritual essence from its use of color, distinctive domes, and harmonious forms.							Discussion

Table 6. Famous Yusuf Mosque, Pavlodar-Kazakhstan.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2001
	This mosque is one of the successful architectural works, and its greatest impact comes from the use of color and the dome's creative conical form, which—through a unique sense of hierarchy—leads the viewer upward toward a spiritual peak.							Discussion

Table 7. Putra Mosque-Malaysia.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1999
	This mosque is one of the successful buildings because it creates unity in diversity, with all its elements harmoniously intertwined in ultimate beauty.							Discussion

Table 8. College of Islamic Studies Mosque-Qatar.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	_	2015
	This mosque is one of the unsuccessful buildings because the upward-curving lines alone merely give it a monumental feel and, therefore, fail to convey a sense of spiritual or sacred content.							Discussion

Table 9. King Faisal Mosque, Islamabad-Pakistan.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	✓	_	✓	✓	_	1986
	This mosque is one of the unsuccessful buildings, as the removal of the dome and the combination of several forms incompatible with the traditional mosque architecture have resulted in a failed design lacking spiritual essence.							Discussion

Table 10. Sheikh Fatima Mosque-Kuwait.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2010
	This mosque is one of the successful buildings, as it presents a conical form of the dome and succeeds through its harmonious combination of ornamentation, color, and matching minaret.							Discussion

Table 11. Rijeka Mosque-Croatia.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2013
	This mosque is one of the unsuccessful buildings, as it has failed to appropriately evoke the sense of a mosque as a sacred place, and without its minaret, it would undoubtedly stray even further from its religious identity.							Discussion

Table 12. Al-Ayyasiyad Mosque-Indonesia.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	_	2010
	It may highlight the face of the mosque, but it is part of a whole, and in the absence of the whole, it appears unsuccessful.							Discussion

Table 13. Modest Mosque-Singapore.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	_	_	_	✓	_	2009
	This mosque is one of the unsuccessful buildings, as its identity cannot be discerned without its distinctive elements.							Discussion

Table 14. Al-Nilin Mosque-Sudan.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1984
	This mosque is one of the successful buildings, featuring a latticed and modern dome that harmonizes with its minaret and other elements. It appears as though it has tamed modernity with tradition.							Discussion

Conclusion from the analysis of the samples

In this analysis, our effort was to select mosques for analysis in such a way that the following criteria were taken into account:

I. The selection of samples should cover a wide geographical range from East to West.

II. The samples should be chosen from countries with diverse cultures.

III. The samples should come from countries known for their distinctive mosque architecture styles.

IV. The greatest diversity in terms of form and the use of elements should be considered so that the possibility of observing and analyzing different examples side by side is facilitated.

V. The significance of various elements in creating the sense of place of a mosque should be determined so that it becomes clear whether their removal is possible or not.

Considering these points, it can be said that the most crucial factor in accepting a place as a mosque in the mind of a Muslim is the ability to convey the feeling of a mosque through various elements. Among these, there are elements whose removal would essentially eliminate the sense of a mosque's place. These elements are the dome and minaret, and it is challenging to consider a space in a mosque without these two elements. It was accepted. Apart from the dome and minaret, it is possible to remove other elements, although their use strengthens the sense of place. Therefore, in the design of modern mosques, care should be taken to ensure that instead of removing elements such as the dome and minaret, their forms are made modern and contemporary. This way, the sense of place will not be harmed, and a new and unique form of these elements will be presented, thus creating attractiveness and novelty and avoiding monotony. As seen in the Mosques of Marmara University, Cologne, and some others.

6.2 | Evaluation of Modern Mosques in Iran

Table 15. Al-Jawad Mosque-Tehran.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	_	_	_	_	_	1962
	This mosque lacks a sense of place, and the absence of distinctive elements, along with no substitute for them, has undermined the spiritual essence of the mosque.							The Discussion of Sense of Place

Table 16. Al-Ghadir Mosque-Tehran.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	✓	✓	✓	_	_	1986
	This mosque possesses a relative sense of place, and through the rotation of the twelve-sided prism, it attempts to evoke an ascent similar to that of a dome. Combined with brickwork, color, and architectural lines, it has managed to be somewhat successful. Nevertheless, the structure itself resembles an evolved minaret.							The Discussion of Sense of Place

Table 17. Hazrat Rasool Akram (Al-Rasool) Mosque-Karaj.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1991
	This mosque conveys a strong sense of place, and the execution of the concrete shell with parabolic arches has created an innovative dome that seems inherently integrated from the beginning. The decorative calligraphy, colors, and hierarchy further enhance its spiritual and inviting atmosphere.							The Discussion of Sense of Place

Table 18. Hazrat Ebrahim Mosque-Tehran.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1991
	The sense of place in this mosque is exceptional. It showcases an intriguing blend of tradition and modernity, featuring a bold and parametric dome. Its harmonious minaret draws the viewer's attention. Particularly striking is the forecourt, which, along with its magnificent hierarchy, creates a unique emotional experience. The use of color appears to be a metaphor for hope and despair, light and darkness, black and white—ultimately suggesting the triumph of light over darkness, white over black, and hope over despair. The decorative elements further enrich its overall impact.							The Discussion of Sense of Place

Table 19. Imam Reza Mosque-Tehran.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	✓	_	_	_	_	2011
	This mosque lacks a sense of place, and with a horizontal rather than vertical layout—which could have expressed ascension and movement toward perfection—it fails to convey its form effectively. Its dark color, like its form, creates a paradox, although it does possess a strong sense of hierarchy.							The Discussion of Sense of Place

Table 20. Mohammad Rasool Allah Mosque, Namazi Hospital-Shiraz.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2016
	This mosque has a strong sense of place, and despite its modern minaret, low dome, and harmonious colors, it draws the viewer in—primarily through its inviting entrance, which features a strong sense of hierarchy.							The Discussion of Sense of Place

Table 21. Vali Asr Mosque-Tehran.

	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach	Key Elements					Year of Construction
	Regional	Contextual	Hierarchy	Ornaments	Color	Minaret	Dome	in Its Current Form
	_	✓	✓	_	_	_	_	Incomplete
	This mosque lacks a sense of place, as it has a thoroughly modern appearance. Like the mosque of the College of Islamic Studies in Qatar, it is merely a metaphor for a mosque, marked by a visual contrast with its context. Perhaps it would have been more successful with a different function, as instead of conveying purity and spirituality, it carries an air of mystery.							The Discussion of Sense of Place

The first approach, which is the dominant one, is the preservation of the traditional form of the mosque without making any alterations or even the slightest changes to its structure.

The second approach is a modern one, which allows for any modification to the mosque's structure—even if the resulting form bears no resemblance to the mosques rooted in the public's collective memory. Prominent examples of this approach include the construction of Imam Reza and Vali-e-Asr mosques, which bear little relevance to the traditional concept of a mosque.

Among these, there are occasionally well-designed modern mosques, such as the Hazrat-e Ebrahim Mosque, which are exceptions and extremely rare. The reason for this scarcity lies in the dominance of the two aforementioned opposing approaches, which marginalize alternative thinkers—a significant weakness in our architectural landscape.

7 | Findings

I. A historical and comparative analysis revealed that, in addition to its religious function, the mosque historically served as a hub for social, educational, and cultural interactions within Islamic society.

II. The study of contemporary examples indicated that functional and spatial disconnection in the design of modern mosques has led to a decline in social and cultural engagement.

III. A contextual architectural approach can help revive the mosque's multifaceted role by addressing local conditions, cultural context, and current societal needs.

IV. Community participation in the design and implementation of mosques plays a significant role in enhancing the sense of social belonging and reintegrating the mosque into urban life.

V. A reinterpretation of traditional architectural elements, integrated with modern needs and facilities, can create a balance between authenticity and contemporaneity in mosque architecture.

8 | Contribution

I. Proposing a context-oriented architectural framework for mosque design, emphasizing the redefinition of its socio-cultural role in the modern era.

II. Critical analysis of current urban mosque structures and identification of their functional gaps compared to historical roles.

III. Integrating people-centered design methods with Islamic architectural principles to strengthen the mosque's connection with the local community.

IV. Suggesting evaluation criteria for the socio-cultural success of mosques based on contextual architectural indicators.

V. Establishing a link between architectural design and urban policymaking to restore the mosque as a multifunctional civic institution.

9 | Conclusion

The mosque, as one of the most fundamental institutions of Islamic civilization, has always played a central role in the social, cultural, and educational structure of Islamic societies—going beyond its purely devotional function. However, the rapid developments in urbanization and the physical–and social transformations of the modern era have led to the diminishing of the mosque's social and cultural roles, reducing it to a space solely for ritual purposes.

This study, adopting a context-based architectural approach, demonstrates that through rethinking mosque design, considering local context and needs, and engaging the local community, it is possible to revive the mosque's multifaceted and historical functions.

The findings indicate that re-establishing the connection between architecture and cultural–social identity can redefine the mosque's role as a dynamic, people-centered, and multifunctional institution. In this regard, the intelligent integration of traditional architectural elements alongside responsiveness to contemporary needs plays a crucial role in restoring this connection.

Ultimately, the successful revival of the mosque's role in the modern era requires a holistic approach that integrates architectural design, urban planning, and cultural policy-making. This approach reimagines the mosque not merely as a religious structure but as a vibrant social hub at the heart of the contemporary city.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this work.

References

[1] Shams, O. (2024). The architecture of Al-Askari Shrine in the 18th century based on Niebuhr's Pilgrimage Scroll. *Soffeh*, *34*(1), 91-104. (**In Persian**). https://doi.org/10.48308/sofeh.2024.104355

[2] Norouzi, A. H. (2023). The political and social function of architectural art, a case study of the political function of mosque architecture in islamic civilization. *The third international conference on architecture, civil engineering, urban planning, environment and horizons of Islamic art in the declaration of the second step of the revolution*. (**In Persian**). Tabriz, Iran, Civilica. https://civilica.com/doc/1960247

[3] Bemanian, M. R., & Salimi, M. (2023). The effect of spatial contrast at the entrance to mosques on the manifestation of dhikr (Case study: Selected mosques of the Islamic period). *The third international conference on architecture, civil engineering, urban planning, environment and horizons of Islamic art in the declaration of the second step of the revolution*. (**In Persian**). Tabriz, Iran, Civilica. https://civilica.com/doc/1959116

[4] Ataei Hamedani, M. R., Hamzehnejad, M., & Noghrekar, A. (2011). A study about the location of mosques in Medina during the era of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) (An introduction to principles for determining proper locations for mosques in Islamic cities). *Bagh-e nazar*, *8*(16), 3-18. (**In Persian**). https://www.magiran.com/p918241

[5] Memarian, Gh. H., & Tabarsa, M. A. (2014). Type and typology in architecture. *Iranian scientiic and architectural society of architecture and urban planning*, *6*, 103-114. (**In Persian**). https://www.sid.ir/paper/250884/fa

[6] Ameli, Z., & Litkouhi, S. (2024). Evaluation of effective components in the maximum attraction of mosque users with sustainable architecture approach in Kashan city TT. *Researches in Islamic architecture*, *12*(4), 22-36. (**In Persian**). https://doi.org/10.61186/jria.12.4.2

[7] Chehelmardan, N., & Hod, S. D. H. (2023). Study of the design of safavid-era mosques with sustainable architectural structures: A case study of the Shah mosque. *The third international conference on architecture, civil engineering, urban planning, environment and horizons of Islamic art in the declaration of the second step of the revolution*. (**In Persian**). Tabriz, Iran, Civilica. https://civilica.com/doc/1959674

[8] Seyedi, S. M. S., Vafamehr, M., & Zanjani Zadeh, H. (2021). Analysis of research factors on contemporary mosque architecture with designs that meet present and future needs. *National conference on architecture, civil engineering, urban development and horizons of Islamic art in the declaration of the second step of the revolution*. (**In Persian**). Tabriz, Iran, Civilica. https://civilica.com/doc/1252498

[9] Zomorreshidi, H. (2009). *Mosque in Iranian architecture*. Zaman publications. (**In Persian**). https://www.gisoom.com/book/1613803/

[10] Naghizadeh, M. (2013). The place of the mosque in Islamic city design. *Monthly book of art month*, (179), 20-39. (**In Persian**). https://www.magiran.com/p1147512

[11] Pirnia, M. K., & Memariyan, Gh, H. (2013). *Iranian architectural stylistics*. Gholamhossein Memarian. https://db.ketab.ir/bookview.aspx?bookid=1830948

[12] Basouli, M., & Derakhsh, S. (2021). Investigating the needs of disabled pilgrims in religious places (Case study: Razavi Shrine). *Journal of Razavi culture*, *9*(35), 37-61. (**In Persian**). https://doi.org/10.22034/farzv.2020.236874.1540

[13] Pirnia, M. K. (1970). Fahraj Jameh Mosque. *Journal of iranian archeology and art magazine*, *5*, 2-13. (**In Persian**).

[14] Architects. (2013). http://iranian-architect.ir/?s=2013

[15] Tasnim News Agency. (2017). https://www.tasnimnews.com/en

[16] Labaf Khanaki, R. A. (2022). Arrangements of two-porch mosques in khorasan. *The third national conference on the role of khorasan in the flourishing of Iranian-Islamic art and architecture*. (**In Persian**). Mashhad, Iran, Civilica. https://civilica.com/doc/1486157

[17] Fatehi Rashkhavari, M., & Mobini, M. (2022). A study of two-porch mosques with the topic of the historical mosque of Rashtkhar. *The 7th international conference on civil engineering, architecture and sustainable green cities*. (**In Persian**). Hamedan, Iran, Civilica. https://civilica.com/doc/1650389

[18] Mahdavinejad, M., & Mashayekhi, M. (2011). Principles of the socio-cultural mosque design based on socio-cultural approach. *Armanshahr*, *3*(5), 65-78. (**In Persian**). https://sid.ir/paper/202537/en

[19] Seyidi, S. M. S., Vafamehr, M., & Zanjani Zadeh, H. (2021). Analyzing factors affecting the architectural design of contemporary mosques with an approach to meeting present and future needs. *National conference on architecture, civil engineering, urban development and horizons of Islamic art in the declaration of the second step of the revolution*. (**In Persian**). Tabriz, Iran, Civilica. https://civilica.com/doc/1252498

[20] Mahdavinejad, M., Mashayekhi, M., & Bahrami, M. (2015). Mosque design patterns in contemporary architecture. *Journal of Islamic architecture research*, *2*(4), 3-15. (**In Persian**). https://www.magiran.com/p2122093

[21] Varmaghani, H. (2021). An analytical approach to the invitation quality of contemporary mosques (Case study: Mosques of Tehran). *Journal of researches in Islamic architecture*, *9*(1), 123-141. (**In Persian**). https://doi.org/10.52547/jria.9.1.1