A SURVEY OF AMERICAN IMAMS: DUTIES, QUALIFICATIONS AND CHALLENGES

A QUANTITATIVE AND RELIGIOUS ANALYSIS

by

MUHAMMAD ABUELEZZ

(Under the Direction of Alan Godlas)

ABSTRACT

This study, the foundation of which is a quantitative survey of American imams, investigated the principal duties, qualifications, and challenges of imams in America from the viewpoint of the imams themselves, from a traditional Islamic religious perspective, and from the angle of the researcher's observations of American mosques. Educational and social duties are found to be of greatest importance to the imams. Traditional education of imams overseas does not provide sufficient training for working in American mosques because imams need training in fields such as contextual Islamic jurisprudence and American culture. A comprehensive educational program in America for training imams to work in the USA is suggested. In order to alleviate imams' financial, administrative and professional problems such as low-salaries, interference in their work, and power struggles within the community, the study suggests inaugurating an American Islamic endowment system that would enable imams to function more independently.

INDEX WORDS: Islam, Muslim, Imam, Clergy, Qur'ān, Sunna, Prophet, Survey, Task, Challenges, Duties, Problems, Qualifications

A SURVEY OF AMERICAN IMAMS: DUTIES, QUALIFICATIONS AND CHALLENGES

A QUANTITATIVE AND RELIGIOUS ANALYSIS

by

MUHAMMAD ABUELEZZ

BA, Al-Azhar University, Egypt, 2001

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2011

A SURVEY OF AMERICAN IMAMS: DUTIES, QUALIFICATIONS AND CHALLENGES

A QUANTITATIVE AND RELIGIOUS ANALYSIS

by

MUHAMMAD ABUELEZZ

Major Professor:	Alan Godlas
Committee:	Kenneth Honerkamp
	Adam Sabra

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2011

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis especially to my parents for their guidance, love and support at all stages of my life, and to my wife and kids.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Allah (God) for helping and guiding me with all of my resources in completing my thesis. To this effect, I would like to thank the Fulbright Commission for its complete support in providing me an opportunity to pursue an advanced degree and the Department of Religion at the University of Georgia for accepting me and providing great mentors. I would like to thank Dr. Alan Godlas for directing me in my thesis and for his patience with me during this process. He was the one who strongly encouraged me to conduct this study and helped in thoroughly revising it. Also I would like to thank my committee members: Dr. Kenneth Honerkamp and Dr. Adam Sabra for all of their input and guidance. Furthermore, I would like to thank all the imams at NAIF (North American Imams Federation) for taking time to fill out the survey for the purposes of this thesis. In addition, I would also like to thank my friends Mohammad Arshad, Kashif Zaheer, Salman Siddiqui, Hasan Mustafa, and Omer Tasgetiren for their support in improving the thesis presentation and proofreading it. Lastly, I would like to express my love and appreciation of my mother and my family for their encouragement, patience and support while I pursued this degree.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The mosque is the most important Islamic institution in America; and the ideal imam or mosque leader is the epicenter of this institution. To understand the importance of the role of the imam for American Muslim communities, one should recognize what a mosque represents to them. In fact, there is a great misunderstanding or lack of information about mosques and especially about the role of imams in America. The massive debates which spread all over America after the announcement of building a mosque near Ground Zero in New York provide evidence of misconceptions about the function of the mosque in America.[1]

The mosque, as described by Bagby, "is the cornerstone"[2] in serving American Muslims. Compared to the institutions in the Muslim world, the mosque has a much greater unique and vital role for Muslims living in the United States. It fills the gap in U.S. caused by the absence of many different supporting Islamic institutions that have existed in Muslim countries.[3] The American mosque is a place of spiritual worship, Islamic education, social interaction among the members of the Muslim community, charitable support of the needy, counseling and arbitration, presenting Islam to non-Muslims, interfaith dialogue with other religions,

---

[1] Edward E. Curtis, "Five myths about mosques in America," The Washington Post, accessed June 1, 2011. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/26/AR2010082605510.html .
[2] Ihsan Bagby, *A Portrait of Detroit Mosques: Muslim Views on Policy, Politics and Religion* (Clinton Township, Michigan: Institution of Social Policy and Understanding, 2004), 5.
[3] Ibid., 5.

teaching political awareness, medical health services through establishing free clinics, and even a youth club and community center for celebrating different festivals.[4]

In his article "*Five myths about mosques in America*" Edward Curtis[5] states that mosques are "typical American religious institutions" because of the effective and positive role they play in integrating and involving of the Muslims in the American society.[6] This fact has been demonstrated by Bagby in one of his works based on his earlier comprehensive study about mosques in America. He states that mosques are not only a place of spiritual worship but they are also places for fulfilling the social and economic needs of the community. He says that American mosques, "like [non-Muslim] religious congregations throughout the United States, are involved in providing services to their members and general community."[7] Among the particular results of his study were that 90% of mosques in America provide financial assistance to the needy through cash. As for distributing food and clothes for the poor, about two-thirds of the mosques are involved in such service, Also, over three-fourths (77%) of the mosques offer counseling service; and 66% engaged in prison programs.[8] This brief overview of the function of the mosque in America clarifies its significant role for the Muslim community and for the American society as a whole and illustrates the great responsibilities upon the shoulders of the imam of the mosque. The imam is the one who is responsible for supervising all the vital functions of the mosque.

---

[4] Yvonne Haddad and Adair T. Lummis, *Islamic Values In The United States a Comparative Study* (New York:Oxford University Press, 1987), 59. See also the Muslim Council of Britain, *Voices from the Minarets*(London, 2006), 4.
[5] Edward Curtis is millennium chair of liberal arts and Professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. (Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, http://liberalarts.iupui.edu/religious_studies/index.php/curtis)
[6] Curtis, "Five myths."
[7] Ihsan Bagby, "The Mosque and the American Public Square," in *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square, Hope Fears, and Aspirations, ed. Zahid H. Bukhari et al* (New York: Altamira Press, 2004), 330.
[8] Ibid., 331.

Linguistically, the Arabic word *imām* is a noun form of the verb *amma* which means to go, betake, to lead the way or to lead in prayer. Hence, *imām* means a leader or a master regardless of being good or evil.[9] The word *imām* is mentioned in the Qur'ān twelve times, but with two different meanings. For example, in the following verse it means a "book": "And of all things have We taken account in a clear Book (*imām mubīn*)" (Qur'ān 36:12).[10] The word *imām* here means the book in which Allah wrote everything, whether it is in the past, in the present, or in the coming future. Here it has the sense of a book because the information in a book is followed as an imam is followed.[11] Allah also said concerning the Prophet Abraham "I will make thee an Imam to the Nations"(Qur'ān 2:24), which means "a leader to be followed and the one who shows people the way to all goodness."[12] Similarly He also said about Isaac and Jacob: "And We made them leaders (*imāms*), guiding (men) by Our Command..." (Qur'ān 21:73). Thus, in the Qur'ān, the word *imām* also means leader, role model, guide and good example.

In addition to its Qur'ānic senses, in current usage the imam is any adult male Muslim who leads people in prayer. This is derived from the way in which the word was used by the Prophet Muhammad,[13] who said in one of his hadiths, "If you are three in number, then one of you should be the imam. The one who has the most right to it is the one who is the most versed in the Qur'ān (*'aqra'*)."[14] There is some dispute, however, concerning the meaning of *aqra'*. Three schools of jurisprudence (the Hanafī, Mālikī, and Shāfi'ī schools) say that the

---

[9] Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Writen Arabic*(Beirut: Library of Lebanon, 1980). See also MuḥammadibnJarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayānfīta'wīl al-Qur'ān*(Cairo:Dar al-Risalah, 2000), 19: 320.

[10] Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Holy Qur'ān* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, Inc., 2001). All translations of the Qur'ān are from the Yusuf Ali edition.

[11] Muhammad al-Ṭahiribn 'Ashur, *Al-taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*(Beirut: Mu'assasat al-tarīkh al-'Arabī,, 2000), 22:205.

[12] SayyidQutub, *In The Shade of the Qur'ān*, trans.AdilSalih& A. Shamis(UK:Islamic Foundation, 2002),1:131, see also al-TabarīTafsīr,2:18.

[13] According to belief of Muslims, one should praise the Prophet Muhammad after mentioning his name every time, saying "peace and blessings of Allah be upon him." Nevertheless, because of American academic convention, the researcher had to waive this requirement and use instead his own verbal praise.

[14] Abu al-Husayan Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, *Ṣahīh Muslim*(Beirut:Dar al-Jīl and Dar al-Afāq, date unavailable), 2:133.

meaning of "the most versed in the Quran" is *al-afqah* (the most knowledgeable), while the Hanbali school of Aḥmad ibn Hanbal sees that it means the one who has more of the Qur'ān memorized, so he gave precedence to *al-aqra'* (who memorized the Qur'ān) over *al-afqah.* Wahbah al-Zuhayli (an influential contemporary Syrian professor and scholar of Islamic law) has stated that *al-aqra',* during the time of the Prophet's companions, meant the most knowledgeable one; and that the need for an imam who is knowledgeable about the Qur'ān is more important than the need for an imam who is just a memorizer of the Qur'ān.[15] Therefore, his interpretation concludes that the imam should be the best one among worshipers in his knowledge of the Qur'ān and in knowing the legal rules of prayer.

In the American context the role of the imam of the mosque is multi-faceted and different in its nature from the official job of the imam within the Muslim nations. For instance, based on my experiences as an imam in Egypt, I can state that the main official duties of the imam in Egypt are leading the prayer, delivering the Friday sermon, and being a religious teacher for the community of the mosque. In contrast, the American imam has to play a wide variety of roles. He "is often encouraged to assume responsibilities that more closely resemble those of the American pastor or rabbi...."[16] He is considered for the Muslims in America as a transmitter of the message of the past to the present and the one who connects the current generations to the previous ones. The imam is the one who conveys the message of Islam and tries to tailor it to be appropriate for the contemporary time without compromising the major aspects of the religion. In addition to leading prayer and preaching on Fridays, he is the people's religious teacher and their reference regarding legal matters as a *mufti* (one who issues Islamic legal judgments). He works as a social worker responsible for many different social services in his

---

[15] Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, *al-Fiqh al-IslāmīwaAdilatuhu*(Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1985), 2:185-186.
[16] Haddad, *Islamic Values,* 58.

community. At the same time he serves as a counselor and arbitrator who seeks to resolve community disputes. Many families trust him; he becomes their mediator in their most private issues. Muslim patients in hospitals and Muslims in jails see him as their chaplain; and in inter-faith dialogue events he is the main communicator who represents Islam and his local community. As for media, some communities may choose the imam to speak about Islam in local radio or TV. Overall the imam serves as and is the spiritual leader of Muslim communities in America.[17] One of imams summarizes his role in America saying:

> "The mosque in America serves the Muslim affairs from cradle to death...a place where...all the necessary functions of society—economic, political, social, religious...recreational—everything is being practiced here. The imam is the center of that place so he is the one to be involved with them, with all these things."[18]

Because of this serious and crucial role of the imam, I argue that he should have all needed professional qualifications for leading the community, although currently many do not. Those who fulfilled the role of the imam in the beginning of Islam were the Prophet, his caliphs, leaders and great scholars.[19] Hence, the imam should receive extensive training in different fields and skills so that he becomes qualified to practice his job professionally. He should also be a personal role model for the community by virtue of his possessing all the required characteristics or behaviors of a leader. It is also important to facilitate his gaining access to all types of resources so that he can implement his tasks successfully. Moreover, all different kinds of obstacles and challenges facing him should be solved and avoided as much as possible by the help of the community or the other administrators or board members of the mosques in America. Unfortunately, the reality of the current situation of imams in America—according to some previous studies and my observation—is not as it should be.

---

[17] Ibid., 59. See also The Muslim Council of Britain, *Voices,* 7 and Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain an Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 159-160.

[18] Haddad and Loomis, *Islamic Values*, 59.

[19] Ali Mahfūdh, *Fan al-Khatābawaiʻdad al-Khatīb* (Cairo: Dar al-Iʻtisām, no date), 24.

There are four main groups of defects that can be observed in some of the mosques in the United States. Firstly, there is a shortage in the number of imams serving in the United States and a dire need for ordaining imams to serve Muslim communities. According to Bagby "only 33% of mosques have full-time, paid imams,"[20] which is very low compared to other religious congregations, 89% of which have paid ministers.[21] About 19% of Mosques are without imams; and 40% of mosques have volunteer imams, 30% of which are part-time and 11% are full-time. According to Bagby, this low percentage of full-time, paid imams in American mosques stems from two main reasons; first, the lack of interest in hiring imams due to their not being held in high esteem or the community's fear of clashing with them (i.e., the fear in American Muslim communities that they will clash with imams who have been trained overseas). The other reason is that mosques are financially weak compared to other American religious institutions due to the shortage of donors from among mosque attendees.[22]

Secondly, in addition to the shortage of imams, there is also a lack of educational preparation and appropriate professional training of imams. According to Bagby's study there were about 63% of imams without even a Bachelor's degree in Islamic studies; and the ratio in African American mosques reaches 78% of imams with no formal Islamic education. As for immigrant imams, the study made by Morgan in 2010 showed that 40% had no university degree whatsoever.[23] These two studies show that there is a tremendous lack of education of imams working in America.

---

[20] Ihsan Bagby, "Imams and Mosque Organization in the United States" A Study of Mosque Leadership and Organizational Structure in American Mosques," in *Muslims in the United States,* ed Philippa Strum and Danielle Tarantolo (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2003), 123.
[21] Ibid., 123.
[22] Ibid., 124.
[23] John Morgan, *Muslim Clergy in America: Ministry as Profession in the Islamic Community* (Lima, Ohio: Wyndham Hall Press, 2010 second edition), 125.

This lack of education, in turn, affects the professional performance of the imam. According to Morgan, professional training and education is the main criterion for measuring a successful ministry, skills that many imams greatly lack. He sees that the lack of adequate professional training is not confined to only those imams who have low level of education but also to some imams who have degrees from overseas Islamic universities. They both share this deficiency because many of them, especially immigrant imams, completed their religious studies outside America and within an alien culture different from the American way of life. Those imams must often minister to several ethnicities who have immigrated to United States from many countries that have different cultural backgrounds. At the same time there are new Muslim generations raised in American culture who want to be righteous Muslims. All of this diversity poses enormous challenges to the imams, but unfortunately nothing in their previous Islamic training has prepared them to tackle such diversity.[24]

Based on my study, I would argue that Morgan's contentions are true: many graduates of Islamic universities are not completely ready to hold a position of imam in America after graduation even if they are well-versed in religious knowledge. They are still in need of studying other fields of knowledge such as sociological and psychological studies. They need to study American culture, the history of America, and the history of Muslims in America, and to have a substantial knowledge of the main religions in America and their sects. In addition to education in all of these fields of knowledge that many imams have never received, they need to be trained also on such other skills as English language, communication, leadership, administration, and public speaking skills, which are indispensable qualifications for an effective community leader. Essentially, Imams need to be trained in a variety of fields related

---

[24] Ibid., 59.

to their work in American society similar to the training received by Christian or Jewish clergymen. They need to receive training (before serving as imams) in areas such as pastoral counseling, criminal justice, health care, prison and hospital chaplaincy, conflict resolution and arbitration. They need to be trained in how to advise Muslim soldiers working in the American Army, how to conduct interfaith outreach programs, re-integrate Muslim ex-prisoners into society, and rehabilitate drug addicts among Muslims. The majority of imams never received such training besides their religious studies. According to Morgan's study, three-fourths (75%) of imams have never received any kind of training in counseling.[25] This is because the main courses of study in many Islamic universities are not designed to educate imams to be able to work in the United States. Moreover many of the study programs are not set for training imams even in their home country. Some of the imams who studied to be Arabic teachers have no deep theological and legal studies like those who studied in schools of ministry and Islamic law. Therefore, a major challenge facing Muslims is that the existing graduate education of imams is not sufficient to meet their needs. Some of the imams have only certificates of completing Qur'ān school or short training imam programs.[26] All this has led to underestimating the importance of the position of imam.

The third defect—which relates to the question of why Muslims, unlike non-Muslim religious congregations, lack highly skilled and qualified clergymen— is the absence of accredited American schools for training imams for the United States. There may be only one school in America helping in this regard, the Hartford Seminary.[27] In fact this number is

---

[25] Ibid., 129.
[26] Bagby, *Imams and Mosque Organization,* 127-128.
[27] In addition to the Hartford Seminary, the Graduate Theological Foundation (GTF) and some other online private institutions offer training for imams. The GTF, however, does not appear to be accredited. See U.S. Department of Education, *Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs*, accessed July 23, 2011, http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/Search.aspx.

nothing compared to the number of accredited schools and seminaries of other religions.

There are 251 schools for different Christian sects for the teaching and preparing their

clergymen for the ministry.[28] There is nevertheless a unique school at Al-Azhar University in

Egypt that teaches Islamic Studies in foreign languages. This program of study at Al-Azhar,

however, also needs a lot of enhancement and development in order to cope with the needs of

Muslims living in America and in the West in general. It must also be noted that sending

American born-Muslims to study overseas in Islamic universities may not be the best solution.

The same problem still occurs there because the designed programs of study do not take into

consideration the American environment and its specific needs. Hence, it is essential for

Muslims in America to establish schools or specific educational programs dedicated to training

and graduating imams who will be able to fulfill the needs of the growing Muslim communities

in America.[29] Bagby suggests this by saying, "when effective Islamic seminaries are established

in the United States, a new stage will begin in the history of Islam in this country."[30]

The fourth defect observed in American mosques consists of clashes and power

struggles between the administration or board members, on the one hand, and imams, on the

other hand, which clashes and power struggles affect the imam's role as well as the whole

community negatively. This is a problem whether the cause is the board members or the imam

himself; it needs to be discussed, analyzed, and resolved. Bagby argues that board members try

to limit the role of the imam fearing that "if he had too much power he might take the mosque

in an unacceptable direction or simply wrest power from the *majlis* (board of directors)."[31] In

many mosques led by a *majlis* one can find such conflicts over authority of the mosque. They

---

[28] "Fast Facts," Hartford Institute for Religion Research, accessed June 10, 2011, http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#numclergy.

[29] Morgan, *Muslim Clergy,* 60-61.

[30] Bagby, *Imams and Mosque Organization*, 133.

[31] Ibid., 120

sometimes end with firing the imam and resulting in waiting long periods without one until they find one who fits their mentality.[32]

This overall picture of the current situation of the role of the imam and the challenges facing Muslim clergymen working in the United States has highlighted four general problem areas: shortage of imams, inadequately educated imams, lack of American institutions for training imams, and clashes between the administrative boards of mosques and imams. Clarifying and further articulating this picture in order to improve the role of the imam in the United States will largely be the main aim of this study.

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

There are few studies that have been conducted on the role of the imam in America. Haddad and Lummis' 1987 study, *Islamic Values in the United States: A Comparative Study*[33] is one of the early studies that discussed the topic of imam as part of one of its chapters. It discussed the role of the imam in the American context and what people expect from their imam. The study concentrated on the importance of counseling, the nature of the imam's function, the cross-culture conflict facing imams in America and the importance of Arabic language and having a bilingual-imam. These were the main themes about imams that the study tackled in brief, but I contend that it did not deeply cover all that is related to the imam's function.

Bagby, Perl, and Froehle's 2001 book, *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait,*[34] is the second main study that investigated the imam as part of a general study about Muslims in America. It is a comprehensive study about mosques in the United States; in particular, there is a section about the leadership of the mosques that explores through a survey the

---

[32] Ibid., 121
[33] Haddad and Lummis, *Islamic Values.*
[34] Ihsan Bagby, Paul M. Perl, and Bryan T. Froehle, *The Mosque in America, A National Portrait*: A Report from the Mosque Study Project(Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2001).

organizational structure of the leadership in American mosques. The survey includes a group

of themes related to the imam, such as the general shape of leadership of the mosques, the

question of who has decision making power in the mosques, and the main demographical

characteristics of the mosque leaders: their age, employment status, education, and ethnicity.

In fact the study offers a very good introduction for understanding the situation of imams in

America and who they are.

The last recent study about American imams is Morgan's 2010 work, *Muslim Clergy in

America: Ministry as profession in Islamic Community.*[35] It is a sociological study in which the

writer, as he stated, avoids any theological dimension of the function of the imam.[36] He mainly

explains the characteristics of the imam's ministry, professionalization in the American

society and what they should do not only to survive but also to thrive in America.[37] He

introduces a very interesting comparative study between imams and their religious

counterparts in America such as priests, ministers and rabbis. He primarily argues that the

imam should play a great role in the process of the integration and assimilation of Muslims in

the American society without losing their identity. He argues that the Americanization of

Islam is the only way for Muslims to survive in American secular society and believes that

imams should play a great role in leading the Muslim community to this Americanization, just

as non-Muslim religious leaders such as priests and rabbis have managed to do. He also states

that education is one of the main measures of success of any clergy; and therefore the

education and professional training of imams should be suitable to the new culture and

environment in which they are introducing their services. Moreover, he also argues that

education could be a means of the convergence of Islam and American society together if

---

[35] Morgan, *Muslim Clergy.*
[36] Ibid., 88.
[37] Ibid., 9.

Muslim leaders take the responsibility of conducting educational programs in different

American institutions such as universities and hospitals. The study also includes a survey

about immigrant imams that discusses many social aspects of their life in addition to their

education, characteristics of their communities, and some administrative issues. His study, as

Morgan states, should be seen as a beginning of what should be a series of works about imams

in America that should be conducted because of the current lack of enough resources about

imams in America. He says;

> If one searches the research libraries of America and the online resources of the
> internet, one is astounded at the lack of information about Muslim clergy generally and
> Muslim clergy in America specifically...what they do, what they believe, how they
> function, what they think, and what their needs and ambitions are. A series of studies
> addressing each of these points would go a long way in both assisting Muslims clergy in
> understanding their role in America as well as assisting Americans in understanding
> Islam.[38]

The Purpose of the Study

Following Morgan's suggestion, this thesis aims at building upon the foundation of the

few previous works and will cover other topics related to imams in America, topics that had

only been partially studied in previous studies or not researched at all. Written mainly from

both a social scientific and Islamic point of view, this study strives to present the view of

American imams themselves about what they should do, what they need to succeed in their

position, and what their main problems are. None of the previous studies managed to

introduce a complete picture for these three points as seen by imams themselves, not from the

perspective of mosque attendees. Hence, the study will not deal with views of mosque

attendees but will only focus on the imams' opinions. This study will investigate not only

immigrant populations (which was the object of Morgan's study) but will also consist of

perspectives of imams of various ethnicities (including African-American) and nationalities in

---

[38] Ibid., 88.

order to collect a variety of views and to explore the challenges facing different kinds of imams.

In brief, the purpose of this study is to investigate three main themes crucial to the role of the imams in America: the first is to explore the main important duties and responsibilities of the current imams in American mosques and Islamic centers; the second is to identify the significant qualifications of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and resources that the imam needs to fulfill his duties professionally and efficiently; and the third theme is to identify the current context and the challenges facing imams in the United States.

The Significance of the Study

By investigating these three themes related to the imams, this study aims to achieve a group of important goals:

1- Introducing to future and current imams what is expected of them.

2- Presenting to Muslims and Americans in general the best examples and ideal models of imams in America.

3- Assisting the executive boards of mosques in their writing of their imam's initial contract, in order to clarify the imam's responsibilities, so as to avoid misunderstandings (after the employment of the imam has begun) concerning the imam's responsibilities.

4- Providing Muslims and especially mosque administrators with a portfolio of the imam's responsibilities in order to help them evaluate and assess his overall work in the mosque.

5- Developing a practical curriculum for training imams by providing educators and founders of imam-training programs with information about what is needed in order to teach and train students who will be imams in America.

6- Highlighting the main skills and behaviors needed by imams, which will enable both current and future imams to realize the skills and behaviors that they should acquire in order to be successful; and it is also important for those who recruit imams.

7- Indicating resources essential for imams, which will assist mosque and Islamic center administrators in making them available to imams.

8- Outlining the major problems and challenges facing imams, which is an important step toward solving them. This area has been neglected; and until now, no study has researched and identified the problems and obstacles facing imams in American society.

9- Improving the efficiency and professionalism of imams by establishing a comprehensive program of training that takes into consideration the American context and the needs of Muslim community in America.

10- Enabling the imams to lead the Muslim community toward integrating with American society and avoiding the troubles of isolation by recognizing their main roles as religious leaders responsible for the prosperity and stability of their communities.

The Methodology

This study is based upon a quantitative methodology for collecting the data and analyzing its findings. In order to suggest what I think about the ideal qualifications and duties of the imams in America, I will make use of an Islamic religious methodology in which I examine the sources of Islam and derive general principles from them for understanding the Islamic rationale behind the data collected. I will explain the variables used in the quantitative analysis based on this religious methodology.

The Quantitative Method

The quantitative method concerns the quantity, frequency, and statistics for this research. It answers the question of what "tends to be based on numerical measurements of specific aspects of phenomena."[39] The survey instrument is one of the main tools of quantitative method for collecting data through using questionnaires.[40] Therefore this researcher designed a questionnaire that covers all the questions and points related to the theme of the study. Since there is no previous questionnaire that covers all the points of the current study about imams, it was useful to examine the structure of a previous online questionnaire prepared for doing similar research; but instead of studying imams, it was focused on Roman Catholic priests.[41] This online questionnaire was designed to answer the same three questions, duties, qualifications, and challenges. Due to the obvious differences between the nature of the work of both imams and priests and their qualifications and problems, it was necessary to redesign the questionnaire to fit with the nature of the imam's

---

[39] R. Murray Thomas, *Blending Qualitative &Quantitative Research Methods in Theses and Dissertations* (California: Corwin Press, INC., 2003), 2.

[40] Ibid., 41.

[41] "Survey of Roman Catholic Pastors," Education Development Center, Inc., accessed June 13, 2011, http://surveys.edc.org/cleveland/dacum3.htm.

position. I designed the questionnaire, firstly, with regard to my own previous experience as an imam; secondly, with regard to my observations of the local mosque (in Athens, GA) and the mosques I visited in America; and thirdly, taking into account the results of consulting with a group of working imams and discussing this topic with them. After discussion with these imams, I managed to form a questionnaire and then revise it with my supervising professors.

The questionnaire includes forty-six questions covering all-possible points related to the topic. There are different kinds of questions, multiple choice, yes or no, matrix, and open-ended questions. The first set of questions cover all the basic characteristics of imams in order to find out who the participant imams are. The second group of questions includes the views of imams about the most important duties of the American imam. In this section, I asked imams to rate the importance of a group of suggested duties and at the same time gave them the chance to state other duties not included in the questionnaire. The third group of questions deals with the views of imams about the most important fields of knowledge that the imam needs to study. The fourth is about the skills of imams; the fifth is about his manners or traits (*akhlāq*); while the sixth covers the resources helpful for his work. As for the seventh and final set of questions, it collects data about the imam's view concerning a group of suggested challenges and problems facing them; and also includes a chance to state other problems not mentioned in the questionnaire. In addition to these seven groups of questions, there are separate questions related to many of the previous points but asked from another angle in order to assist in assessing the imams' views.

The questionnaire was anonymous and the participants were informed that all responses and information collected would be completely confidential, that no identifiers would be included with the data, and the results would only be reported in aggregated form. In

addition the participants were informed that there are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. Information about the study or a summary of its findings would also be made available to any participant who requested it.

For the purpose of the study, I used an online software program at FreeOnlineSurveys.com to create the questionnaire and collect the data through it. It is secure software with some charges; and no one except the researcher can access the results of the study.

After creating the questionnaire, I went through the process of getting the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This process involved taking a web-based course largely focused on learning the procedures and requirements for protecting and insuring confidentiality of the research subjects. At the University of Georgia, going through this training and gaining IRB approval is required for any researcher involved in conducting research with human subjects. After passing the IRB training, I submitted a lengthy signed IRB application (that was prepared by me and my supervisor) and "instruments" to be used in my research—such as the survey and interview sample, introductory letter, and consent forms. The IRB studied the application after receiving it and approved the research as long as it was performed following IRB guidelines and using the approved research "instruments."

After getting approved by IRB I sent a link for the questionnaire to all participants via email. The software had created this link in order to lead the participants to an online webpage containing the questionnaire, where they could answer its questions easily. The period of receiving responses lasted from January 2011 until May 15, 2011.

All the participant imams are affiliated with the North American Imams Federation (NAIF) and the Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America (AMJA). I attended a group of their

conferences for training imams, contacted members in charge of these organizations, and they helped me in my research. During these conferences I got the chance to introduce my research topic to the attending imams. With the cooperation of the Chairs of AMJA and NAIF I sent a link of the questionnaire to three hundred imams via email. From that group a total of seventy-six imams gave a complete response to the questionnaire and were used in this study.

Some of the imams who did not participate sent emails expressing the reason why they did not participate. Some imams gave ambiguous answers such as "For some reason I will not be able to answer the questions." Others were clearer:

> I have my reservations about filling out so much personal information about my *masjid* and community. Unfortunately, such information has been used in the past to make certain claims about the American Muslim community, such as whether they are Salafi or Sufi oriented, etc. Also, you are asking political questions as to whether we engage in politics etc. In reality Allah knows best that we are all trying to serve His *deen (sic)* [religion] in the best way and abiding by all the laws. Please excuse me if I do not participate.

Such examples show that fear and suspicion may be one of the reasons behind the reluctance of some of the imams to participate. The Islamophobia in American society has created in some Muslims what can be called "academophobia," namely fearing and doubting the objective behind the academic research or at least fearing that some anti-Muslim groups in America could use the collected information about Muslims in America against them. This, however, is not the only reason for some imams to refrain from participation; some of them in all likelihood simply have little interest in such studies. Others have little knowledge about the Internet—which was the main tool for distributing the survey. (Even if they have emails, that does not mean that they themselves use it; they may simply have people helping them.) Others may have a problem with the English language and because the survey was in English, they may not have been able to fill it out.

For analyzing the data, I cleaned the collected data of wrong, repeated, and missing answers. [42]After that I used another computer software program for the statistical analysis called SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), which is generally seen as the standard software package for doing statistical research in the social sciences. This program facilitates getting frequencies, descriptive statistics, means, medians, correlations and forming graphs, diagrams and histograms, tables, and charts, in addition to many other features needed for analyzing the data.

I used all these tools to describe and compare data as well as to relate data to other data in order to reach conclusions concerning the research questions. Also, my personal experiences and observations especially during my academic training period and my volunteer activities in some of American mosques enabled me to gain a better understanding of the quantitative results, their contexts, and some of their causes.

---

[42] "What is SPSS?," Flinders University accessed July 28, 2011, http://www.flinders.edu.au/isd/consulting-and-development/statistics-consulting/spss---licenses-and-technical-support/.

CHAPTER 2

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IMAMS

This chapter of the study will discuss the basic characteristics of the imams. The

chapter will also present a descriptive analysis of some statistics gathered through the survey.

Some of the important points include age, country of origin, ethnicity and residence.

Age

The average age of imams in the study was 44 years old. Overall this group of imams

ranged from 27 to 71 years of age. Namely, the maximum age was 71 years old while the

youngest was 27 years old. This appears in the following chart:

Table 2.1: Age of the Imam

Mean	44.64
Median	42.50
Mode	28
Minimum	27
Maximum	71

Place of Birth

The study finds that imams are from diverse countries of origin. This category shows

only the place where the imams were born and not their nationality. This means that some of

the imams may have been born in their home country, but after that they moved to another

country and got its nationality. The majority of the imams were born in United States, since it

constitutes 23.7 percent of the overall percentage. The second highest percentage is from

Egypt, i.e., 18.4 percent. One of the reasons for this high percentage is that a number of

qualified imams graduated from Al-Azhar University which is based in Egypt (and possibly

because the researcher is himself an Al-Azhar graduate, these Egyptian imams may have felt

disproportionately disposed to assist him). The rest of imams are distributed on 19 countries

with small percentages as in Figure 2.1.
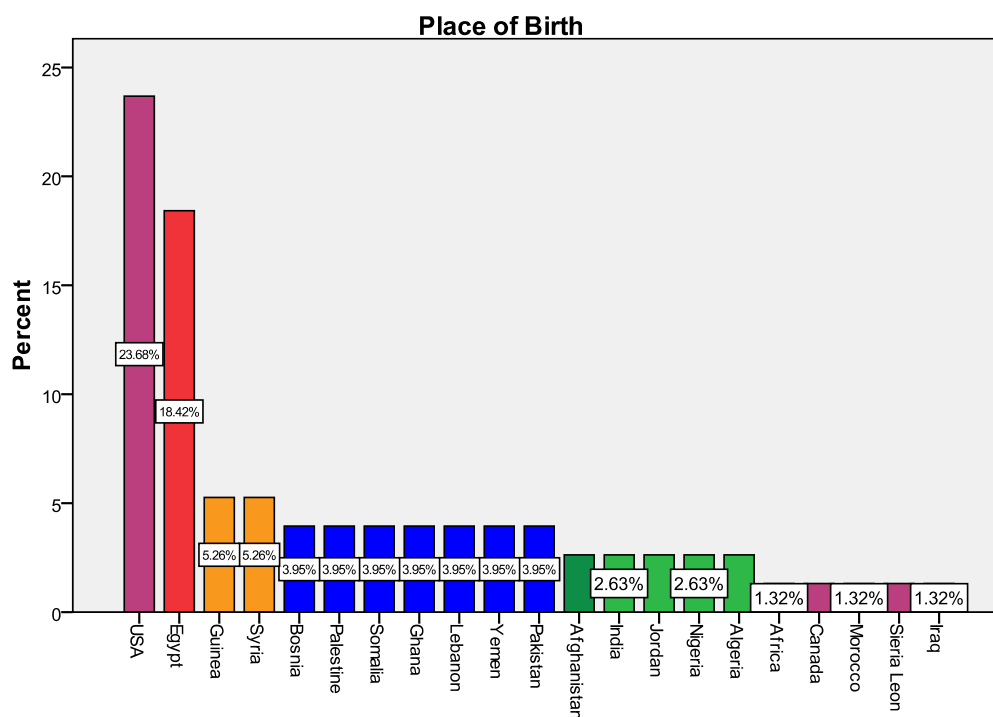
Figure 2.1: Place of Birth[43]

---

[43] The vertical axis in this figure and in all the following ones refers to the percent of imams.

Ethnicity

Mainly the imams' ethnicity is in two groups, Arab and African American. The greatest percentage of participating imams, over 46 percent, are Arabs. The second largest ethnic group is African Americans with 27.6 percent, while 9.2 percent of the imams are from Caucasian origin. Among the Caucasians, 5.3 percent of the imams are white American and 3.9 percent of them are Bosnians. This means that there are now a group of white Americans who were born in America and studied Islam and who have become imams. Their percentage compared to other ethnicities is small, however, but this seems to indicate an increase in the number of white American-born imams, since in one of the previous studies, for instance, that of Bagby et al (2001), white American imams are not even discussed.[44] The "other" category as in Figure 2.2 includes both African and Central Asian imams[45]. African imams comprised 7.9% of imams surveyed, while South Asian imams consisted of 6.6 percent of the whole. The remaining 2.6% of the imams are Central Asian.

Place of Residence

Out of fifty states, there are twenty-three states where participant imams are residing. The imams in this study, however, were concentrated in six states: Texas, New York, Michigan, North Carolina, California, and Florida. The southern state, Texas, is where the greatest number of imams who participated are living, comprising 18.4 percent of the whole. It is followed by New York (in the Northeast), which has 15.8 percent of the imams. The third

---

[44] In general, there is a lack of data with regard to the number of white American imams. Some of the white American imams may have gone abroad for religious studies abroad in the last 10 years. For example, a white American imam mentioned to me that he spent 10 years studying in Saudi Arabia before he started his job as an imam. This lack of data should be remedied in the future by studies focused on white American imams.

[45] The designation of "African" ethnicity in this study refers to imams who have a Sub-Saharan Africa ethnicity, whereas imams from North Africa are designated as having "Arab" ethnicity. As for the Central Asian imams they are from Afghanistan.

ranked state is Michigan, where 9.2 percent of participants are serving, while the fourth state

is North Carolina, which has 7.9 percent of the imams.
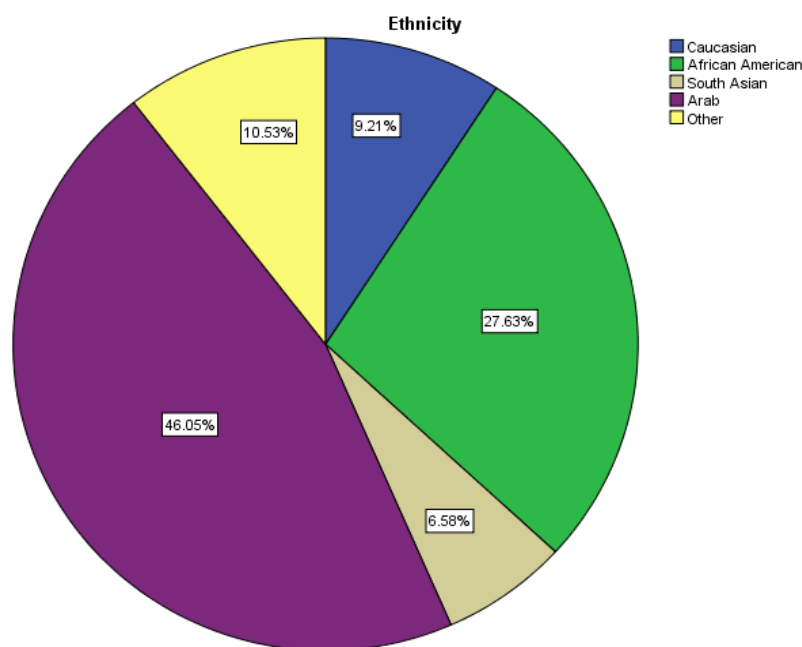
Ethnicity

Figure 2.2: Ethnicity

California and Florida come in the fifth place equally with 5.3 percent for each. Although only a

small percentage of all imams in the United States participated in this study, it is likely that

they are a representative sample of American imams because the six states where the imams in

this study are concentrated are the states that appear to have the largest Muslim communities

and numbers of mosques.[46] Another reason why the imams in the study were concentrated in

---

[46] Based on the data available online about the mosques in the United States these six states constitute a large majority of the mosques and hence probably a large number of imams corresponding to these mosques. For instance California has 164 mosques, New York 141 mosques, Texas 57 mosques, Florida 49 mosques, Michigan 27 mosques, and North Carolina 37 mosques. (See "Search/Find Mosques," IslamicValley, accessed July 29, 2011, http://islamicvalley.com/prod/entitySearch.php/t/09L

the six states may be that such concentrations of imams may be a reflection of the proportions of imams affiliated to the organizations AMJA and NAIF, from whose email lists the imams of this study were drawn.
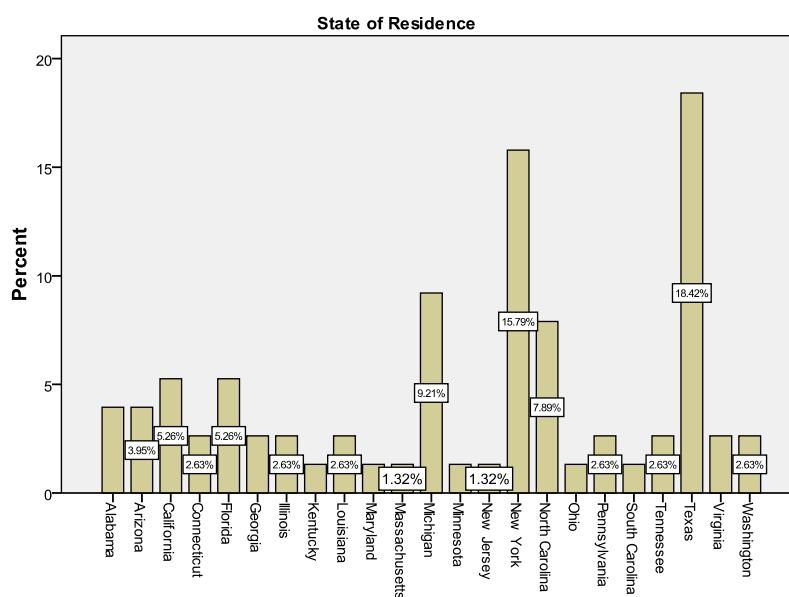
Figure 2.3: Place of Residence

Education of Imams

Concerning the education of imams, they were asked two questions, one about their secular education and the other about their Islamic education. This is because some imams practice their job without having specific academic education in Islamic studies, but they may have a degree in another field. In addition, while some other imams may have been educated in both Islamic Studies and a secular field, still others had neither formal Islamic nor secular education, with their only Islamic education being informal.

Levels of Education in General

In answering the question "What is your highest level of education?", the responses were varied. Over one third of the imams (38.2 percent) have a bachelor degree and similarly more than one-third of them (35.5 percent) have Master's degree. Little over 13 percent of them have a PhD degree; and about 8 percent of imams have only high school education. As for the category of "other", which is 5.3 percent of the imams, all of the imams in this category (with the exception of one imam who did not mention anything) have post-secondary education that is between high school and bachelor degree. This means that at least 12 percent of imams do not have a bachelor's degree. Figure 2.4 shows the percentage of the general education of imams.

Islamic Education

The level of Islamic Education is presented in Table 2.2. It can be observed that more than one-fourth of the imams (28.9 percent) have a bachelor's degree in Islamic studies from overseas Islamic Universities. A little over 23 percent of the imams have Masters or PhD degrees in Islamic studies from abroad. This means more than half of participant imams (nearly 52 percent) have a standard formal Islamic education from overseas. As for imams who received a degree in Islamic studies from an American university, they are a little over 10 percent of the total. In contrast, those who have no academic degree in Islam are approximately one-third of the imams. Among these imams without any degree in Islam, around 20 percent have no formal Islamic education; while 13.2 percent of them have just a certificate, which means finishing "a Qur'ān school"[47] or "completing a short training program for imams."[48]

---

[47] Bagby, *Imam and Mosque Organization in the United States,* 128.
[48] Ibid., 128.

General Level of Education
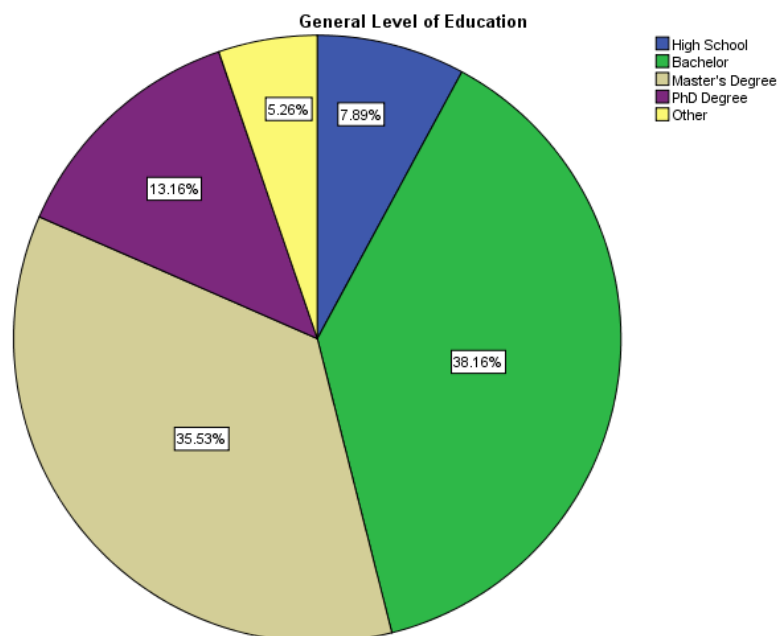
Figure 2.4: General Level of Education

Table 2.2: Level of Islamic Education

Level of Islamic Education?	Percent
Bachelor/License from overseas Islamic University	28.9
M.A. or PhD. from overseas Islamic University	23.7
No formal Islamic education	19.7
Certificate	13.2
M.A. or PhD. from American University	10.5
Other	3.9
Total	100.0

There are around 4 percent of imams who fall under the category of "others;" they are pursuing their Islamic education through online-degrees. In sum, approximately one-third of the imams surveyed do not possess any formal degree in Islamic education, while roughly two-thirds (66 percent) of them have at least a Bachelors degree in Islamic studies or higher.

Islamic Education by Ethnicity of Imams

Q6 Do you hold a degree in Islamic Studies?
- Bachelor/License from overseas Islamic University
- M.A. or PhD. from overseas Islamic University
- M.A. or PhD. from American University
- Certificate
- No formal Islamic education
- Other
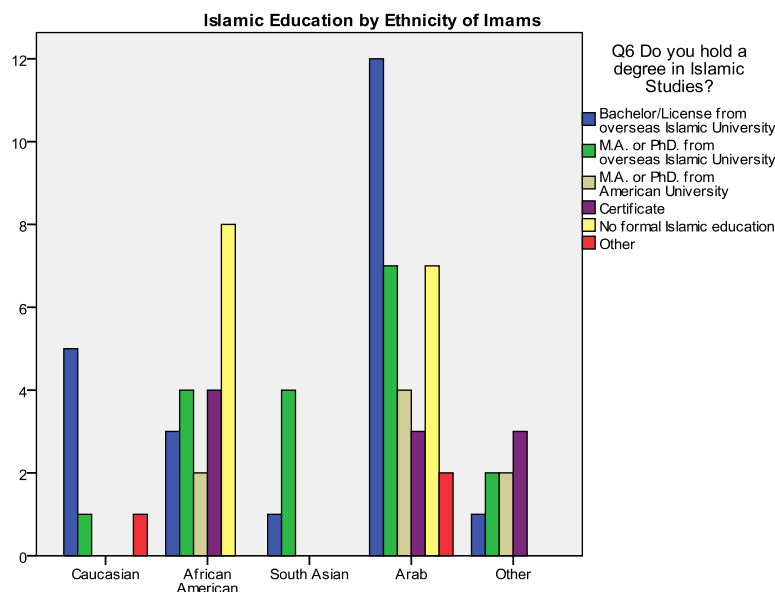
Figure 2.5: Islamic Education by Ethnicity

Ethnicity Correlated with Islamic Education

By checking the relationship between Islamic education and ethnicity one finds that the percentage varies from one ethnicity to another. Figure 2.5 indicates that the Arab imams are the most educated in Islamic Studies, while the African American imams are the least formally educated in Islamic Studies. The Arabs constitute 55 percent of the imams holding Bachelor degrees in a field of Islamic Studies from overseas and over 38 percent of imams possessing degrees such as an MA or PhD in Islamic Studies from overseas. In addition, Arab imams constitute 50 percent of all imams who have an MA or PhD in Islamic Studies from an American university. As for African imams, they represent 40 percent of the imams who hold certificates and more than half (53.3 percent) of the imams who have no formal Islamic

education. Thus it can be observed from the data that the Arab imams' formal Islamic education is much higher than their counterparts from other ethnic groups.

The Employment Status of the Imam's Position

The study's findings show that concerning employment status, the position of imam in America varies. The breakdown of this is illustrated in Figure 2.6.

Employment Status of Imams
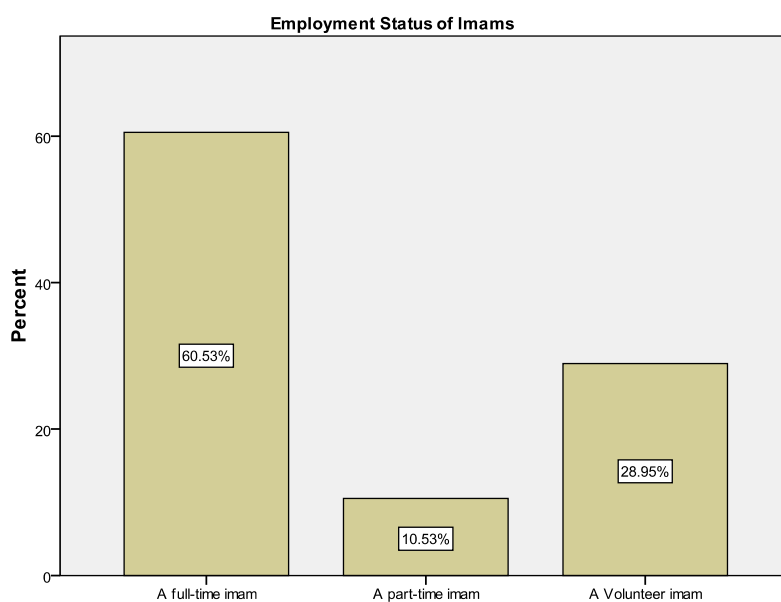
Figure 2.6: Employment Status of the Imam's Position

The majority of imams (60.5 percent) are working as full-time imams, while more than one-fourth (28.9 percent) of them are working as volunteer imams. As for part-time imams they represent only little over a tenth (10.5 percent) of participants. The reason why imams can be volunteers or only part-time imams is due to the traditional nature of imam's position (in the traditional Muslim world in contrast to the West) and due to the fact that any Muslim can function as imam in prayer or in giving the Friday sermon in absence of a qualified imam.

Another reason for non-full time paid imams is the financial demands involved in paying for a qualified imam in some communities.

The study also found that There are over 73 percent of participant imams had another career prior to becoming imams. And there are 26.7 percent of them who had no other career before working as imams which means they trained only to be imams. Moreover, by correlation one finds that more than half (58.7 percent) of the full-time imams had another career while all part-time imams (100 percent) and 95.2 percent of volunteers have some other career. This means that the majority of participating imams, especially the volunteers and the part-time imams, had another job before their position as imams and probably they still have the same job. Table 2.3 shows this frequency.

Table 2.3: Careers Prior to Being an Imam

Position of imam with Having another Career		
Position	Having a career in another field	
	Yes	No
A full-time imam	58.7%	41.3%
A part-time imam	100.0%	
A Volunteer imam	95.2%	4.8%
Total	73.3%	26.7%

The findings also show that there is a good correlation between Islamic education and the status of imam's position. Over three-fourths (77.4 percent) of the imams who are working as a full-time imams have a formal degree in some form of Islamic Studies, in sharp contrast to the 62 percent of part-time imams and 50 percent of volunteer-imams, who have no formal Islamic

education. This means that imams with some type of formal Islamic education have more

chances of having a full-time job.
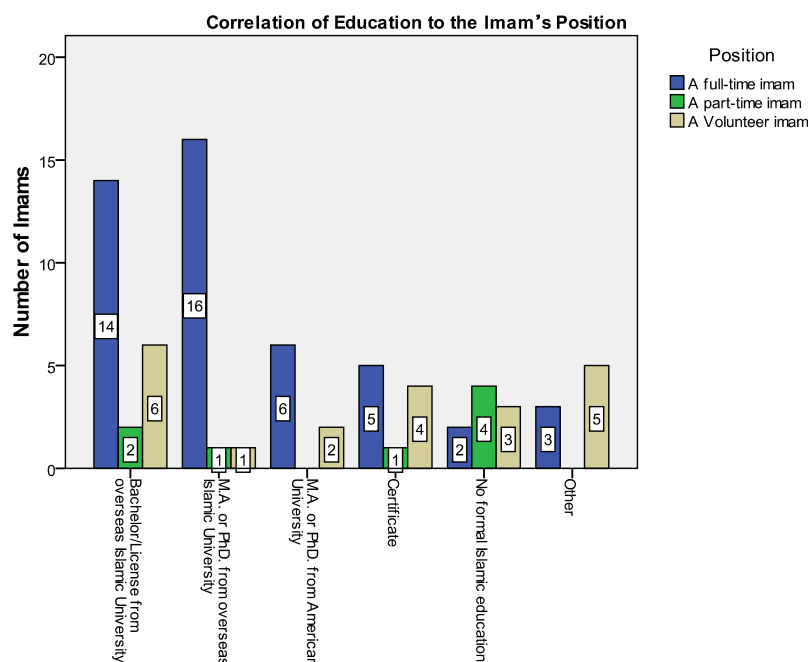
Figure 2.7: Correlation of Education to the Imam's Position

Number of Years in the Position

Table 2.4 shows that the mean number of years that imams served in Islamic

community is 11 years, which implies that most of the imams have worked in their position for

enough amount of time. The maximum number is thirty-five years while the minimum is one

year. Overall the period of the imams' work experience as imams is spread between 1 year and

35 years, with 50 percent of the imams who have worked for more than 8 years.

The Imam's Salary

The highest percent of participating imams (18.4 percent) earn annually $40.000,

followed by 17.1 percent of them, who earn $30,000. These in turn are followed by 21 percent

of imams who earn less than $30,000, while more than ten percent of imams (11.8 percent)

work for no salary. There are nevertheless a few higher-income imams whose salary is $100,000 or more. By and large, the average salary of imams is $37,000 while the median salary is $35,000 which means that 50 percent of imams earn less than $35,000. The findings also show that the maximum salary is $133,000, but at the same time the minimum is 0.

Table 2.4: Number of Years in Position

Mean	11.08
Mode	10
Minimum	1
Maximum	35
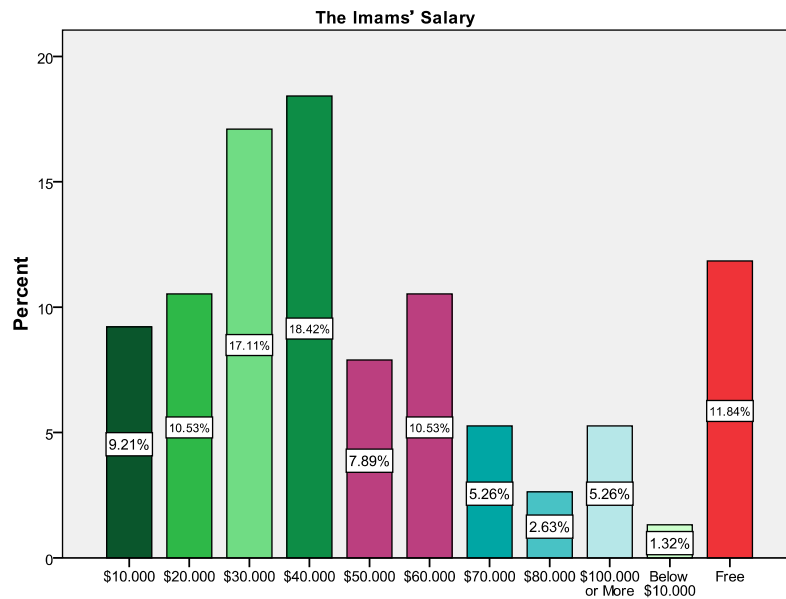
Figure 2.8: The Imams' Salary graph

Table 2.5: Statistical Analysis of Imams' Salaries

Mean	37142.11
Median	35000.00
Minimum	0
Maximum	133000

The Average Attendance at Friday Prayer

One can consider those who attend Friday prayer regularly as the main members of the congregation, members who largely receive the services of the imam. One can also assume that they are the ones who make the major financial contributions for the maintenance of the mosque and for the salary of the imam. Thus it is important to know the percentage of those who attend the mosque especially on Fridays. The responding imams estimated that their Friday attendees (including men, women and children) are an average of 420. The maximum number is in the range of 2500 to 3000 persons, while the minimum is less than 100. There are 28.9 percent of mosques whose attendees on Fridays are between 250 and 500; followed by 23.7 percent of the mosques, whose attendees are from 100 to 250 persons. Finally, 22.4 percent of them have 100 or less attendees. Regarding mosques with a large numbers of attendees, 15.8 percent of mosques have attendees that number between 500 and 1000; 7.9 percent of these mosques have attendees between 1000 and 2000; and only 1.3 percent of mosques have attendees that are between 2000 and 3000 on Friday. In general, the mosque attendance on Friday varies between 250 and 500 worshippers. That is the most frequent number; and hence one can consider the majority of mosque congregations in America to be relatively moderately sized.

Table 2.6: Data of Average Attendance at Friday Prayer

Mosque Attendance at Friday	Percentage
1-100	22.4
100-250	23.7
250-500	28.9
500-1000	15.8
1000-2000	7.9
2000-3000	1.3
Total	100.0

When we correlate size of the congregation with the salary of the imam, we find that the size of congregation has affected the salaries of imams. Low-income imams are serving in mosques with small congregations, while higher-income imams are working in medium and large communities.

The mosques attended by 100 persons or less have 44.4 percent of the imams who work without any salary, 100 percent of those who earn less than $5,000, and 85.7 percent of imams making approximately $10,000. Concerning imams working in mosques that have between 100 and 250 worshippers, 22.2 percent of them work for free, 14.3 percent get $10,000, 42.9 percent earn $20,000, and 30.8 percent make $30,000 annually. In contrast, the majority of imams (64.3 percent) who earn $40,000 are working in mosques attended by 250 to 3000 persons; and over four-fifths of the imams (83.3 percent) making $50,000 are working in mosques attended by 250 to 2000 persons; while 100 percent of those who earn a salary of $70,000 are serving congregations of 250 to 2000. Half of the imams who earn $70,000 (50 percent) consist of imams of mosques attended by 1000 to 2000 people on Fridays. As a whole, the majority of low-paid imams (i.e., making less than $35000 annually) are working in small mosques attended sometimes by less than 100 or more than 100 but not greater than 250, while the highest

percentage of high-paid imams (i.e., making more than $35000 annually) are working in congregations having 500 or more attendees on every Friday.

Table 2.7: Salary in Relation to Mosque Attendance on Friday

Approximate Salary	Attendance at Friday						
	0-100	100-250	250-500	500-1000	1000-2000	2000-3000	Total
133000			100.0%				100.0%
100000		50.0%	50.0%				100.0%
80000	33.3%	33.3%			33.3%		100.0%
70000			25.0%	25.0%	50.0%		100.0%
60000	25.0%	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	12.5%		100.0%
50000		16.7%	33.3%	33.3%	16.7%		100.0%
40000	7.1%	28.6%	42.9%	14.3%		7.1%	100.0%
30000	7.7%	30.8%	46.2%	7.7%	7.7%		100.0%
25000			100.0%				100.0%
20000	14.3%	42.9%	14.3%	28.6%			100.0%
10000	85.7%	14.3%					100.0%
4800	100.0%						100.0%
0	44.4%	22.2%	22.2%	11.1%			100.0%
Total	22.4%	23.7%	28.9%	15.8%	7.9%	1.3%	100.0%

Predominant Ethnicity of the Mosques

Identifying the predominant ethnicity of mosques is also important, especially for determining if there is a relationship between the ethnicity of mosques and the challenges faced by imams. The responding imams stated that the majority of their mosques (40.8 percent) are a mixture of ethnicities, with high percentage of mosques (25 percent) having a

mixture of both South Asians and Arabs. In contrast, 14.5 percent of the mosques are dominated by African Americans; whereas 11.8 percent of mosques are attended primarily by South Asians. Finally, there are only 7.9 percent of mosques the attendees of which are predominantly Arabs.

Predominant Ethnicity of the Mosque

- Mixture with high percentage of both south Asians and Arabs
- All other combinations
- African American
- South Asian
- Arab

7.89%
11.84%
14.47%
40.79%
25.00%
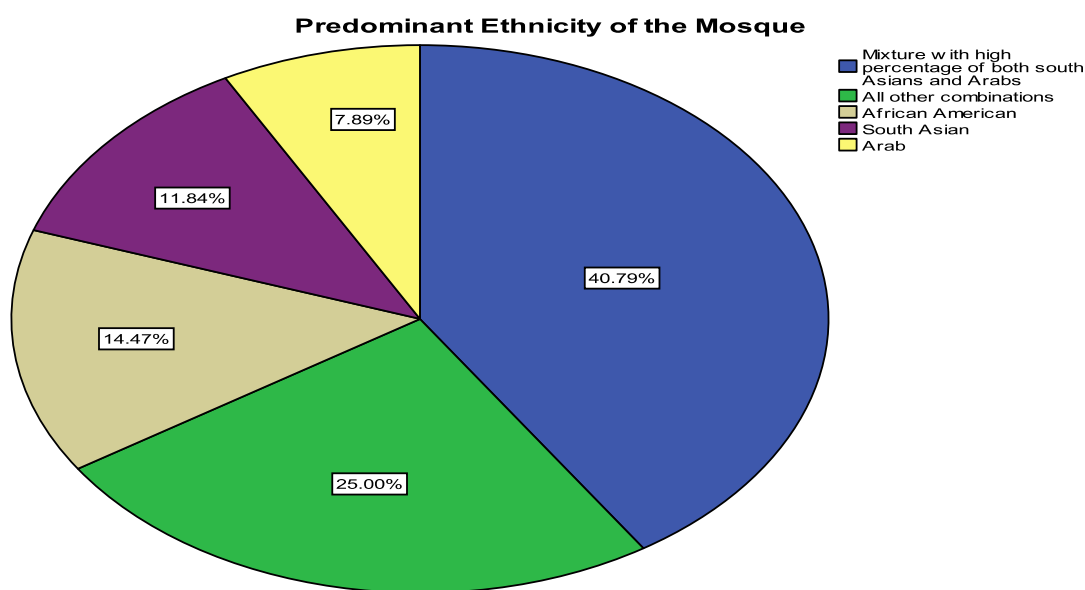
Figure 2.9: Predominant Ethnicity of the Mosques

The Religious Approach of Imams

In order to identify the religious approach of imams and the degree of conservatism or traditionalism adopted by them, they were asked a question about how they make an Islamic decision. They had to choose one of the following three choices:

1- Refer directly to the relevant sources in the Qur'ān and Sunnah and follow an interpretation that takes into account the purpose of those relevant sources and modern circumstances.

2- Refer directly to the Qur'ān and Sunnah and follow a literal interpretation.

3- Follow the well-established views of a particular *madhhab* (legal school).
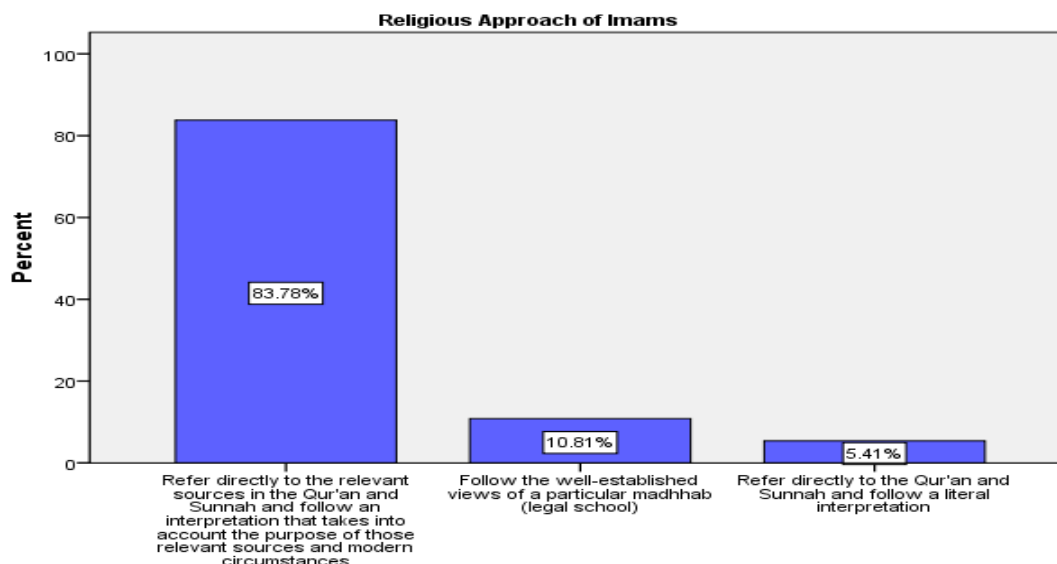
Figure 2.10: Religious Approach of the Imams

In answering this question, the majority of imams surveyed (83.8 percent) chose the approach that for making an Islamic decision they depend on Qur'ān and the Sunnah, but that they follow an interpretation that takes into consideration the context of the relevant Qur'ānic verses, hadith, and the contemporary circumstances. In contrast, little over ten percent of imams chose the methodology of following a well-established *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence), while only 5.4 percent of them responded that they should depend on the Qur'ān and the Sunnah with a literal interpretation. Hence, the findings show that among three main groups of the imams (contextualists, *madhhabists*, and literalists) the mainstream approach among imams regards themselves as have a contextual approach. In general this means that the majority of the imams understand that Muslims in American face unique

challenges that could be different than the challenges and problems with which Muslims wrestle in Muslim-majority societies.

Imams' Religious Approach Correlated with Ethnicity

The religious approach of the imams studied varies due to their ethnicities, but in general the majority of the contextualist imams are (100 percent) Caucasians, (88 percent) Arabs and (85 percent) African Americans, while the majority of South Asian imams (60 percent) are *madhhabists* who follow the *Ḥanafi madhhab*.[49] As for the small percentage of literalist imams, they consist of 50 percent African Americans and 50 percent Arabs.
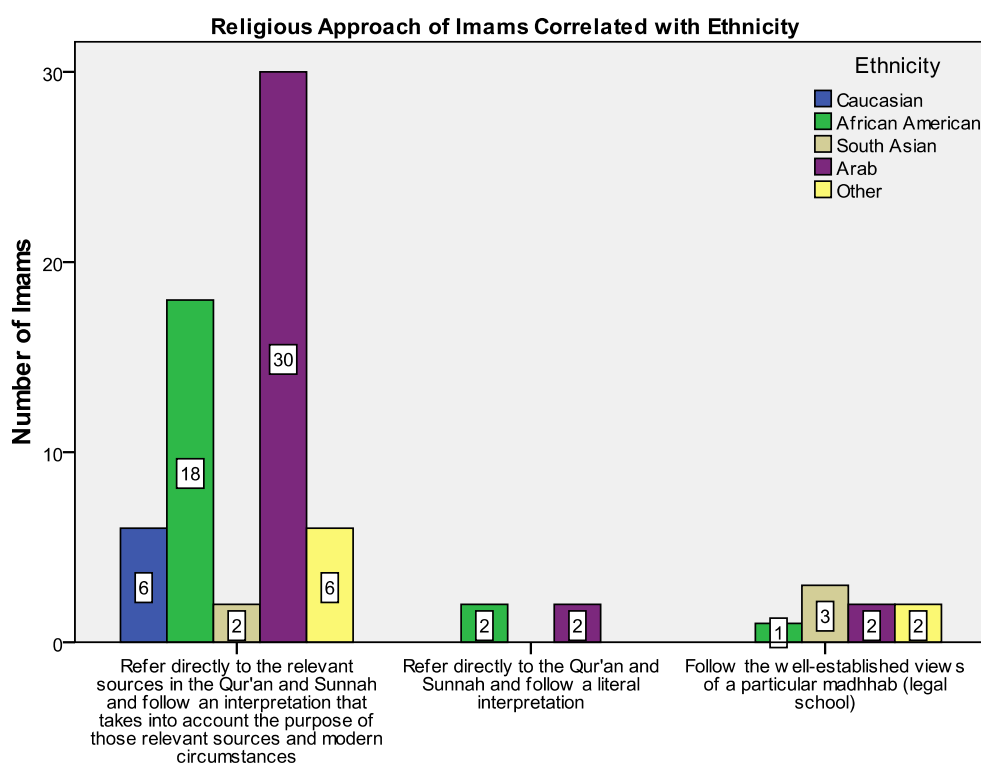
Figure 2.11: Religious Approach of Imams Correlated with Ethnicity

---

[49] *Hanafimadhahb* is one of the main four sunni *madhahib* (schools of law) in Islamic jurisprudence. It has been entitled after the Imam Abu Hanifa (d.150 AH/767CE) the founder of this school. For more information see Ali al-Khafif, *Asbāb Ikhtilaf al-Fuqahā'* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1996), 257.

Imam's Native Language

Concerning their native language, approximately half of the imams (48.7 percent) said that it is Arabic, while a little more than one-fourth of the imams (27.6 percent) responded that their native language is English. The rest of imams, about 24 percent, noted that they speak their homelands languages, such as Bosnian, Guajarati, Hausa, Mandingo, Somali, and Urdu. As for the English language, the majority of the imams (82.9 percent) claimed that they are fluent in the English language and only 17 percent of them said they are not fluent. Surprisingly, when they were asked if speaking in English sometimes hinders their ability to communicate their ideas, more than half of them (53.9 percent) said 'yes' and 46.1 percent said 'no'. This percentage of those who said 'no' includes those whose native language is English.
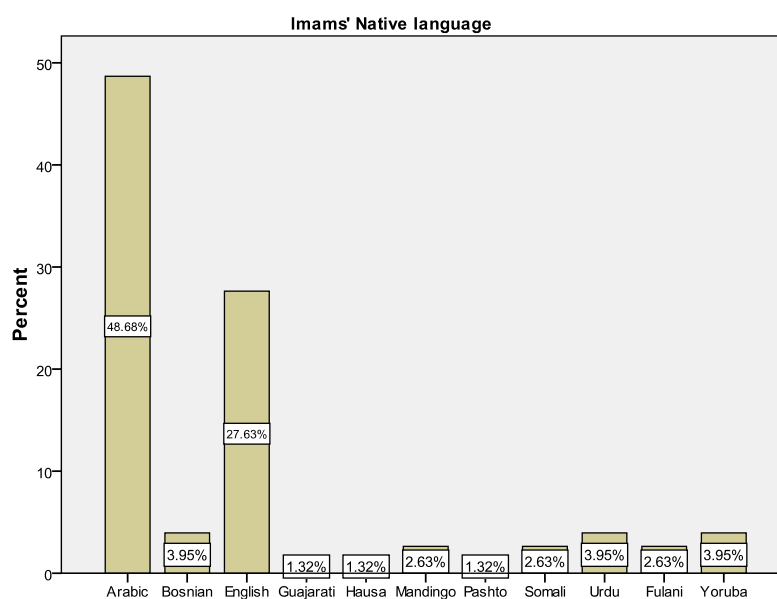
Figure 2.12: Imams' Native Language

If we exclude the imams who are native speakers of English, 57.6 percent of the imams felt that speaking in English sometimes hinders their communication, while 42.4 percent did not consider speaking in English to hinder their expression of their thoughts. This relatively high percentage of imams (57.6%) who reported having some difficulty in communicating in English implies that mastering the English language is one of the challenges facing immigrant imams in American society. The table below shows this frequency.

Table 2.8: Non-native-born American Imams with English Competency

Native Language	English sometimes hinders communicating your ideas		
	Yes	No	Total
Arabic	56.8%	43.2%	100.0%
Guajarati		100.0%	100.0%
Hausa		100.0%	100.0%
Mandingo	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Pashto	100.0%		100.0%
Somali	100.0%		100.0%
Urdu	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Fulani	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Yoruba	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Total	57.6%	42.4%	100.0%

This chapter introduced the main characteristics of imams working in America who participated in this study. Their average age is 44 years and they are from diverse country of origin; however, the Arab imams represent the highest percentage of the participant imams. The results show that there is lack in imams' formal Islamic education. At least one-third of imams have no formal Islamic education which affected their employment status. The majority

of those who do not have high school and good formal education worked as part-time imams and earn lower salaries than others. This means that imams with good Islamic education have more chances of having a full-time job and high salaries which results in more stability and productivity in their work as imams. Hence, they can concentrate on their required tasks and not worry of earning their living and seeking another job simultaneously.

The Participant imams had an average of 11 years of employment which provided them with enough experience in the American environment. This experience first gives more credibility to the results since they have been serving in the community for a longer period of time and they understand the problems and issues faced by the imams. Secondly, the results from the study can also be used in the future not only to evaluate the good experiences of imams but also their strategies in successfully fulfilling their duties and to avoid the same problems of those imams.

The study also found that there are many low-paid imams. The medium salary is 35,000 a year that means half of the imams earn less than the mean salary. Over 10 percent of them work for no salary. It should be noted that the majority of low-salary imams are working in small congregations. The mainstream approach of participant imams is contextual which means the majority of imams think that situation of Muslims in America requires a unique Islamic response from the Muslim religious scholars. In other words, these imams contend that Islamic responses to the problems experienced in different countries cannot be carried to America without any modification. When imams were asked about their competence of the English language, 57.6 percent of imams who are non-native English speaking said sometimes speaking in English hinders them from communicating their ideas. Thus, the study found that mastering the English language as means of communication in the American society is one of

the challenges faced by immigrant imams in America. This challenge requires that the Imam should enroll in English proficiency courses and improve their linguistic skills while the mosques bear the financial cost of such trainings. This shortcoming can be overcome by future imams with enough training in the English language.

CHAPTER 3

THE DUTIES OF IMAMS

The main duties of imams working in America vary from educational, ritual, spiritual, social, and political ones. These duties can be further broken down to the activities within the Muslim community and those with the wider American society. This chapter will demonstrate the most important tasks of the imam in the Muslim community and the American society as a whole. Also, it aims at introducing a standard guideline for developing and discussing important functions of imams and what is expected of them in the future. Identifying these tasks was done through interviews of imams who have expertise in this area—since they have been working in American society an average of eleven years (as previously stated in chapter 2) with some having worked as imams for 30 years or more.

The questionnaire included a group of tasks related to different areas of an imam's work. This group of tasks contains twenty-two functions that cover the educational, ritual, spiritual, social, and political role of the American imam. The imams have been asked to evaluate the degree of importance of these tasks in order to be successful imams in America. They were asked to rank them using the rating scale ranging from "essential" to "not applicable." Hence, based on their responses, this chapter will present a descriptive analysis of the statistics. It will discuss from an Islamic perspective every duty separately according to its relative significance (as judged by the responding imams) and subsequently will summarize the main important duties of the imam in America.

Primary Tasks within the Muslim Community

1-**Delivering the Friday Sermon (*Khuṭbat al- Jumuʿah*)[50]**

The Friday sermon (*Khuṭbat al- Jumuʿa*) delivered before the congregational Friday prayer to the congregation (together with the congregational Friday prayer) is perhaps the most essential weekly gathering of Muslims. Its importance is like the Sabbath Day for the Jews and Sunday Worship for the Christians.
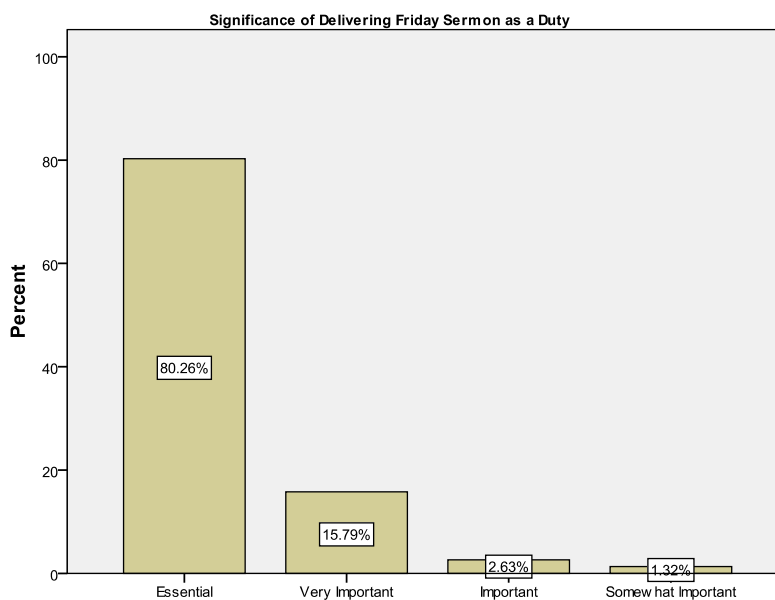
Figure 3.1: Significance of Delivering Friday Sermon as a Duty

The majority of imams (80.3 percent) view delivering the Khuṭbat *al-Jumuʿa* to be essential; and 15.8 percent of them see that it is very important. This indicates that the majority of the imams (96.1 percent) think that the Friday sermon is one of the most important duties since

---

[50] The Friday Prayer includes the *Khuṭba* followed by the congregational prayer. So, religiously both are equally important. The *Khuṭba* is part of the Friday prayer, but this term is also used to express the Friday congregation in general among Muslims without separation between the two parts.

only 2.6 percent rated it as being important and only 1.3 percent somewhat important. It is the only task that none of them said it is not applicable. This means that they rated delivering the Khuṭbat *al-Jumuʿa* as the most important task that the imam should carry out; and hence it is considered the number one task in the list of the imam's duties.

2-Leading Prayer

The attitude of the imams regarding leading daily prayer as one of their duties is summarized in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Importance of Leading Prayer

Importance of Leading Prayer	Percent
Essential	53.9
Very Important	13.2
Important	17.1
Somewhat Important	9.2
Not applicable	6.6
Total	100.0

This table clearly shows that most of the imams (68%) are of the opinion that leading daily prayer is highly important; but about 7% of them think that leading daily prayer is not important at all. Overall approximately 16% of them give very low priority to performing daily prayer. Many reasons could be behind the percentage of those who give low importance for leading prayer. One of the interviewed imams explained that the social role of the imam is more important than the ritual one. Hence he may spend time visiting people in their towns and homes and interacting with them in order to build bridges with them and bring them

closer to Islam. If the Imam is not present because of such visits, then any Muslim male can lead the prayer. This means that mosque administrators should allow for some flexibility regarding the task of leading prayer as long as the imam is involved in other important activities. Another reason why some imams regard leading daily prayers as relatively lacking in importance may be the correlation of the importance of leading prayer with the status of the imam's position and salary. It shows that none of full-time imams regarded prayer as being unimportant (by rating its importance as "not applicable"), while 100% of those who regarded it as being unimportant (by rating its importance as "not applicable"), were low-salaried and non-full-time imams.

Table 3.2: Importance of Leading Prayer Correlated with Position

Importance of Leading prayer	Position		
	A full-time imam	A part-time imam	A volunteer imam
Essential	68.3%	12.2%	19.5%
Very Important	90.0%		10.0%
Important	46.2%	15.4%	38.5%
Somewhat Important	42.9%		57.1%
Not applicable		20.0%	80.0%

3-Arbitration of Disputes in the Muslim community

The imams' stance concerning arbitration among members of the Muslim community shows that such arbitration is regarded as being one of the main tasks of the imam, being rated at third among the imams' responsibilities. Arbitration includes solving disputes among families, businessmen, and couples. Half of the imams (50%) are of the view that arbitration is

essential, and 21 percent of them see that it is very important. This means that over 70 percent of the imams think arbitration should have a high priority in the imam's work. One imam explained that arbitration takes a lot of his time and is among the social responsibilities of the imam, which according to him should be having greater priority over many other duties.

Figure 3.2 shows that about one-fourth of the imams (24.6%) do not see that arbitration has a high priority and regard it as being just "important" or "somewhat important." In addition, 5.3 percent of the imams designated it as being "not applicable," which means that they felt that it should not be included as one of the imam's tasks. Nevertheless, this percentage is very small; and furthermore, 75 percent of the imams who rated arbitration as "non-applicable" are non-full-time and low-salaried imams.
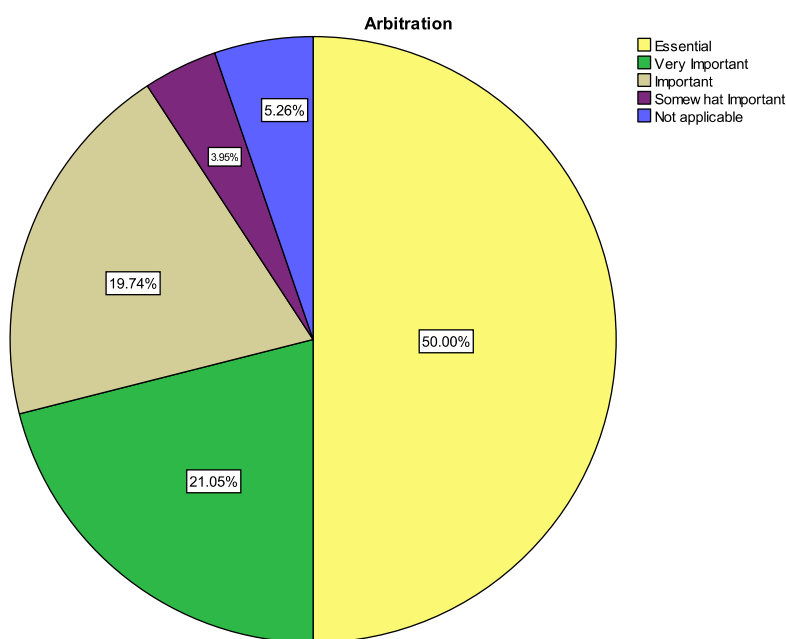
Figure 3.2: Arbitration as a Duty

4- Giving weekly religious lectures

Educating the Muslim community about Islam in general should be one of the main duties of the imam in the mosque according to the view of the majority of the American imams surveyed. Therefore, American imams generally regard giving weekly religious classes (dealing with Islam) as being an important part of their responsibilities. Commonly such classes involve Qur'ānic *tafsīr* (interpretation), hadith commentary, biography of the Prophet Muhammad, Islamic history, *fiqh* (Islamic law), Arabic language, *tajwid* (rules of Qur'ān recitation) and others.

Weekly Religious Classes
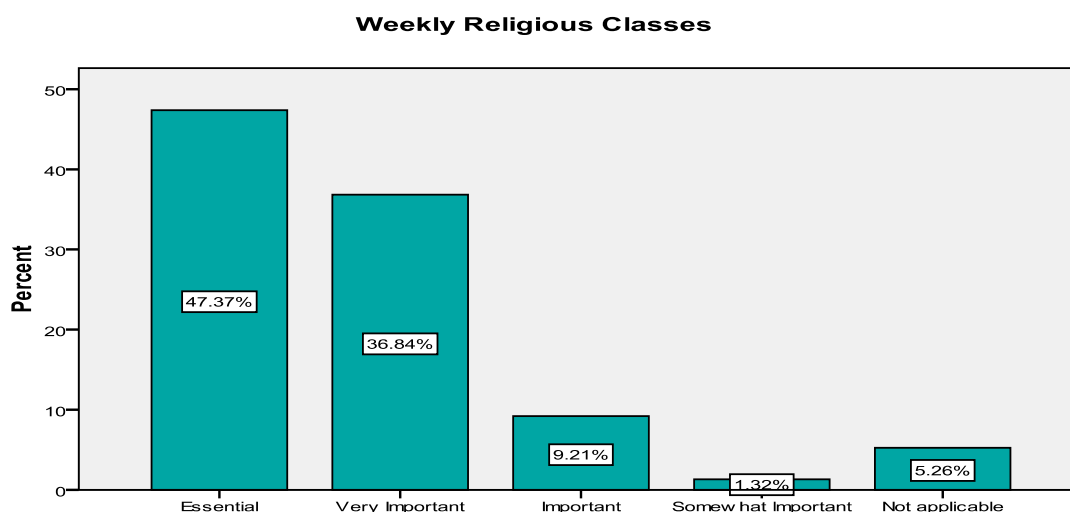
Figure 3.3: Weekly Religious Classes Taught by Imams

Approximately half of the surveyed imams (47.4%) stated that teaching weekly religious classes is essential to the success of the imam; and more than third of them (36.8%) saw it as being very important. In general, 84 percent of the imams put this task at the top of the list of imams' main tasks in America. Moreover, few of imams (i.e., 9.2 percent) considered giving weekly religious classes as being "important;" and only one percent (1.3%) of them

viewed such classes as being "somewhat important." In contrast to those who viewed teaching weekly classes on Islam as being on the important end of the spectrum, 5.3 percent of participating imams viewed that it was not applicable. Also, correlation analysis indicates that the majority (75%) of those who said it is not applicable (and thus not important to an imam) are in fact volunteer imams.

5-Counseling

Providing religious and spiritual counseling for the congregants of the mosque especially in marital and family relationships is one of the tasks that imams were asked to rate concerning its importance as one of the imam's duties.
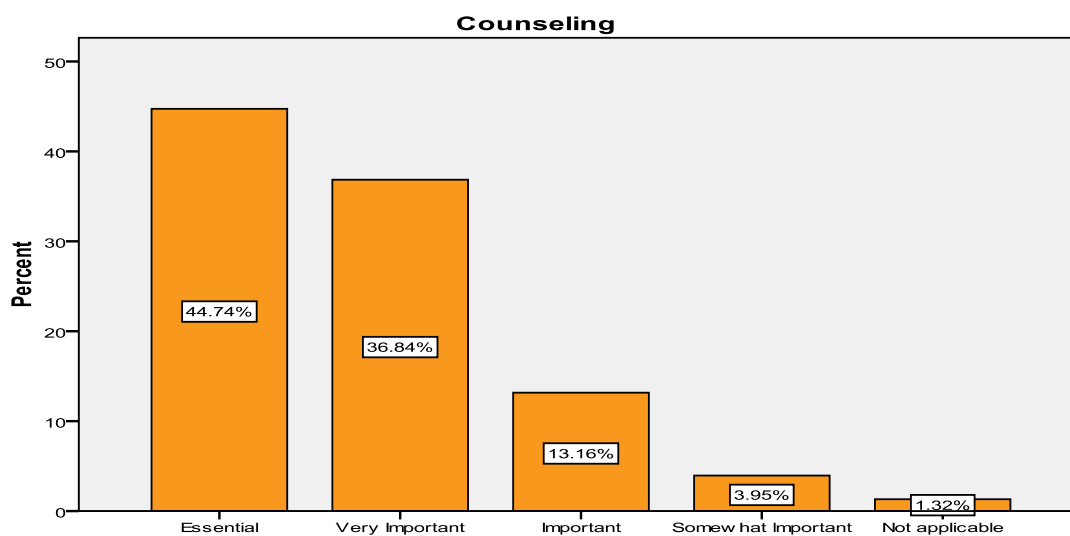
Figure 3.4: Importance of Counseling as a duty

As was shown in the previous chart, around half of the imams (44.7%) consider counseling as an "essential" task while over one third of them (36.8%) see it as "very important." Combining these two percentages, one finds that more than 80 percent of the

imams emphasize providing religious and spiritual counseling services to their community members. There are 13.2 percent of imams, however, who think that it is just "important" and 3.9 percent of imams view it is "somewhat important." This means that from their perspective there are other priorities which could take precedence. In contrast, one percent of the imams (i.e., one imam) considered counseling not to be applicable. Not surprisingly, this imam is a volunteer imam.

6- Conducting Funerals

Islamic funeral rites are unique to Islam, in the sense that they are different from funeral rites in other religions. The imam plays an important educational and religious role in this ritual. Because he is the religious reference in the mosque, he is responsible for educating Muslims about the Islamic funerary rites, such as bathing the dead (*taghsīl)*, shrouding (*takfīn*), performing the funeral prayer (*ṣalāt al-janāza*), burying the deceased (*al-dafn*), and then ethics of mourning and condolence. As a religious authority in the mosque, he could also lead the Muslims in the funeral prayer, which is an obligatory congregational prayer (obligatory in the sense that it must be performed after one dies, not in the sense the other Muslims must attend).

Table 3.3: Conducting Funerals

Level of Importance	Percent
Essential	43.4
Very Important	22.4
Important	22.4
Somewhat Important	9.2
Not applicable	2.6
Total	100.0

In addition to his education function concerning funerary rites, just as he can lead the funeral prayer, he can also help performing any of the previous mentioned funerary rites.[51]

Due to this importance of conducting funeral rituals to Muslims and according to the previous table, nearly half of imams (43.4%) say it is one of the essential tasks of the imam in America, while one-fourth of them (22.4%) think it is very important for the fulfillment of the imam's role. This means that more than 65 percent of the American imams surveyed attach a great significance to this task as being one of the main duties of American imams. On the other hand, around one-fourth of the imams (22.4%) hold the view that conducting the funerals is important, and 9.2 percent see it as "somewhat important." This may means that if there is a contradiction between this task and another task, which they deem to be more important, imams may sacrifice conducting the funerals to fulfill the other duty. It also may mean that there are other individuals in the mosque in charge of such duties under the supervision of the imam. Although the imams varied in the ranking importance of this task, only a very small percentage of them (2.6%), view it is "not applicable," and hence that it should not be included as one of the imam's tasks. Half of this small percentage consists of volunteer imams and the other half consists of full-time imams.

7-Helping the Poor and the Needy

Supporting the poor and the needy, especially financially, comes under one of the main pillars of Islam, which is *zakāt* (obligatory almsgiving). Therefore, the imam has a great role, first in encouraging rich Muslims to pay their due charity and then another role, which is in distributing the collected money in direct and indirect ways. If he is a member of the mosque charity committee, he could be directly involved in distributing *zakat* and deciding who

---

[51] For more information see Al-Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al-Sunnah* (Cairo: Al-Fatḥ lil-Iʿlām al-ʿArabī, 2008), 2: 7-106.

deserves it. If he is not a member in this committee, his role will be consultative through advising and guiding the committee concerning the legal matters related to it according to the Islamic law. Also due to his involvement with the whole community, the imam will be familiar with the circumstances of those who are in need of help and support.[52] The ratings of the surveyed imams concerning this role are illustrated in Figure 3.5.
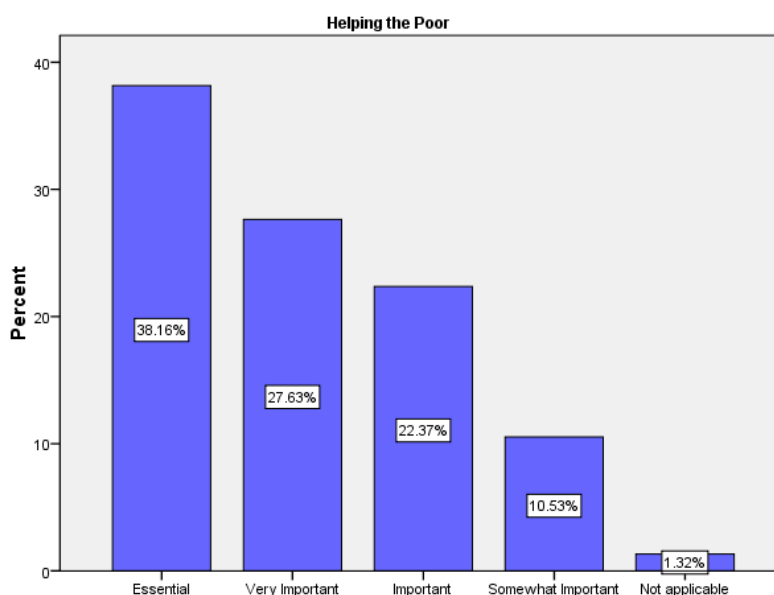
Figure 3.5: Helping the Poor as a Duty

The imams rank this task as seventh in importance. More than one-third of them (38.2%) state that it is essential and over one-fourth (27.6%) of them think it is very important. This means that more than 65 percent view helping the poor to be a central task of the imam that should be regarded as being among his work priorities. In contrast, 22 percent of the imams consider helping the poor to be an important task, and 10.5 percent think that it is somewhat

---

[52] Muḥammad Muwaffaq al-Ghalāyinī, *Anshiṭat al-marākiz al-islāmīyah bi-Amrikā al-Shamālīyah: dirāsah fiqhīyah* (Amman, Jordan: Dār Sirāj, 2006), 468.

important. Hence, about one third of the imams see this task as not being a highly important one and it seems that for them there are other issues that the imam should take care of first or that he can designate the responsibility for this to others. Only one percent of the imams' view helping the poor as "not applicable;" and, as we have seen concerning other duties, this percent also consists of volunteer imams. One of the reasons why some imams gave low importance to helping the poor as one of the imam's duties may be that in many of the American mosques there are committees within the mosque board which are responsible for this matter. Hence, in such cases, the involvement of board members in this issue renders the imams' participation unnecessary.

8- Performing marriage ceremony

Marriage in Islam has specific regulations and conditions. Hence the imam, due to his religious position of authority, needs to perform this religious duty according to Islamic law. This also happens alongside the procedures required according to American civil law. Performing marriages according to the civil law is not one of the tasks of the imam in some Islamic countries[53], because there is a specific religious position sometimes called *qadi* (judge) or *m'azun* (authorized or who has the authority to perform marriage) that is affiliated to the civil court as it is the case in Egypt for example. Hence, due to the absence of such a service by the American court, American mosques and Islamic centers seek to fill this gap, providing the service of helping Muslims to marry according to the Islamic law. The chart below clarifies how the surveyed imams rate the importance of providing this service among the many duties of the imam in America.

---

[53] This is the general practice that is known to the author based on his personal experience and interaction with imams from some Muslim countries.
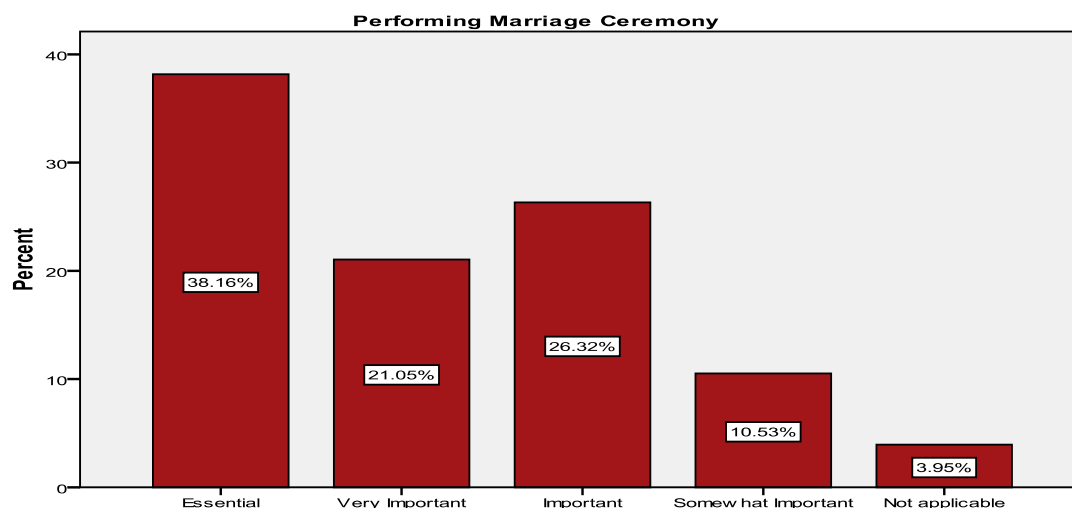
Figure 3.6: Conducting Marriage Ceremony

It is clear from the above graph that 38.2 percent of the imams think that performing the marriage ceremony is one of the essential duties of the imam, and 21 percent view that it is very important. Thus, with 60 percent of the imams holding the opinion that providing this kind of service is either essential or very important, it ranks eighth in priority among the main duties of the imam. In contrast, it is clear from the graph that the percentage of those who rate this task as important is 26.3, which is more than one-fourth, while about 11 percent consider it as somewhat important. This means that more than one-third of imams (37%)—which is almost equal to the percentage of those who said it is essential—believe it is not essential and is not one of the main priorities of imam. Moreover, 3.9 percent of imams (all of whom were volunteer imams) hold the view that it is not applicable to the imam's duties. This is clear in the Table. 3.4

9-Engaging in Youth Programs

One of the phenomena that I have observed in many Islamic centers is programs designed specifically for the young generation. Muslim communities try to keep young members of their community connected to Islam and its teachings. This desire by parents and Muslims in general is encouraged by Islam. Islam considers the youth the backbone of any society. If they are strong, modest, and knowledgeable, this will reflect positively on the society as well. It is stated that the prophet Muhammad was very concerned about the youth, particularly in order to "build their character spiritually, physically, intellectually, ethically, and psychologically."[54] Therefore people expect the imam to play a major role in this regard and to be active in attracting the youth to the mosque specifically and to their religion in general. The responses of the majority of the imams surveyed concerning this duty reflect their serious awareness of their essential role in nurturing the Muslim youth in America. Their responses are clearly represented in Figure 3.7:

Table 3.4: Conducting Marriage Ceremony

Importance of Performing Marriage Ceremony	Position		
	Full-time imams	Part-time imams	Volunteer imams
Essential	65.5%	13.8%	20.7%
Very Important	62.5%	12.5%	25.0%
Important	65.0%	5.0%	30.0%
Somewhat Important	50.0%	12.5%	37.5%
Not applicable			100.0%
Total	60.5%	10.5%	28.9%

---

[54] 'Abdallāh Nāṣih 'Alwān, *Dawr al-shabāb fi ḥaml risālat al-Islām,* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1999), 4.

Engaging in Youth Programs
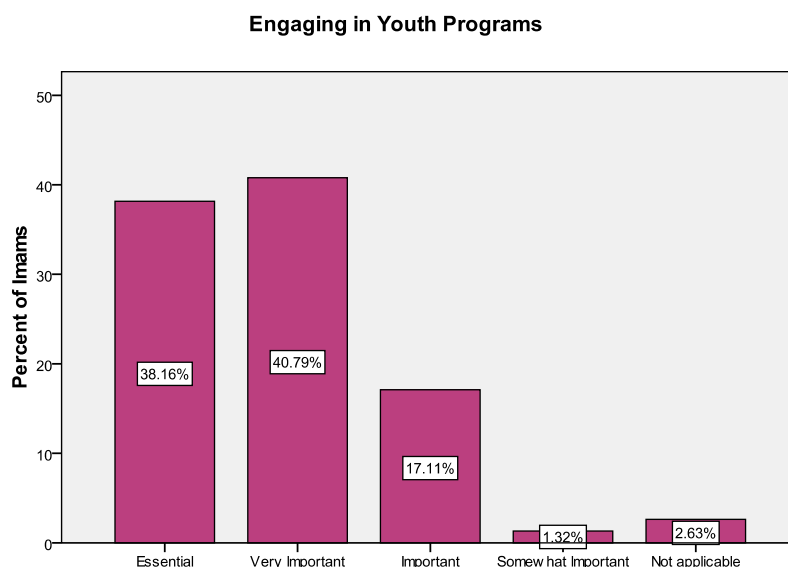
Figure 3.7: Engaging in Youth Programs

More than one-third of imams (38.2%) have the view that their engaging in youth programs is one of their essential tasks, and 40 percent of them rate it as very important responsibility of theirs. Thus, 79 percent of the imams put supervising and participating in youth activities in their mosques as one of the extremely important duties related to the success of their mission and role in the community. Only 17 percent of the imams think that it is simply important, and only one percent of them consider it as somewhat important. There are very few imams (2.6%) who state that it is not applicable and hence irrelevant to their role as imam.
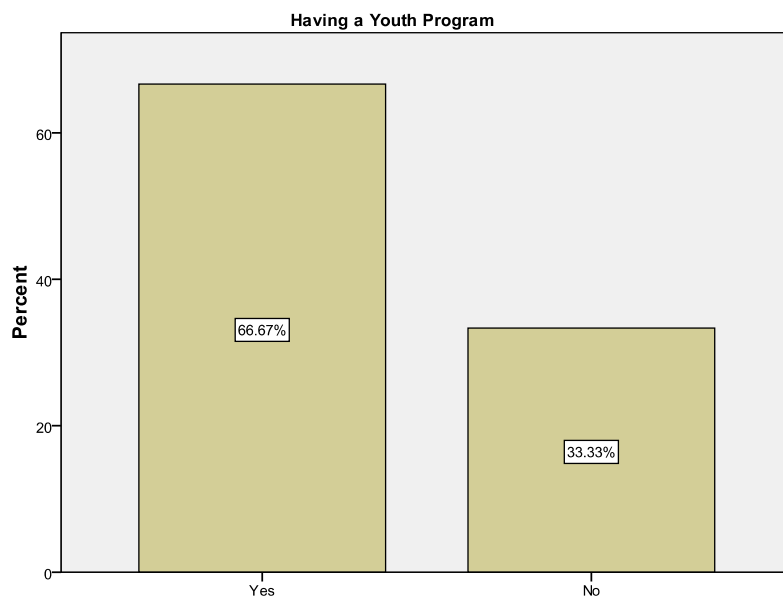
Figure 3.8: Having a Youth Program

The imams were also asked two other questions regarding their role with the youth and the mosque. The first question was whether or not they had an effective youth program; and the second question was whether they themselves participate in playing any kind of sports with the youth. Regarding the first question, two-thirds of respondent imams (66.7) said yes, they do have an effective youth program in their mosques, while one-third (33.3%) of them said there is no youth program in their mosques. The majority (72%) of those who said that they did not have a youth program are part-time and low-salaried imams. This means that they do not have time for interacting with the youth and establishing a stable and effective program for them because they are not paid enough to do so. Hence, they present having a youth program as a less important task. Moreover, the majority (68%) of those who did not have effective youth programs in their mosques are the imams of the mosques that have a congregation of less than 250 people, which are relatively small congregations.

Table 3.5: Having Youth Program Correlated with
Position

Position	Having Youth program	
	Yes	No
A full-time imam	84.4%	15.6%
A part-time imam	50.0%	50.0%
A Volunteer imam	36.4%	63.6%

Table 3.6: Having Youth Program Correlated with Friday
Attendance

Friday Attendance	Q42 Having Youth program	
	Yes	No
0–100	16.0%	36.0%
100–250	20.0%	32.0%
250–500	34.0%	16.0%
500–1000	18.0%	12.0%
1000–2000	10.0%	4.0%
2000–3000	2.0%	

As for the second question (whether or not the imams themselves play sports with the youth), over three-fourths of imams (77.6%) stated that they sometimes play basketball, soccer, or other kinds of sports with the youth, while approximately one-fourth of them (22.3%) said that they do not participate in such activities. The age of the majority (80.2%) of those who do not participate in sports with the youth is more than 40 years old.

The goal of this question was to investigate whether the imams are close to the youth and interact with them using the activities desirable at their young age or not, since one of the favorite activities of the youth is participating in sports. The findings show that the majority

strive to communicate with the youth and understand at least to some extent the needs of their age; but there is a small percentage of imams (many of whom are much older than the youth) who do not appear to do that; and the age discrepancy between the youth and the older imams may be one of the reasons behind that. This means that young imams are able to interact with youth in a community (in the very least by participant in sports with them), while older imams must find other ways of interacting with the youth in order to bridge the age gap between them.

10- Visiting the sick

It is known in America that many hospitals and health care institutions hire chaplains for providing spiritual and pastoral care for their patients. The imam sometimes, if there is no appointed Muslim chaplain, provides this service for Muslim patients by visiting them in hospitals or even their homes. Imams do this in order to emotionally and spiritually improve the states of Muslim patients. It should be noted that Islamic tradition encourages not only Imams to visit sick but also all Muslims to do so. If we keep this in mind, other Muslims can alleviate the responsibilities of the imam (to a degree) if they carry out the duty of visiting the sick.

The imam's role is special, however, because he is supposed to provide Muslim patients with the religious knowledge that they need during their sickness; how they should perform their prayers; how to be in a state of ritual purity if they cannot easily purify themselves well; and other legal issues related to their worship; and he can assist them in many other affairs, such as writing their wills and distributing the inheritance that they will pass on. This kind of service can be provided by Muslims from the community during their visitation after due guidance from the imam. Or more specifically the Imam should train other members of the

community who can do it in case he is overburdened with other responsibilities. The graph in Figure 3.9 rates the imams' opinion of the importance of this task as one of his duties.

The largest number of imams, representing over one-third of them (36.8%), hold the view that visiting the sick is an essential task with which the imam should be concerned; and it is therefore high on his list of priorities. Slightly more than one-fourth of them (26.3%) think that it is a very important aspect of the success of the imam in serving his community members. Hence, 63 percent of imams think it is highly important, which puts this task tenth in importance among the imam's responsibilities.
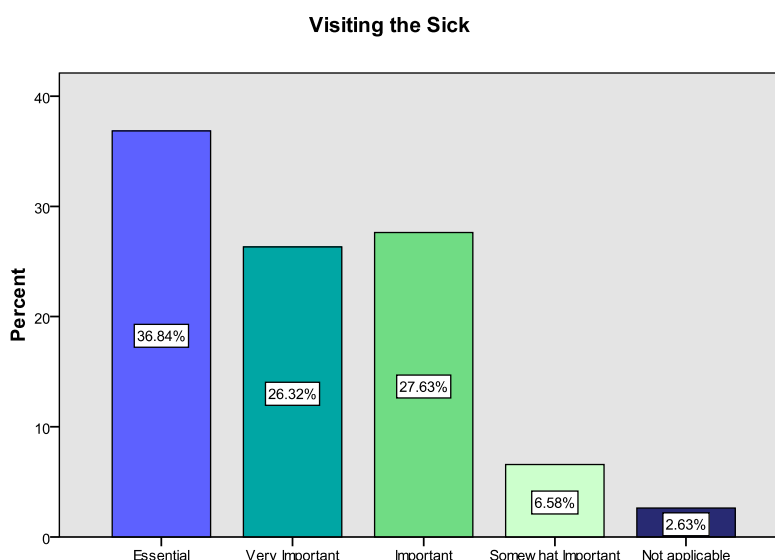
Visiting the Sick

Figure 3.9: Visiting the Sick

In contrast to the 63% of the imams who feel that visiting the sick is either essential or very important, more than one-fourth of imams (27.6%) consider visiting the sick to only be important; and 6.5 percent view it is only somewhat important. Collectively they comprise just over one-third of imams (34.2%) who do not rank visiting the sick in the two highest categories

of importance for the imam's work. As for those who view that it is not applicable, they are only 2.6 percent of imams; and none of them are full-time imams. In general, the majority of imams view visiting the sick to be highly important, however; a group of imams do consider it to be less important. I suspect that these imams are busy with other activities. Hence they think that this task can be done by other members of the community.

Secondary Tasks within the Muslim Community

The tasks previously discussed were considered by the imams as their ten most important duties within the Muslim community. In contrast to these ten most important responsibilities, a number of other duties were ranked relatively low though still being regarded as "essential" by at least over 30% of the imams: teaching Arabic, new Muslim programs, community celebrations, special classes for women, and leading *tarawih* prayers. Concerning teaching Arabic classes, only one third of the imams (34%) view it as essential, and 27 percent as being very important (totaling 63% in the top two categories of importance, the same percentage of those imams who rated "visiting the sick" in the top two categories of importance). It is remarkable; however, that 14 percent think teaching Arabic is not applicable to the responsibilities of the imam (this being one of the highest percentages concerning duties rated as not being applicable). In other words, a significantly high numbers of imams (though by no means even close to a majority) felt that teaching Arabic was not relevant to their position as imam.
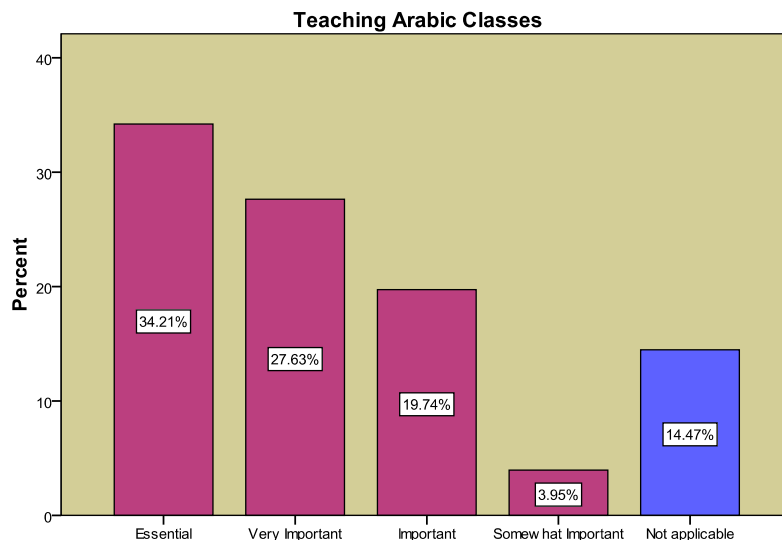
Figure 3.10: Teaching Arabic Classes

Among the other relatively low ranking responsibilities, teaching new Muslim programs was rated by roughly one-third of the imams (34%) as being essential, with 26 percent considering it to be very important (60% in the top two categories of importance). In contrast, 7 percent deemed teaching new Muslim programs to be not applicable to their responsibilities.

In addition to the relatively lower ranking duties of teaching Arabic and leading programs for new Muslims, another somewhat less important responsibility is participating in community celebrations. This duty was regarded by 32 percent of the imams as being essential. A similarly relatively low-ranking duty was teaching special classes for women, which was considered to be essential by 30 percent of the imams, while about 12 percent of imams deemed it as being not applicable.

Teaching New-Muslims Programs
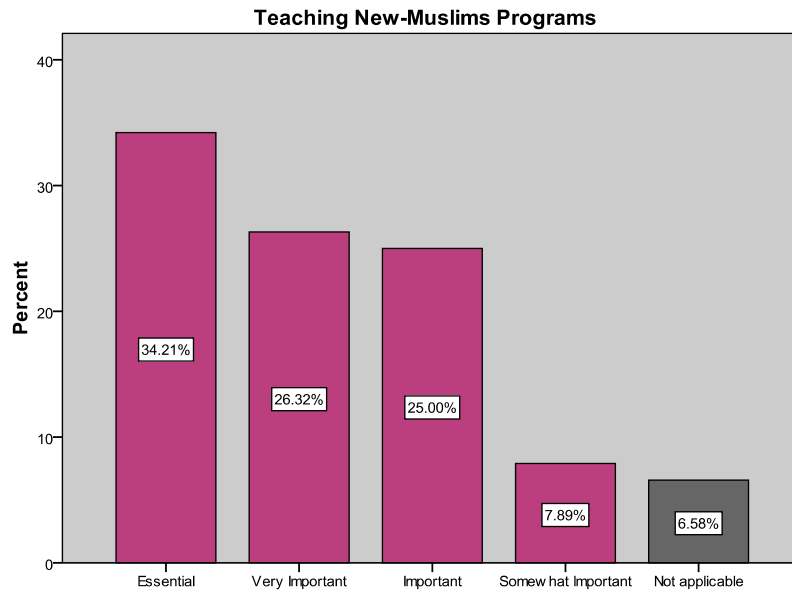
Figure 3.11: Teaching New-Muslims Programs

Teaching Special Classes for Women
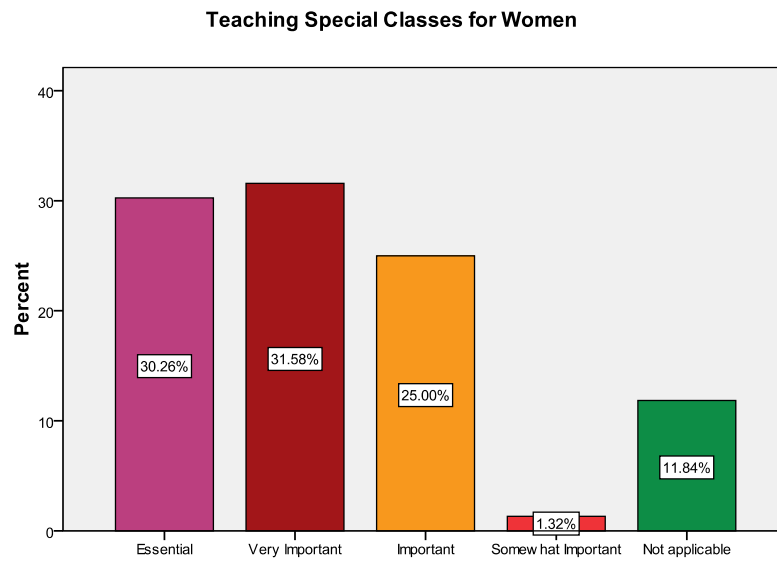
Figure 3.12: Teaching Special Classes for Women

Participating in Community Celebrations
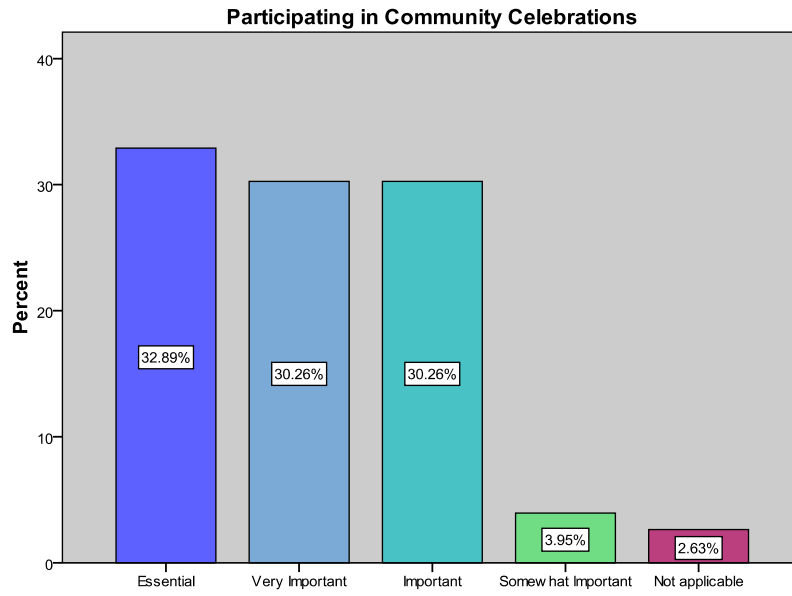
Figure 3.13: Participating in Community Celebrations
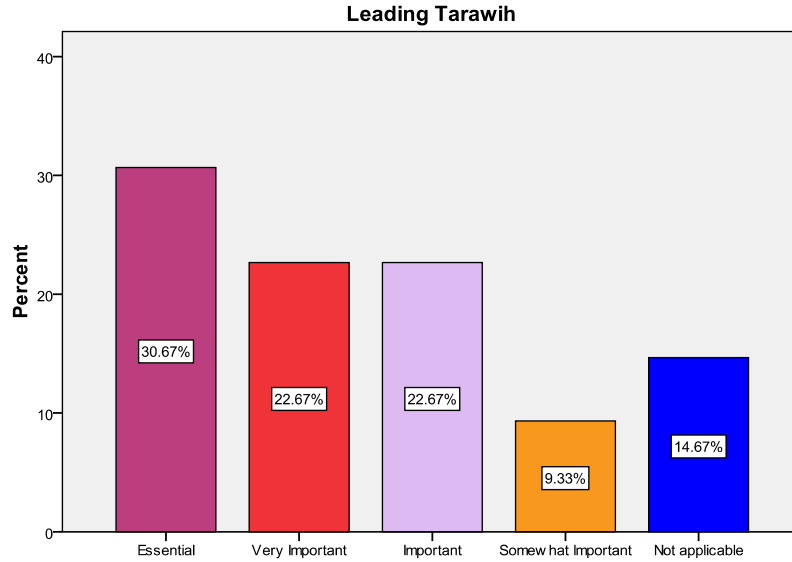
Leading Tarawih

Figure 3.14: Leading *Tarawih*

As for leading *tarawih* prayer (supererogatory night-prayer in month of Ramadan), only 30 percent of imams think that it is essential, with 22 percent considering it to be very important. It is particularly noteworthy that—like the relatively high percentage of imams who ranked teaching Arabic as unimportant—14 percent of the imams deemed leading *tarawih* prayer as being not applicable to the responsibilities of an imam.

A few other duties were rated as being "essential" by less than 30% of the imams: visiting Muslim families, helping new immigrants, and supervising an Islamic school, as can be seen in the following table.

Table 3.7: Some of the Secondary Tasks

Duties	Essential	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not applicable
Visiting Muslim families	28.9%	26.3%	28.9%	11.8%	3.9%
Supervising Islamic School	26.6%	24%	26.6%	9.3%	13.3%
Helping new immigrants	21.1%	17.1%	36.8%	10.5%	14.4%

It may be that the reason the imams rate these duties low in importance is that they may regard them as being subsumed, to a degree, within the main ten duties of the imam. This means the imam can sometimes perform them if there is nothing more important for him to do. Otherwise he can delegate them to other members in the mosque, or there may already be people other than the imam who are in charge of such tasks, like is sometimes the case in a mosque's Islamic school. In many cases, as I observed, there is a director or a manager for the Islamic school other than the imam whether the person is a volunteer from the community or a paid-manager.

Activities outside the Muslim Community

The role of the imam is not confined to the Muslim community. Successful imams should also engage in out-reach to the surrounding non-Muslim community and interact with the American society as a whole. For Morgan this is one of the main measures of the success of clergy. He believes that Muslims should become involved in the American society in which they are living and cooperate with the broader community for the good of all. This in turn will help the Muslim community to integrate into the American society and gain acceptance of their faith, just as other religions in America have done. Therefore, the Muslim community should encourage their imams to become involved in the outside community[55] and take responsibility for educating Americans and interacting with different institutions such as universities, hospitals and media.[56] Morgan states, "Do good outside your community and good will be done to your community in turn."[57] This study has followed Morgan's lead and has looked specifically at American imams' attitudes to the following outreach activities: communicating the message of Islam through the media, encouraging Muslim political participation, interacting with diverse cultural (non-Muslim) groups, interfaith dialogue, and visiting prisoners.

1-Communicating the Message of Islam through Media

One of the main windows to the wider society is through media. American Imams had very positive attitudes regarding their role in media, strongly emphasizing the essential importance of communicating about Islam to the media in their various outreach activities.

---

[55] Morgan, *Muslim Clergy,* 64.
[56] Ibid., 91.
[57] Ibid., 64.

Communicating the Message of Islam through Media
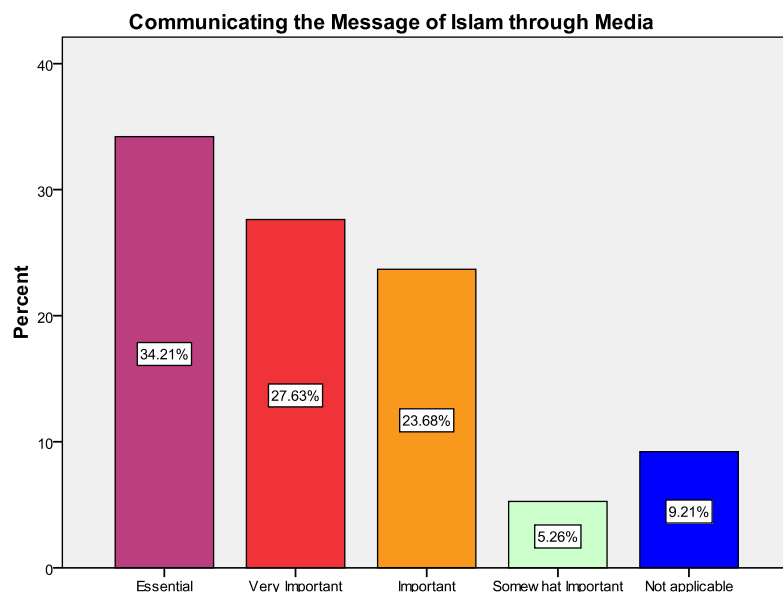
Figure 3.15: Communicating the Message of Islam through Media

It can be seen in the above chart that about 85 percent of imams in general think that it is important for the imam to communicate the message of Islam through media, with 5.2 percent seeing this task as being somewhat important. In contrast, only 10 percent consider communicating through media as not being applicable to the imam's duties. One reason for this 10% may have to do with the fact that working with the media requires a high level of communication skills, while some imams even lack the ability to communicate in English. Another reason for the 10% of imams who do not see working with the media as an important part of their responsibilities may be that they simply refer to other members of the community who may be better than them in this regard. Irrespective of the reasons for the fact that 10% of imams' did not feel that media outreach was important, the view of the majority is consistent with Morgan's opinion that Muslim should become involved actively in the media in order to correct the image of Islam and misunderstandings that Americans have

about Muslims. He even argues that Muslim should not only participate in existing media but they should also create their own media outlets which could more truly represent them.[58]

2-The Imam's Political Role

Imams have been asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement that "Imams should have a role in encouraging Muslims to participate in the political process in America." Overall, a significant majority of the imams (80%) agree, while about 10 percent of them are neutral, and around 10 percent disagree. This means that the majority of imams believe that American imams should have some kind of role in political life and should lead the Muslim community to be active in this regard. According to Bagby the primary motivation for this desire of the majority of the imams to have a role in the political process is to protect Muslim rights and interests.[59]
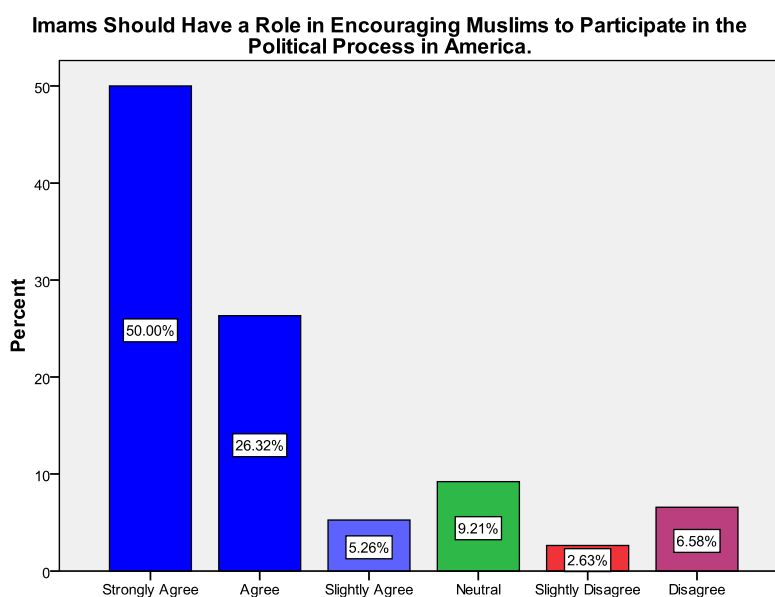
Figure 3.16: The Need for the Imam's Role in Politics

---

[58] Ibid., 13.

[59] Ihsan Bagby, "Isolate, Insulate, Assimilate: Attitudes of Mosque Leaders toward America," in *A Nation of Religions*, ed. Stephen Prothero (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 23-42.

3- Building Relationships with Diverse Cultural Groups

The mosque in America is always surrounded by diverse cultural groups. Regarding the need for building good relationships with these groups, the response of majority of the imams was also quite positive.
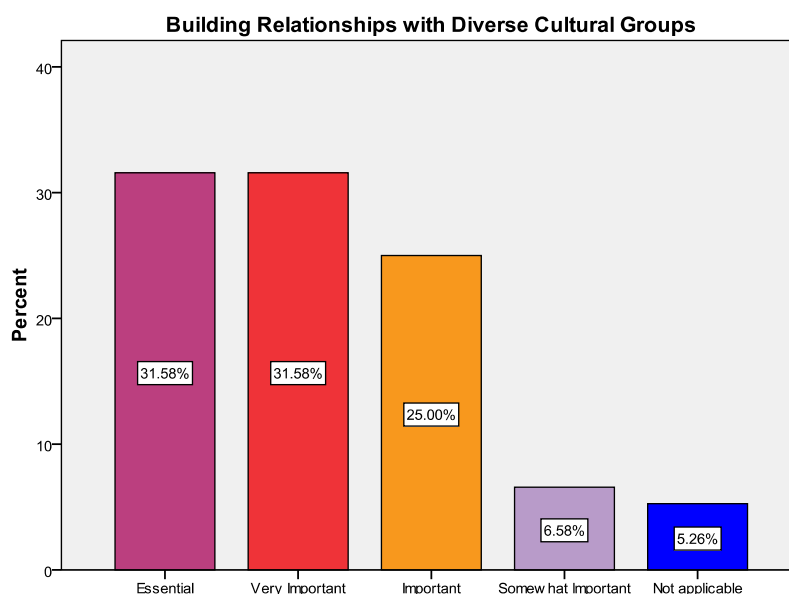
Figure 3.17: Building Relationships with Diverse Cultural Groups

More than four-fifths of the imams (88%) think that establishing outreach programs for building good relationships with different groups outside the mosque is important for the success of the imam in his community. Morgan argues that the participation of Muslim clergy in the wider society is a challenge because an imam needs to integrate himself and his community into the American community and at the same time uphold his Islamic identity. Morgan asserts that secular society does not intentionally ask any community to give up their religion. People living in a secular society need to see what is right and good about religion;

and they would like to know that Islam is for the well-being of all people. Therefore a major aspect of the role of the imam should be to foster good relations with the broader society and to collaborate for the good of all.[60]

4-Interfaith Dialogue

Regarding the participation of imams in interfaith activities (with other religious groups in American society) for the sake of correcting misconceptions and building mutual understanding between Muslims and other, the view of the majority of the imams was proactive. Over four-fifths of the imams (84%) hold the view that participating in interfaith activities is one of the important tasks of the imam.
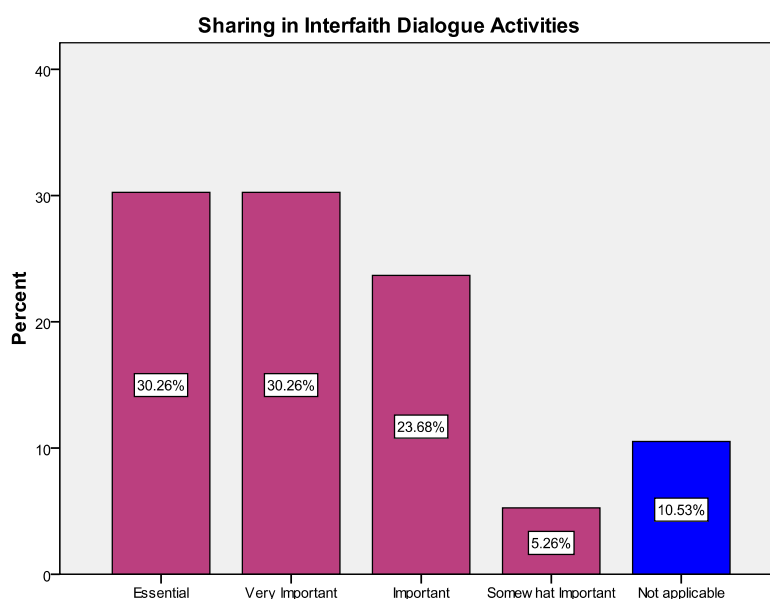
Figure 3.18: Sharing in Interfaith Dialogue Activities

---

[60] Morgan, *Muslim Clergy*, 74-75.

5- Visiting Prisoners for Spiritual Guidance

The least important out of all the duties to be rated as essential is visiting prisoners in order to give them spiritual guidance. Only 15 percent of the imams surveyed assert that visiting prisoners in order to give them spiritual guidance is essential. Nevertheless, more than two-thirds of the imams (67%) consider visiting prisoners to be one of the important tasks of the imam, as illustrated in Figure 3.19.
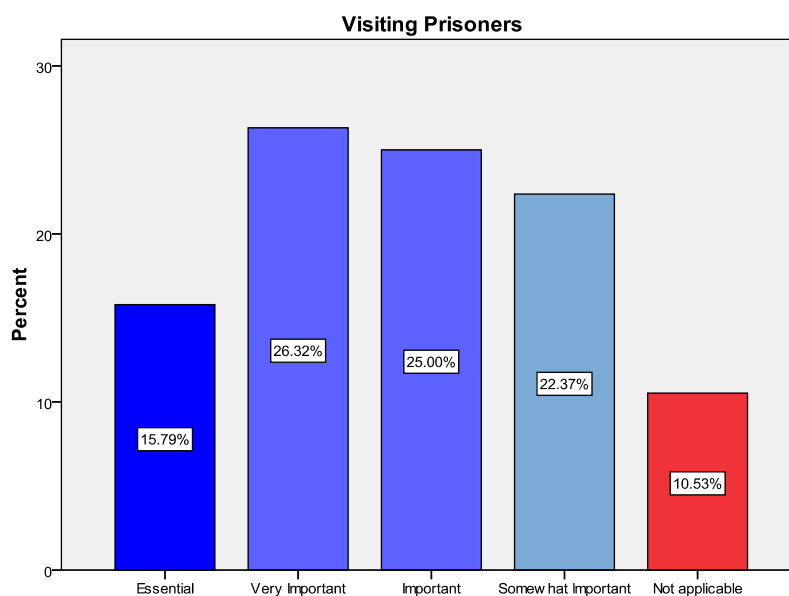
Figure 3.19: Degree of Importance Regarding Visiting Prisoners

Furthermore, Figure 3.20 illustrates that more than half of the participating imams (56%) visit prisons for giving spiritual guidance to the prisoners, while 43 percent do not. This means that the majority of the imams are involved in providing their religious services outside the mosque and that they try to reach even those who are behind the walls of prisons.

Do you Visit Prisons for Giving Spiritual Guidance?
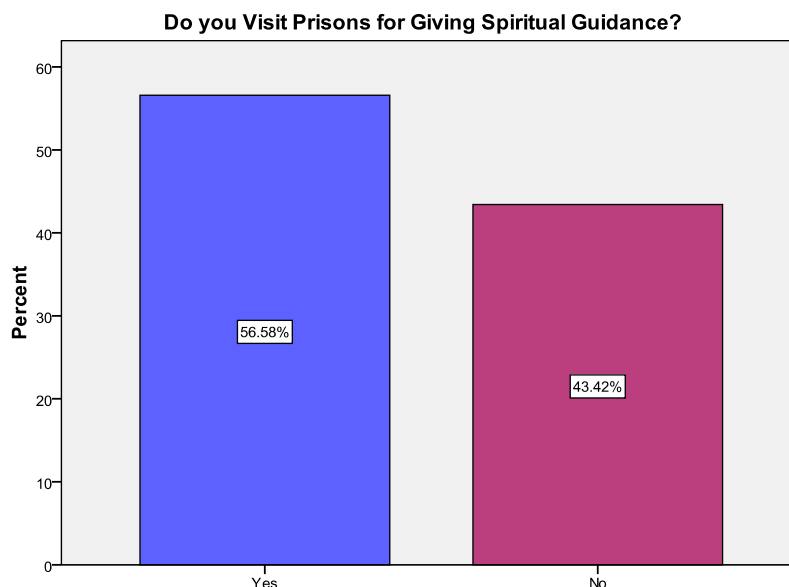
Figure 3.20: Response of Imams on Visiting Prisoners

In sum, American imams' principal responsibilities are educational, ritual, spiritual, social, and political. The study found that the primary responsibilities of the imam are delivering Friday sermon, leading prayers, arbitration, giving religious lectures, providing counseling, conducting funerals, helping the poor, performing marriage ceremony, engaging in youth program, and visiting the sick. Furthermore, the duties of the imam are not confined to Muslims; they are in fact divided between the Muslim community and the wider American society outside the mosque. Hence, the imam has other activities outside the mosque such as communicating the message of Islam through media, encouraging Muslims to participate in the political process, building relationships with diverse cultural groups, participating interfaith dialogue, visiting prisoners for spiritual guidance. Out of all of their various duties, the Imams surveyed gave priority to educational and social duties over the others. In my opinion, based on this study and my personal experience as an imam in America for two years,

even though American imams regard their role as ritual leader as being important, they do not consider it to be the only important role of the imam. For them the Imam is not simply the one who leads prayers, but he is and should be more than that. He should be a teacher, social worker, psychologist, counselor, political thinker, media spokesman, chaplain, and arbitrator, in addition to being the leader of prayer and the preacher of the Friday sermon.

CHAPTER 4

QUALIFICATIONS OF IMAMS

In this chapter the study discusses the imam's most important qualifications that are necessary for their fulfilling their role in the Muslim community successfully and professionally. For the purpose of this study the imams have been asked three questions. The first question is about the scholarly qualifications. It contains a group of suggested fields or areas of knowledge that are commonly believed to be necessary for the imam's position. The imams have been asked to rank these fields of knowledge through their experience and to decide which of them are needed most. The second question deals with a group of skills that the imam needs to acquire in order to improve his professional performance. The third one concerns the ethical requirements of the imam and his ideal character. Therefore, the imams were also asked to assess the importance of a group of behaviors (important according to the imams' view and from a religious perspective) for reaching an ideal sound character. Through providing the imams' answers to these groups of questions in this chapter, the study aims at presenting an overall perspective of the necessary fields of knowledge, moral characteristics, and professional skills that could be included in the future training of imams and which could form a comprehensive educational curriculum that takes into consideration the needs of the American society.

Scholarly Qualifications

The position of the imam in general (as discussed in the introduction) is of great importance because people consider him as the source of their religious knowledge. They

expect him to illuminate them with his deep spiritual and legal knowledge. They come to the mosque with the expectation that the imam will nurture their mind and soul with his wisdom and sincere advice. Therefore, acquiring the necessary knowledge for his position is a must. In this regard Allah says in the Qur'ān, "Say: This is my Way: I call on Allah with sure knowledge (baṣīrah). I and whosoever followeth me…" (Qur'ān 12:108).[61] Here Allah is commanding the Prophet Muhammad to call to Allah based on baṣīrah. The word "baṣīrah" here means knowledge, clear argument, certainty, and religious and intellectual proof.[62] Therefore if anyone wants to call people to God; he should strive to have this kind of baṣīrah if he is really a follower of the Prophet. The imam needs baṣīrah to work efficiently with Muslims and non-Muslims in America, otherwise, i.e., without sufficient knowledge, the damage will be more than the benefits.

As it is said, "He who acts without knowledge, what he corrupts is more than what he reforms."[63] Without sufficient knowledge that qualifies him to be in this position, how he can impart knowledge? How can he answer the questions of people if he does not know the answers? How can he provide them the fatwá (a legal opinion) related to their contemporary life, if he does not have enough religious background in addition to understanding the environment, the culture, and conditions of the people with whom he is dealing? 'Umar ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb, the companion of the Prophet, said, "Tafaqqahū qabla 'an tasūdū (learn before you become masters or before you dominate)."[64] This means that one has to gain qualified knowledge before he assumes responsibility.

---

[61] Muhammad M. Pickthall, *The Glorious Qur'ān* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, Inc., 2000).
[62] Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Risālah, 2000), 16: 291.
[63] *Man 'amila bi-ghayr 'ilm….* in Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd al-Baghdādī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrá* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 1990), 5: 289.
[64] Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-bārī* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Salafīyah, 1987), 1:199.

Superficial knowledge cannot be beneficial at all, especially in American society, which needs deep knowledge in several areas. Through my experience in one of the Islamic centers in the U.S., I experienced some of the challenges facing the imam. One of the main challenges is the diversity of people's *madhāhib* (schools of jurisprudence) and religious views in the same mosque, due to the diversity of people's nationalities and ethnicities. The mosque is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural place despite the fact that all people in the mosque espouse Islam as their religion; they are very diverse, especially in their religious views. The imam faces all schools of thought from the extremely liberal to the extremely narrow and from the oldest views to the most contemporary ones. If he is not well-versed in these schools of thought and does not have a good understanding of the American milieu and its conditions, he will not be able to argue convincingly for the view that he himself thinks is the most appropriate for the Muslims in America and not in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. Therefore, based on the experience of the participant imams and their evaluation of what the imam needs to succeed in his working in America, the study will introduce the fields of knowledge according to their importance from the perspective of the imams'.

1-*Fiqh al-Wāqiʿ* (Dealing with Real Life and Current Problems)

Understanding the meaning of the term Fiqh al-wāqiʿ is of two parts; defining the word *fiqh* and the word *wāqiʿ*. Linguistically, the word *fiqh* derived from the verb *faqiha, which* means to understand, to comprehend or to know; so *fiqh* as a noun generally means knowledge or understanding of something. Specifically the word became almost synonymous with religious knowledge and the science of the Islamic jurisprudence.[65] The word *wāqiʿ* comes from the verb *waqaʿa* which means to happen or to occur, so *al-wāqiʿ means* the thing that happened or

---

[65] Al-Bāḥith al-ʿArabī, *Lisān al-ʿArab,* (accessed December 2, 2010) http://www.baheth.info/web/all.jsp.

occurred. The scholars define *fiqh al-wāqiʻ* as the science that strives "to understand people's affairs, contemporary circumstances and current events whether the general or the specific ones. It seeks to understand the reality of these things, the reasons behind them, their results, and the ways for protecting the society from their harms."[66] Therefore, the imam should study the circumstances of his people and the environment in which they live. He should be deeply aware of the political, economic, social conditions of his surrounding environment.[67] One could call this field of knowledge as the *fiqh* of time and place that deals with real life and current problems. For Qaradāwī, the contemporary Egyptian scholar, *fiqh al-wāqiʻ* is based on thorough and comprehensive study of the current affairs in which people live using the most accurate information and statistics.[68]

But what is the relation between this kind of knowledge and the work of the imam? The relation is that understanding the *wāqiʻ*, i.e., the reality of people and their environment, helps the imam to apply the *aḥkām* (rulings of the religion) appropriately and to choose the right view that suits the current situation, i.e., the specific place, certain time and certain people. It helps him to implement the *nuṣūṣ* (religious texts) in the right context. This methodology has been clarified by Ibn al-Qayyim in his distinguished book *Iʻlām al-muwāqiʻīn.* He states that a jurist cannot issue the right *fatwá* (a legal verdict) except with two kinds of understanding. The first is understanding of the *wāqiʻ* and having a deep grasp of its reality; and the second is

---

[66] Muṣṭafá Makhdūm, "Fiqh al-Wāqʻ," (accessed July 1, 2011), http://www.alwsat.net/articles.php?ID=86&do=view.
[67] Muḥammad al-Wakīlī, *Fiqh al-Awlawīyāt: dirāsah fī al-ḍawābiṭ* (Herndon, VA: the International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1997), 174-175.
[68] "Many shaykhs or scholars live in books. They do not live in reality (*al-wāqiʻ*). Rather they are absent from jurisprudence of reality (*fiqh al-wāqiʻ),"* Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Mūjibāt taghayyur al-fatwá fī ʻaṣrinā* in *Goodreads*, (accessed July 28, 2011), http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/show/196669.

understanding of the required ruling as it should be in the Qur'ān and Sunnah regarding this kind of reality and circumstances.[69]

Surprisingly, the majority of the responding imams (96%) state that studying *Fiqh al-wāqi'* is a highly important field of knowledge that the imam should undertake. Only around three percent of imams think that it is just important; and one percent of them see that it is not applicable. Also, the imam who said it is not applicable has no-formal Islamic education, which implies that he may not be familiar with this subject.
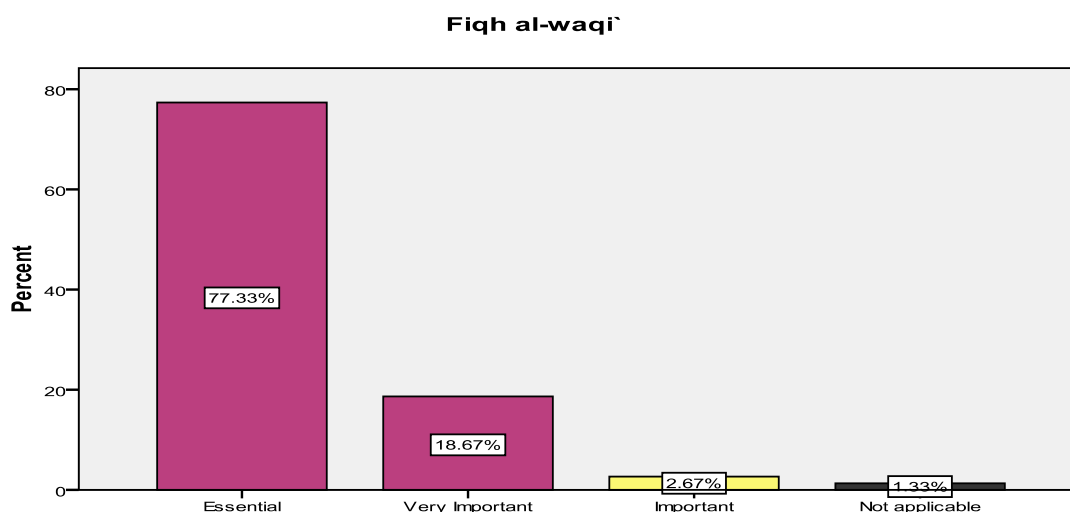
Fiqh al-waqi`

Figure 4.1: *Fiqh al-wāqi'*

In general, it seems that the imams felt an urgent need for such a study before starting the position of imam since they realized that understanding of the *wāqi'* of Muslim communities living in the American society is essential for their success as imams. This experience made them give this field of knowledge the highest priority among the imam's

---

[69] Muḥammad Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *I'lām al-muwāqi'īn* (Beirut: Dār al_kutub al-'Ilmīyiah, 1991), 1:69.

scholarly qualifications, even before basic religious studies. They know that in different

curriculums in Islamic universities, imams do not receive such educations about Muslims in

America, so they emphasized the necessity of such education in the future. Figure 4.1 shows

the frequency of imams' response.

2-Hadith

The second area of knowledge that received a high ranking is the study of *ḥadīth*. *Hadīth*

means "the sayings, actions, tacit approval, and accounts of the Prophet. The word hadith is

also synonymous with the word *sunna* (the Prophet's way of life)"[70] Thus, an imam has to study

the Prophet's *ḥadīth* and memorize a great part of it, since it helps him to understand the

Qur'ān and provides him with a comprehensive understanding of Islam. The Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*

are very connected to each other. Allah speaks in the Qur'ān concerning the function of the

Prophet, which is to clarify and explain the verses of the Qur'ān: "and We have revealed to you

the Reminder that you may make clear to men what has been revealed to them…" (Qur'ān:

16:44)[71] Al-Shāṭibī stated that this verse is proof that the *sunna* of the Prophet is an explanation

of the Qur'ān.[72]

Qaradawi states concerning the importance of the Sunnah for *dā'iyah* (lit., the caller to

Allah) that it is the treasure from which he can preach, teach, and deliver a lecture or a

speech.[73] He also warns him against using unauthentic hadiths and he suggests that imams

should avoid week and fabricated ones. He quotes the prophet saying, "Whoever narrates a

ḥadīth about me while he thinks it is a lie, he is one of the liars."[74] As for the imams, their

---

[70] Muṣṭafá al-Sibāʿī, *al-Sunna wa-makanatuhā fi'l-tashrī'* (Damascus, Syria: Dār al-Waraq, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2000), 65.

[71] M.H. Shakir, trans., *The Qur'ān Translation* (New York: Tarike Tarsile Qur'ān, Inc., 1999).

[72] Ibrāhim ibn Mūsá al-Shāṭibi , *al-Muwāfaqāt*, (Saudi Arabia: Dar ibn 'Āffan, 1997), 4: 314.

[73] Yusuf al-Qaradawī, *Thaqafat al-dā'iyah* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2009), 47.

[74] Abu al-Husayan Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Saḥiḥ Muslim*(Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, without date), 1:8.

response is illustrated in Figure 4.2. None of the imams said that studying *ḥadīth* is not

applicable or even somewhat important. The majority of imams (90.8%) state that it is highly

important for the imams to study *ḥadīth* and only about ten percent of them consider it to be

just important.
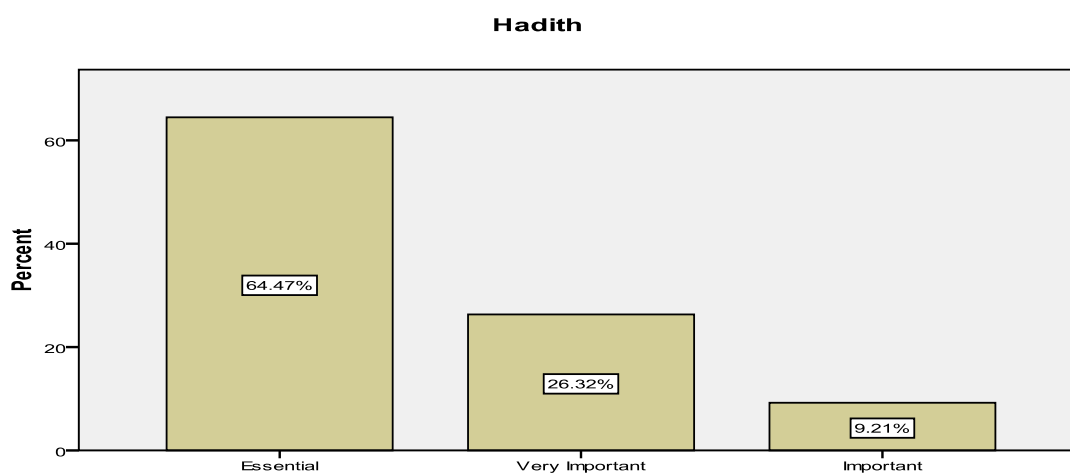
Hadith

Figure 4.2: Imams' Response to the Importance of Knowledge of *Ḥadīth*

The researcher understands that there is an underlying reason why the imams rated

the science of Hadith even higher than knowledge of the Qur'ān, which is generally considered

the first and most important source of Islamic knowledge in the Islamic tradition. In analyzing

the survey one should take into consideration the imams' responses based on their experience

in the American context. Through the researcher's observation of some Muslim communities

in America, it seems that the imams' rating *ḥadīth* more highly than Qur'ānic knowledge can be

explained because commonly congregations care too much about the imam being a *ḥāfiẓ* (one

who has memorized the whole Qur'ān) at the expense of other fields of knowledge such as

studying *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* (Qur'ānic commentary). It is as if they wanted to say that having

knowledge of *ḥadīth* (which provides many of the details of Islamic practice not specified in the Qur'ān) and other fields of knowledge with good recitation and memorization of a good portion of the Qur'ān is more important than memorizing the whole Qur'ān and lacking adequate knowledge of *ḥadīth,* which is essential for being an imam.

3-Qur'ān

The Qur'ān is the primary source of religious knowledge in Islam; and learning Qur'ān is absolutely necessary for an imam, whether he is in America or any place. Qaradawi states that Qur'ān is the main reference for all the principles of Islamic teachings.[75] Therefore the imam is the one who is greatly in need of memorizing, comprehending, and applying the Qur'ān. The surveyed imams were asked to evaluate the importance of the three main fields of knowledge related to the Qur'ān: studying *tafsīr* (Qur'ānic commentary) *and 'ūlum* al-Qur'ān (sciences of the study of the Qur'ān), memorization of the Qur'ān, and studying the rules of the Qur'ān recitation. The imams evaluated the need of the imam in these three fields according to their experience with regard to the needs of the imam in America.

A-Rules of Qur'ān recitation (*ṭajwīd*)

Tajwīd is a science which studies the rules of reciting of the Qur'ān as it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.[76] Studying this science for the imam is mandatory, because the correct recitation of the Qur'ān in *ṣalāh* (canonical prayer) is obligatory and because he is the one who leads the people.[77] There is consensus among the scholars that if one intentionally recites the Qur'ān incorrectly in prayer, his prayer will be invalid and so will the prayer of all the people following him in the congregation. However, they disagree regarding the case of unintentionally erring in Qur'ānic recitation in the canonical prayer. The Shafi'ī̄ and Ḥanbalī

---

[75] Yusuf al-Qaradawī, *Thaqafat al- dā'iyah,* 8.
[76] `Atiyyah Nasr, *Ghayat al-Murid fi `Ilm al-Tajwid* (Cairo: Dar al-Taqwa, 1992), 34.
[77] Ibid., 37 and see also Qaradawī, *Thaqafat al-dā'iyah,* 9.

schools asserted that if the imam's recitation of the *Fātiḥa* (the opening chapter of the Qur'ān) changes the meaning of the Qur'ān, then his prayer is invalid; and if it does not change the meaning of the Qur'ān, his *salah* is valid but it falls in the legal category of "something that is disliked."As for Ḥanafī school, they assert that if one's recitation of the Qur'ān (whether what is recited is the *Fatiḥa* or any other verses from the Qur'ān) is incorrect and changes the meaning of the words, his prayer is invalid. The Mālikī school was the most lenient in this regard, viewing the *ṣalāh* to be valid if there is a mistake in recitation even in the *Fātiḥa*; but they do not permit that if there is another person qualified for being imam and better than the imam who is making mistakes in his recitation.[78]

Therefore, as can be seen from Figure 4.3, the majority of the surveyed imams (83%) hold that an imam should study the science of *tajwīd* and that it is "highly important" for being an imam. None of the imams said that it is not applicable; and only 10.5 percent of them simply said that it is important, while 6.6 percent state that it is somewhat important. The majority (80%) of those who said it is somewhat important are non-Arab imams with no formal Islamic education; 60 percent are African Americans and 20 percent are Caucasians. One possible explanation for this is that sometimes it is hard for non-native Arabic speaking imams to master the recitation of the Qur'ān according to the rules of *tajwīd.* Learning the science of *tajwīd* demands a lot of time, training and practice especially if one who is not a native speaker of Arabic wants to recite the whole Qur'ān according to *tajwid*. Even imams who are non-native speakers of Arabic, however, can at least master the recitation of the portion that he will recite in the canonical prayer so that the prayer is valid according to the view of the majority of the scholars.

---

[78] *Al-Mawsu`ah al-Fiqhiyyah al-Kiwitiyyah, s.v. "Al-Lahnu fi al-Qira'a fi al-Salah,"* (Kuwait: Ministry of Endowment, 1983-2006), V. 35, 215-216.

Studying the Rules of Tajwid
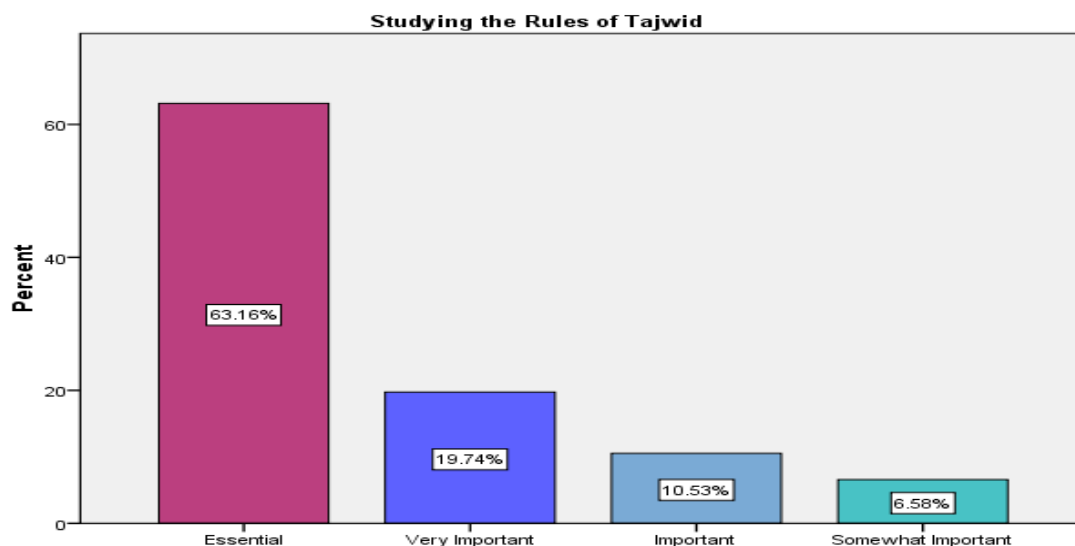
Figure 4.3: Importance of Studying the Rules of *Tajwīd*

B- *Tafsīr and ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*

For understanding the Qurʾān the imam should possess good knowledge of *tafsīr* (Qurʾān commentary or interpretation) in addition to the other sciences of the Qurʾān such as *asbāb al-nuzūl* (causes or circumstances of revelation), *al-muḥkam* and *al-mutashābih* (decisive and allegorical verses) and *al-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh* (abrogating and abrogated verses).[79] While teaching Qurʾān, the imam should talk about the miraculous aspects of the Qurʾān; its divinity, comprehensiveness, easiness, and eternity. In his speeches it is sufficient for him to quote all the verses related to the same subject and get benefit from the moral lessons of the verses. He should completely avoid misquoting and misinterpretation of the Qurʾānic verses, as he should keep himself and his audience away from indulging in allegorical verses (*mutshābihāt*) which is a sign of deviant people. It is also important for the imam to know the methodologies of different commentators and to focus on the fundamental and core Qurʾānic meanings essential

---

[79] Yusuf al-Qaradawī, *Thaqafat al-dāʿiyah, 32-33.*

for people and to avoid linguistic, theological, juristic, rhetorical and polemical digressions. The imam should also avoid weak and fabricated narrations and interpretations included in many books of *tafsīr*.[80] All these are important issues for the imam; and he can acquire knowledge of such issues when he studies *ʿulūm* al-Qurʾān and goes through the books of *tafsīr*.
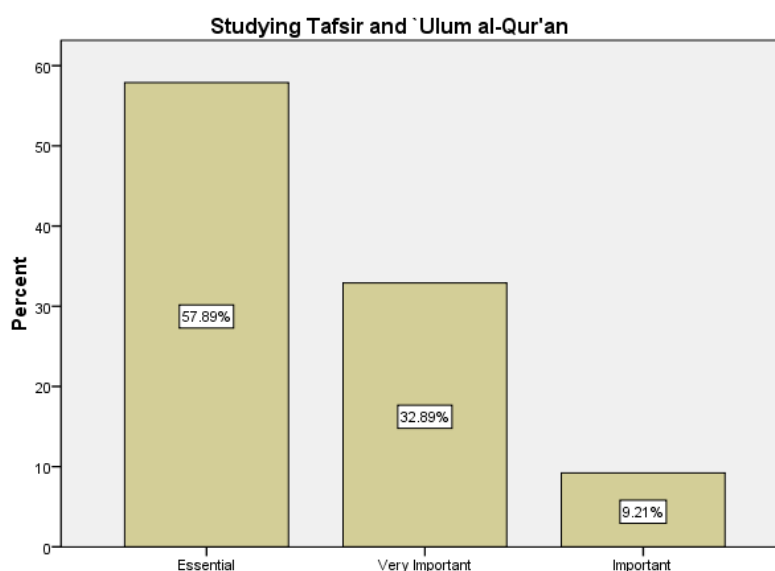
Figure 4.4: Responses regarding the study of *tafsīr* and *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*

From Figure 4.4 it can be observed that almost all the imams (90.8%) consider studying *tafsīr* and *ʿulūm* al-Qurʾān to be very important for playing a successful role in the community. Only 9.2 percent of imams think it is just important, and none of them hold the view that it is somewhat important or not applicable.

---

[80] Ibid., 8-46.

C-Memorization of the Qur'ān

Concerning the importance of the imam being a *ḥāfiẓ* Qur'ān (memorizer of the Qur'ān) which means one who has memorized the whole Qur'ān by heart, the imams surveyed have given lower rating to it than the other qualifications of an imam. Only somewhat more than one-third (38.2%) think it is essential, and 31 percent see it as being very important. Overall, 69% consider it to be highly important. In contrast, about one-fourth of the imams (23.7%) see it as simply being important, while 6.6 percent of them think that it is somewhat important. This means 30 percent of imams do not view that it is essential for the imam to memorize the whole Qur'ān.
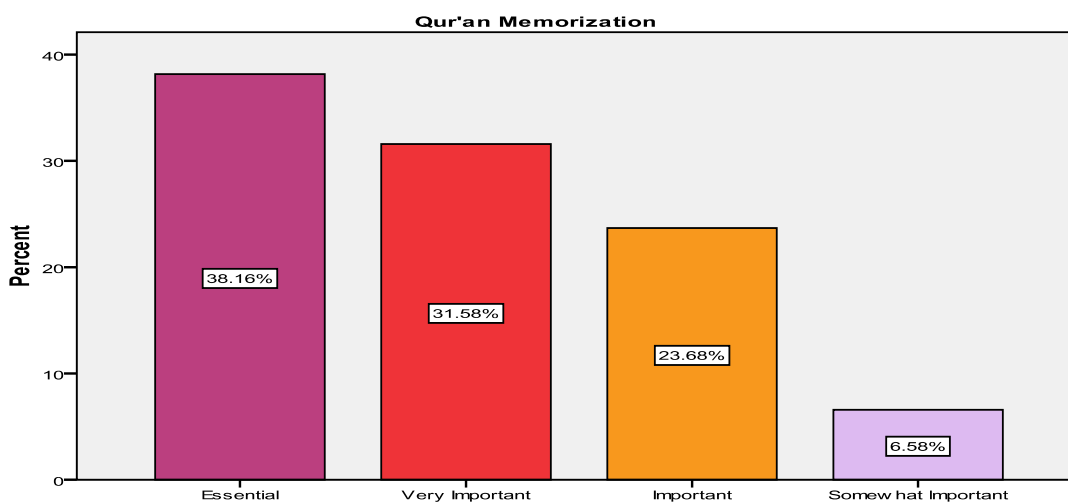
Figure 4.5: Qur'ān Memorization

It seems that the Imams believe that they can fulfill their duties in America without memorizing the whole Qur'ān; and it is enough for them to memorize and comprehend a good portion of it with correct recitation.

4-Fiqh *al-awlawīyāt* (priorities)

Arranging everything according to its degree of importance, necessity, and benefit to people is called the jurisprudence of priorities (*fiqh al-awlawīyāt).* Qaradawi defines this field of Islamic knowledge by saying that "it means putting everything in its right position so that one does not delay what should be advanced or give precedence to what should be delayed. Nor does one lessens the large issue or enlarges the small one."[81] Another modern scholar gives a more concise definition, saying that *fiqh al-awlawīyāt* is "knowing *al-ahkām al-sharʿīya* (the religio-legal rulings) that have the right to have precedence over others based on recognizing their levels and required context."[82]

From these two definitions one understands that it is important for the imam to recognize the degrees of Islamic rulings and their levels of importance, when he must apply them and when not to, and which one comes first and what should be at the next. This is very clear in one of the Prophet Muhammad's *ḥadīth* in which he said to one of his companions (Muʿādh) when he sent him to Yemen, "You are going to people of a (Divine) Book. First of all invite them to worship Allah [alone] and when they come to know Allah, inform them that Allah has enjoined on them five prayers in every day and night; and if they start offering these prayers, inform them that Allah has enjoined on them the *zakat* (almsgiving). And it is to be taken from the rich amongst them and given to the poor amongst them; and if they obey you in that, take *zakāh* from them and avoid (don't take) the best property of the people as *zakāh*."[83]

---

[81] Yusuf al-Qaradawī, "*Awlawīyāt al-ḥaraka al-Islāmīya*," Al-Qaradawi Website (accessed July 3, 2011), http://www.Qaradawī.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=2229&version=1&template_id=88&parent_id=1

[82] Muhammad al-Wakili, 16.

[83] Muhammad ibn Ismaʿīl Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, First Edition), hadith number 1458. See also University of Southern California, "Translation of Sahih Bukhari," University of Southern California, http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/hadith/bukhari/024.sbt.html

In this *ḥadīth* it is clear how the Prophet arranged the principles of Islam for Muʿādh and let him know how he should call people gradually to Islam. He did not tell him to teach the people all commands or all the prohibitions at one time. He clearly advised him that if they accepted one issue, then he should call them to the other. In this regard Qaradawi states that the Prophet himself applied the same methodology when he was in Makkah. He confined his mission, at first, to invite people to the oneness of Allah, the principles of faith, and acquiring good manners. He did not discuss the more involved secondary branches of Islamic rulings which were to come after that in Medina.

Qaradawi contends that there is a great lack of *fiqh al-awlawīyāt* among many groups of Muslims nowadays. They are concerned about the secondary branches (*al-furūʿ*) of Islamic rulings before the principles (*al-usūl*), the particulars (*al-juzʾīyāt*) before the universals (*al-kullīyāt*), and the differences among scholars before studying what they agreed upon.[84] Therefore he maintains that Muslims and especially dāʿiyahs should give priority to:

- *al-kayf* (quality) over *al-kamm* (quantity);
- *al-ʿilm* (knowledge) over *al-ʿamal* (action);
- *al-fahm* (comprehension) over *al-ḥifẓ* (memorization);
- *al-taysīr* (leniency) and gradualism as a method in teaching Islam over *al-taʿsīr* (strictness);
- *al-ʿamal al-dāʾim* (continuous work) over *al-munqaṭiʿ* (interrupted);
- *al-usūl* (fundamentals) over *al-furūʿ* (minor issues);
- *al-farāʾiḍ* (obligatory rulings) over *al-nawāfil* (supererogatory ones);
- the rights of *jamʿah* (the group) over the rights of individuals;

---

[84] Yusuf al-Qaradawī, *Awlawiyyāt al-ḥaraka al-Islāmīyya*, http://www.Qaradawī.net/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=2229&version=1&template_id=88&parent_id=1

- *al-muḥaramāt* (prohibited) over *al-mutashābihāt* (doubtful issues) and *makrūḥāt* (hateful ones);

- *al-kabā'ir* (major sins) over *al-ṣaghā`ir* (minor ones).[85]

The contemporary Syrian scholar 'Adnān 'Ar'ūr agrees with Qaradawi on the importance of *fiqh al-awlawīyāt* and states that the dā'iyah (like the imam) should have a clear methodology in applying gradualism with people and in understanding *fiqh* of priorities in order to convey the message of Islam properly and with what suits the nature of people. He considers that *fiqh* of priorities helps the imam to act appropriately in different situations and save time and effort and make him more productive.[86]

in order to apply *fiqh* of priorities, it is very important for the imam to know also *fiqh al-muwāzanāt,*[87] which means weighing competing interests, weighing different harms against one another, and weighing various interests and harms.[88] This knowledge will help the imam to know what he can do if he has to choose between two interests? What can he do if he cannot avoid anything except only one of two harms? What should he choose when the harm contradicts an interest? Does he leave gaining the interest to avoid the harm? Or does he choose to gain the interest even though there might be some harm?

Many of these cases are faced by imams of mosques in American communities due to the special situation of Muslims in the United States. The imam works in a multi-faceted community that has different needs that sometimes contradict each other. He works with new Muslim converts, whose needs are different from the others; and he also works with youth, women or even children, for whose religious and spiritual grooming he is responsible. New

---

[85] Yusuf al-Qaradawī, *Fiqh al-awlawīyāt,* (Cairo, MaktabatWahbah, 2008), these are some general headings from the chapters of this book.

[86] 'Adnān 'Ar'ur, "Al-TadarujwaFiqh al-Awlawiyyāt," Risalt al-Islam, last modified and accessed July 3, 2011, http://main.islammessage.com/newspage.aspx?id=2531.

[87] Yusuf al-Qaradawī, *Fi Fiqh al- Awlawiyyāt* (Cairo: Maktabit Wahbah, 2008), 28.

[88] Ibid., 25.

projects are suggested by the community from time to time when it finds itself in need of them; and the imam should give his opinion, such as whether the community should establish an Islamic school or community center? Does the community rebuild the old mosque now or just renovate it? Even in his Friday sermons, the imam finds that if he talks about a special topic, it may cause trouble within the community. Should he discuss such topics or not? The same can be said with the individuals themselves, some persons may be practicing unlawful (*ḥarām*) acts and if he admonishes them it will lead to a problem. What should he do? For answering all these questions, the imam needs to be well-acquainted with both *fiqh al-awlawīyāt and fiqh al-muwāzanah* (weighing conflicting interests and harms)*.

A high percentage of the imams surveyed confirmed the need to learn fiqh *al-awlawīyāt.* Approximately 90 percent of them view that it is highly important for the imam to study it, while 8 percent consider it as only being important and 2 percent as somewhat important. None of the imams state that it is not applicable. This frequency is shown in Figure 4.6.
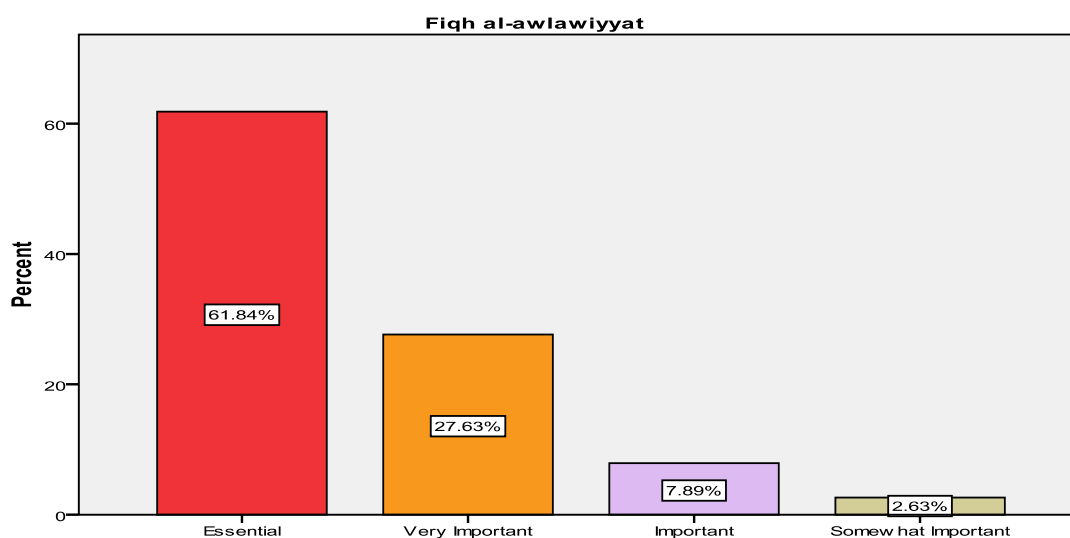
Figure 4.6: *Fiqh al-awlawīyāt*

5-*Fiqh al-maqāṣid*

Another category of Islamic science with which the imam of a community here in the United States needs to be acquainted is *fiqh al-maqāṣid.* It is the science that studies the objectives and the underlying principles of the rulings of *sharī'ah* (Islamic law). Linguistically the word *maqāṣid* is the plural of the word *maqṣid*, which is a derivative from the verb *qaṣada,* which means to proceed straightaway to someone or something, to intend, to aim at or to consider something.[89] Thus, the verb *qaṣada* indicates the intention that lies behind the actions of man[90] and refers to the goals, purposes, objectives, principles, intents, or ends.

Theoretically, it has been stated that the early traditional scholars such as al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1185), al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), al-Amīdī (d. 613/1234), al-Tūfī (d. 716/1316), al-Qarafī (d. 1285/1868) and even al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) wrote on *maqāṣid as* part of some other section of the science of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), but they did not provide a specific definition for it.[91] The Tunisian Ibn'Ashūr, whose book is considered the most important work written on *maqāṣid* in the twentieth century, was the first to define *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah.* He states, "The general objectives of Islamic legislation are the meanings and inner aspects of wisdom considered by [Allah] the Lawgiver in all or most of the areas and circumstances of legislation provided that they are not confined to a particular type of the *sharī'ah* commands."[92] This definition elucidates the meaning of *maqāṣid* and shows that Islamic law has divine purposes upon which these laws were established and that these purposes seek

---

[89] J Milton Cowan, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980), 766. See also "Lisan al-'Arab," al-Bahith al-'Arabī, http://www.baheth.info/web/all.jsp (accessed November 29, 2010).

[90] Isma'īl al-Hasaniyy, *Nadhariyyat al-Maqasid 'inda al-Imam al-Ṭahir ibn 'Ashūr* (Herndon, Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1995), 114.

[91] Ahmad al-Raysuni, *Imam al-Shatibi's Theory of the Higher Objectives and intents of Islamic law* (Herndon, Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2005), xxi. See also Muhammad Bakr Isma'īl, *Maqasid al-Sharī'ah Ta'silanwaTaf'ilan*, (Muslim World League, 1427) 16.

[92] Muhammad al-Tahir ibn `Ashur, *Treatise on Maqasid al-Shari`ah,* translated by Mohamed el-Tahir el-Mesawi (London, Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), 71 with some changes in translation.

to achieve the furthering of the welfare and benefit of the humankind. Ibn al-Qayyim

(d.1350/1751) focuses upon this central aspect of *sharīʿah* in the following:

> The foundation of the *sharīʿah* is the safeguarding of people's interests in this world and the hereafter. In its entirety it is justice, mercy, benefit and wisdom. Every matter that leaves justice for injustice, mercy for its opposite, benefit for harm, and wisdom for foolishness, does not belong to the *sharīʿah* even though it is attributed to it by means of false reasoning. The *sharīʿah* is God's justice amongst His servants. It is His mercy amongst His Creation, His protection over His Earth, and His wisdom that is an indication of Him and of the truth of the Messenger, peace be upon him.[93]

Jasser ʻAuda, another contemporary scholar, describes this science in the following

manner: "*Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* is the branch of Islamic knowledge that answers all the

challenging questions of *why* on various levels."[94] In fact the imam in the American mosque

faces a lot of challenging questions. In a mosque many of its members may be new converts to

Islam and therefore be in need of knowing why they pray five times a day, why they fast, what

is the wisdom behind forbidding wine, why adultery is unlawful in Islam, why polygamy is

allowed and under which conditions? In these times of interfaith outreach it is common for

non-Muslims to visit mosques, bringing with them a lot of questions about Islam. Different

groups of students from different academic departments sometimes visit mosques in America

as part of their studies or research papers. This researcher met a group of students who came

to attend the Friday prayer service and sermon offered by Muslims in the Athens mosque.

They had a lot of questions after the sermon, the majority of which were centered on Muslim

practices and beliefs. One of the questions was why don't Muslims eat pork? The imam of a

mosque faces a lot of these and similar questions every day whether they be from Muslims of

his congregation or from others, Muslim or non-Muslim.

---

[93] MuḥammadIbnQayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Iʻlām al-muwāqiʻīn*, 3:1.
[94] JasserAuda, *Maqasid al-Shari`ah a Beginner's Guide* (Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 2.

Therefore, it is the duty of the imam, as the leader of his community, to understand and realize the objectives of every ruling he conveys and encourages his community to undertake and live by; and this applies to his discourse with the larger society around him as well. This understanding will enlighten his path and safeguard him and his community from a variety of problems. He will be able to choose the easiest and the most suitable means available for every individual specifically and for all the community in general. Having an enlightened understanding about legal rulings will make it easy for him to abstain from applying any *fatwá* (non-binding juridical decree) that may lead to harming people or to increasing their hardship in the face of changing circumstances and geographic locations, which would make it inconsistent with *Sharīʿah* or even contradict the objectives of Sharīʿah.

It is also worth mentioning here Dr. Mohammad Hashim Kamali's view on this topic. He holds that the *maqāṣid* provide an important and basic access for studying the *Sharīʿah* and that a student of Islamic studies has to understand the general features of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* before indulging in studying other Islamic sciences.[95] He states, "An adequate knowledge of *maqāṣid thus* equips the student of the *Sharīʿah* with insight and provides him/her with a theoretical framework in which the attempt to acquire detailed knowledge of its various doctrines can become more interesting and meaningful."[96]

Many scholars have confirmed this significance of studying maqāṣid. For example Yūsuf al-Badawīya, a contemporary Jordanian scholar, states that it is the role of the dāʿiyah to show people the objectives of *Sharīʿah* in order to persuade them to follow the religion and encourage them to implement its rules, because human nature likes to know the benefits of things and their goals; and this was the mission of all the Prophets. He adds that if people

---

[95] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Māqasid al-Shariʿah Made Simple* (Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 24.
[96] Ibid., 24.

know that prayer gives them tranquility and prevents them from committing vices and evils, they will perform it. If the dāʿiyah clarifies for them that adultery destroys families and spreads corruption among the society, this may help them to avoid it.

Al-Badawī also maintains that understanding of *maqāṣid* organizes the priorities of the dāʿiyah . Thus, he gives priority to *al-maqāṣid al-ḍarūrīya* (necessities) over *al-ḥājīya* (complementary benefits) and *al-taḥsīnīya* (embellishments), the public interest over private interest, the greater harm over the lesser, and addresses people according to their level of understanding. He considers the dāʿiyah to be like the physician who gives his patients a different particular medicine at special times and according to specific needs.[97] Through these points one can notice how important it is for the one who teaches Islam as the imam of a mosque to understand *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* in order to be able to introduce the message of Islam in the most appropriate way that suits the community and its needs.

Understanding the significance of *fiqh al-maqāṣid,* over four-fifths (83.2%) of the imams hold the view that it is one of the most important areas of knowledge that the imam needs to have in order to fulfill his responsibilities successfully in the American society. Only 13 percent of imams think it is simply important; while one percent designate it to be somewhat important, just as one percent of the imams felt it to be in the "not applicable" category. This data is presented in Figure 4.7.

---

[97] Yusof al-Badawi, *Māqasidal-Shariʿah ʿinda ibn Taymiyyah* (Jordan: Dar al-Nafaʾis, 2000), 104-105.
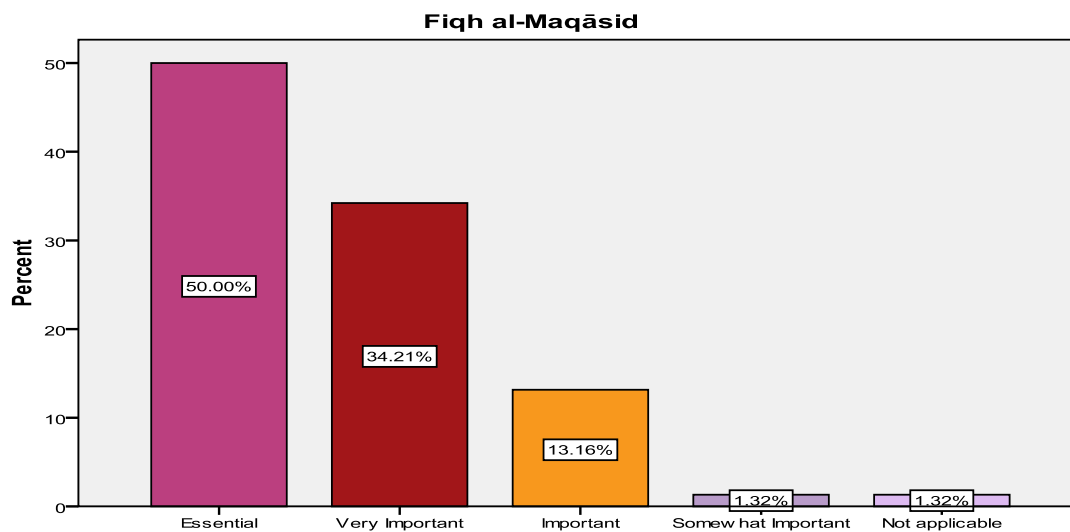
Figure 4.7: *Fiqh al-Maqāṣid*

6-*Fiqh* and its principles (*usūl al-fiqh*)

Four-fifths of imams (80%) have the opinion that studying *fiqh* and its principles is one of the most important qualifications for the imam. By contrast there is about 20 percent of the imams who think that studying *fiqh* and *usul* is not highly important for the imam. But what exactly is *fiqh*? When the word *fiqh* is generally mentioned it means the science of Islamic jurisprudence or the Islamic law, while the term *usūl al-fiqh* means the principles and sources upon which this Islamic jurisprudence has been established. The imam's need for such field is indispensable according to the majority of imams. It is the science with which the imam knows "the rules of *'ibādat* (rituals), *al-mu'āmalāt* (transactions or dealings) and *al-ādāb* (ethics and manners)."[98]

---

[98] Yusuf al-Qaradāwī, *Thaqafat al-Da'iyah,* 79.
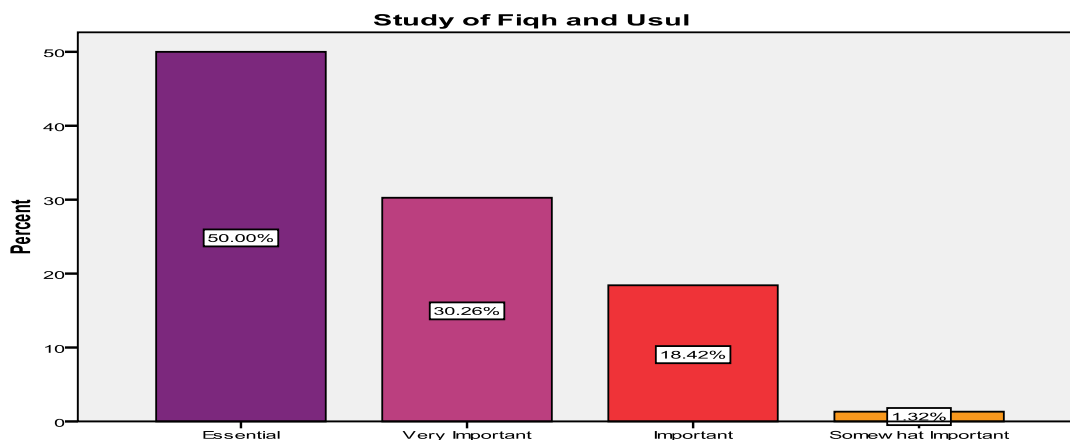
Figure 4.8: Study of *Fiqh* and *Usul*

The importance of studying *fiqh* and its principles for an imam stems from the fact that it enables him firstly to give *fatwas* (legal rulings) and to answer people's questions concerning the lawful and the unlawful in Islam based on the proof, whether it is Qur'ān, sunnah, ijmā'(consensus), qiyās (analogy), and other sources of Islamic law. Secondly it enables him, based on his juristic knowledge, to correct the mistakes he sees in the mosque, mistakes that anyone might make. This was the role of the Prophet when he saw anything wrong. For example, when he was with the man who prayed haphazardly and ordered him to repeat his prayer. He was always teaching his companions and correcting their mistakes.[99] Hence, the imam has to do the same with his community wisely and in a good way.

In diverse Muslim communities the imam does not only need to know one *madhhab* (school of thought) of Islamic law, but also he "should also be familiar with other *madhhabs* and knows its arguments and proofs."[100] Through my experience during my academic training I identified some of the differences among people due to the *madhhabs that* they are following.

---

[99] Ibid., 79.
[100] Ibid., 81.

One even needs to deal with the people who do not follow a specific *madhhab,* who assert that they are just following the dalils (the proof texts) that apply in certain situations. Hence, if the imam is following only a specific *madhhab* and he is not familiar with other *madhhabs* and their juristic proofs, he will face a great challenge to satisfy the community and be regarded by them as representing all of them. They expect him to comprehend all points of view together with their proofs and to present them all before taking a position. After that, the position taken should be based on the most accurate argument and be most appropriate for the conditions of the community. Therefore, acquiring sufficient knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence and its principles for the imam is a fundamental qualification for serving a Muslim community. It is the basis upon which other kinds of *fiqh; fiqh al-wāqi' , al-awlawīyāt, al-maqāṣid* and *al-aqalīyāt* are established.

7- *Fiqh al-aqalīyāt* (Minorities)

One of the significant areas of knowledge that the imam needs to be acquainted with or study because it is related to Muslims in America is *fiqh al-aqalīyāt* (*fiqh* of minorities). The majority of imams, which is over thirds (76.3%), are of the opinion that it is highly important for the imam to study *fiqh* of minorities. In contrast, there are 17 percent of imams who consider it as simply being important, while about 4 percent regard it as being somewhat important. There are also only 2 percent of imams who think it is not applicable. The frequency is shown in Figure 4.9.
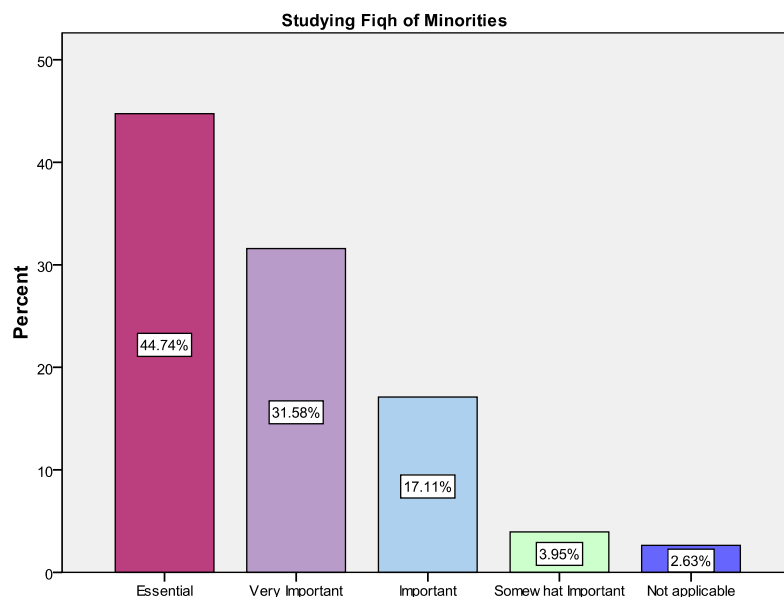
Figure 4.9: Studying *Fiqh* of Minorities

As stated before, the term *fiqh* means the knowledge of the religious rulings based on the Qur'ān and the *sunnah* and other sources of Islamic jurisprudence. As for the term minorities it "refers to a group or groups of states subjects of a racial or religious affiliation different from the majority population."[101] This kind of *fiqh,* however, comes under the general science of *fiqh* and is "a specific discipline which takes into account the relationship between the religious ruling and the condition of the community and the location where it exists."[102] The difference between it and the general rulings of Islamic jurisprudence is that it "applies to a specific group of people living under particular conditions with special needs that may not be appropriate to other communities."[103]

---

[101] Taha Jabir Al-Alawani, *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities: Some Basic Reflections* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2003), 2.
[102] Ibid., 3.
[103] Ibid., 3.

Muslim minorities, like any other minority, face their own problems and challenges in their interactions with the majority with which they are living. Some of these challenges may be political, economic, and social; and a lot of them are religious because the general system of American society has its own laws and customs different from the Islamic legal system even if there is a kind of similarity between both in some general principles. Consequently, Muslims living in America face a number of issues that need a religious answer, such as the following:

What should they do if there is a war between America and another Muslim country?

What should a Muslim soldier in the Army do in such a situation?

What is the ruling concerning meat sold in a market?

Does a market slaughter animals Islamically or not?

Can Muslims eat meat from non-Muslim markets or not?

What is the religious ruling regarding the ingredient gelatin especially if it is derived from pork?

Can a Muslim sell wine in his store?

Can he/she work in a store that sells wine or pork?

Is it sufficient for a Muslim to get married only in an American court or should one also have a religious marriage in the Islamic center?

Is a divorce that was issued by an American court valid even if the Muslim husband refuses to divorce his wife?

Can a Muslim marry a second wife in a common-law (*'urf*) marriage or should he abide by the law of the state, which prohibits polygamy?

Can a Muslim woman marry without a guardian if she does not have one? Or can the imam can be her guardian?

Can a Muslim man marry a non-Muslim American woman?

What is the ruling if the wife converts to Islam and her husband does not?

Does she divorce him or can she stay with him?

Is it allowed for a Muslim to inherit from his non-Muslim father or mother?

How should Muslims deal with the banks? Should they get involved in transactions that involve interest payments or not?

Can a Muslim buy a house through a mortgage?

What is the ruling of participating in the political process or should they boycott it totally?[104]

Muslims ask all these questions and even more, and they look for answers. The goal of *fiqh* of minorities is to answer such questions. It does not intend to provide minorities with dispensations or concessions (*rukhṣa*) but its purpose is to produce an Islamic model for Muslim minorities in the countries where they live.[105] It aims at protecting the Islamic identity of Muslims and at the same time helping Muslims to integrate and interact actively in the society around them, without keeping them isolated.[106] Hence, imams need to study *fiqh al-aqalīyāt.* They should study all the issues related to Muslim community in America— specifically as a separate subject— in order to gain a deeper understanding of the problems of Muslims as minorities and the solutions to such problems.

8- Islamic History

It is said one cannot know the value of the present or be able to plan for his future unless he knows the past. Studying history in general and Islamic history in particular is important in order to extract the moral lessons from the previous incidents and avoid the mistakes of the previous people. The Qur'ān has confirmed these meanings many times.[107] It says about the story of Prophet Joseph and his brothers, "Indeed in their stories, there is a lesson for men of understanding" (Qur'ān 12:111). In another place the Qur'ān explains the goal of telling the history of previous people saying, "So relate the stories, perhaps they may reflect" (Qur'ān 7:176). The goal is reflection and pondering the lessons behind the stories. The great Islamic historian ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) in his *Muqaddimah* (introduction to the history)

---

[104] Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fi Fiqh al-Aqaliyyāt al-Muslima* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2001), 25-28.
[105] Taha al-Alawani, 3.
[106] Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fi Fiqh al-Aqaliyyat al-Muslima,* 35.
[107] Abd al-Bari Ahmad al-'Attar, "Nadhrah fi Sunan al-Kawn wa Qawanin al-Tarihk," Al-Bayan, 166:116.

states this meaning when he says; "The inner meaning of history, on the other hand involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events. History is firmly rooted in philosophy (*al-hikmah*). It deserves to be accounted a branch of it."[108]
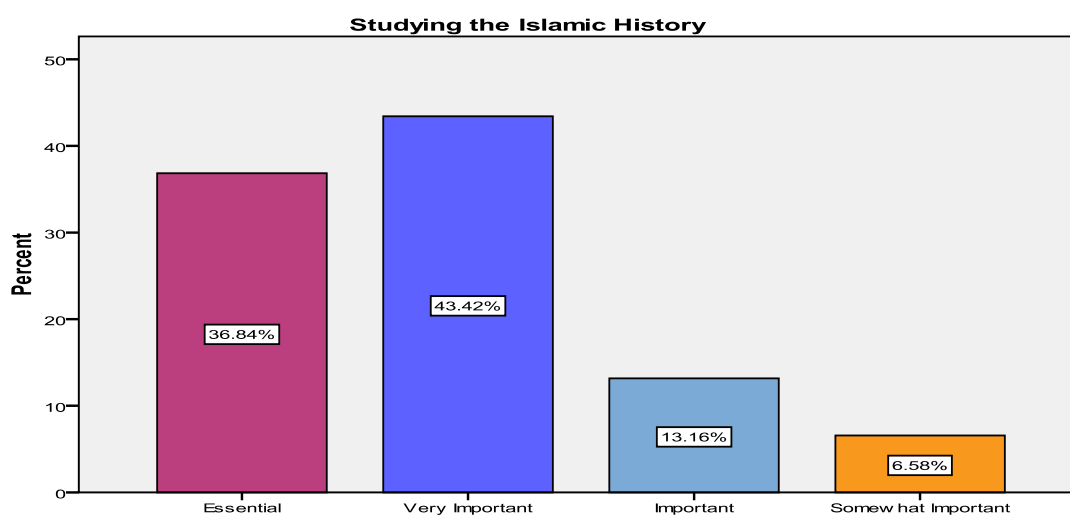
Figure 4.10: Studying Islamic History

Therefore, it is important for the imam to get a sufficient knowledge about the history of Islam and especially the biography of Prophet Muhammad. The life of the Prophet is the real practical model of Islam for Muslims. This kind of study in general helps the imam to broaden his scope of thinking and to deepen his ability to know reasons and causes of current events because life is the same and history repeats itself in many cases. Imams working in American communities also need to have some knowledge about the history of the main nationalities that have migrated to America, especially the major ones like the Arabs and Indo-Pakistani

---

[108] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989).

Muslims. Moreover, the imam should study the history of Islam in America and the history of African Muslims, who are one of the largest Muslim ethnicities in America.

As observed from Figure 4.10, according to the majority of imams, studying Islamic history deserves to be regarded as one of the main fields of knowledge that the imam should study. Over three-fourths of the imams (80.2%) consider it to be highly important for the imam to study the Islamic history. Only 13 percent hold the view that it is simply important; 6.6 percent of them see it as somewhat important; but none of them said it is not applicable.

9-Knowledge of Comparative Religions

The field that comes in the ninth position of importance is studying comparative religions. Even though this field of knowledge appears to be a more specialized area, one third of the imams (30.2%) give it a lower priority than other field of knowledge. Around 70 percent of the imams hold the view that possessing knowledge of comparative religions is either very important or essential. This is clear from Figure 4.11.
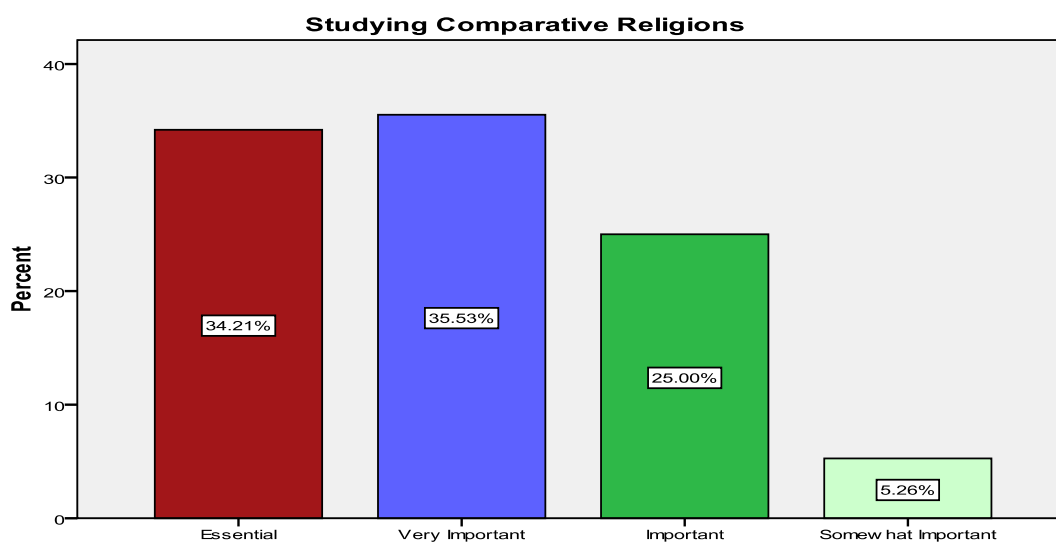
Figure 4.11: Studying Comparative Religions

In brief, it is very important for the imams to have sufficient knowledge about contemporary religions in America, including knowledge of the various sects of the major religions, or in the very least the imam should at least have knowledge of the principle beliefs, practices, and major figures of major American religions such as Christianity and Judaism.

10- American Culture and History

According to this study, the tenth most important area of knowledge, from the perspective of American imams, is American culture and history. Over two-thirds of responding imams (68.4%) rated the study of American culture and history as being essential or very important. At the same time about 30 percent of them rated it in lesser categories of importance, including 2 percent thinking that it is not applicable to the duties of the imam.
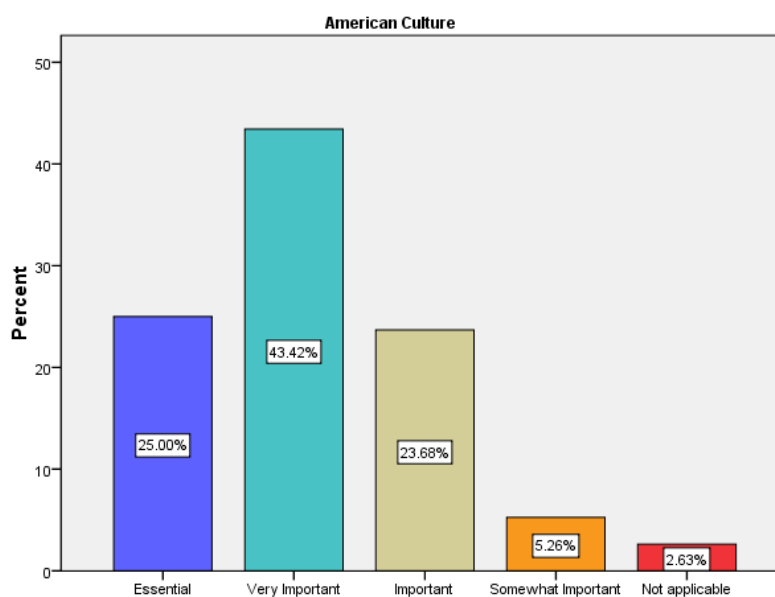
Figure 4.12: American Culture

Supplementary Fields of Knowledge

The previous fields were the ten most important areas of knowledge that the majority

of the imams deem to be essential for their position as an imam. In contrast, there were other

possible fields that they could have chosen, but in the view of majority of imams these other

fields are not essential like the more important fields. This means that if one could acquire

knowledge in these less essential fields, it would be good; but if they did not have knowledge in

these areas, in the view of the imams such a lack of knowledge will not affect the efficacy of his

work or his role within the community. These less important fields of knowledge arranged as

rated by imams from the highest to the lowest.

1- Beliefs of different Islamic Sects
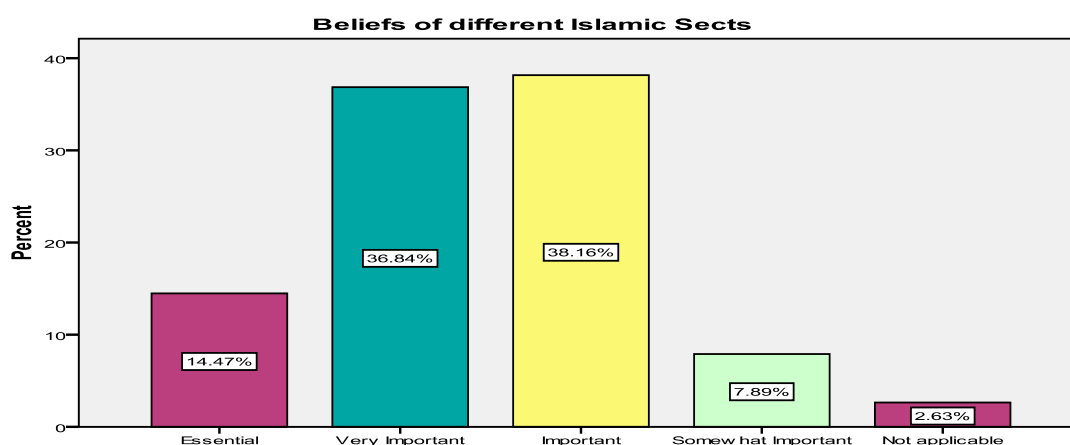
Figure 4.13: Beliefs of different Islamic Sects

Only 14 percent of imams said studying beliefs of different Islamic sects is essential, and

36 percent said it is very important. The highest percentage of imams (38.2%) stated that it is

just an important field, while about 8 percent consider it as "somewhat important." There is

also very low percentage of imams (2.6%) who see it as not being applicable. The reason behind the relatively low ranking given to knowledge of different Islamic sects (in comparison to the ranking of the previously discussed fields is that the majority of Muslims living in America are following the Sunni Islam, although some of them follow the Shi`i sect. Therefore, there is no essential need for studying sects that the imam will not deal with it or come across in his mosque.

2- Psychology
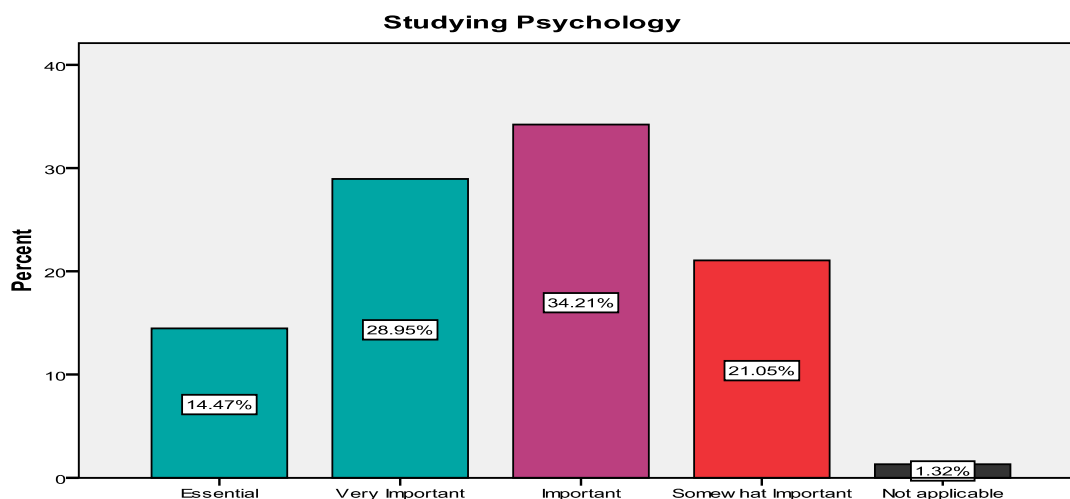
Figure 4.14: Studying Psychology

The second ranking field (among those of relatively lesser importance) that a reasonable percentage of imams (42%) think that it is greatly important for the imam to have knowledge of is Psychology. Over half of the imams (55.3%) are of the opinion that Psychology is neither essential nor very important but that it has some degree of importance for the imam, and if one could acquire such knowledge it will be a good addition to his profile.

3- Sociology

Sociology comes in as the third most important field of knowledge (among the supplementary fields of knowledge). The percentage of imams who ranked it as essential was only 7.9%, while 19.7% considered it to be very important. Roughly 40 percent of the imams, however, considered Sociology as only important and about 20 percent as somewhat important; while only one percent said it is not applicable. Overall 71 percent of the imams ranked it as being neither essential nor very important.. This is very clear from Figure 4.15.
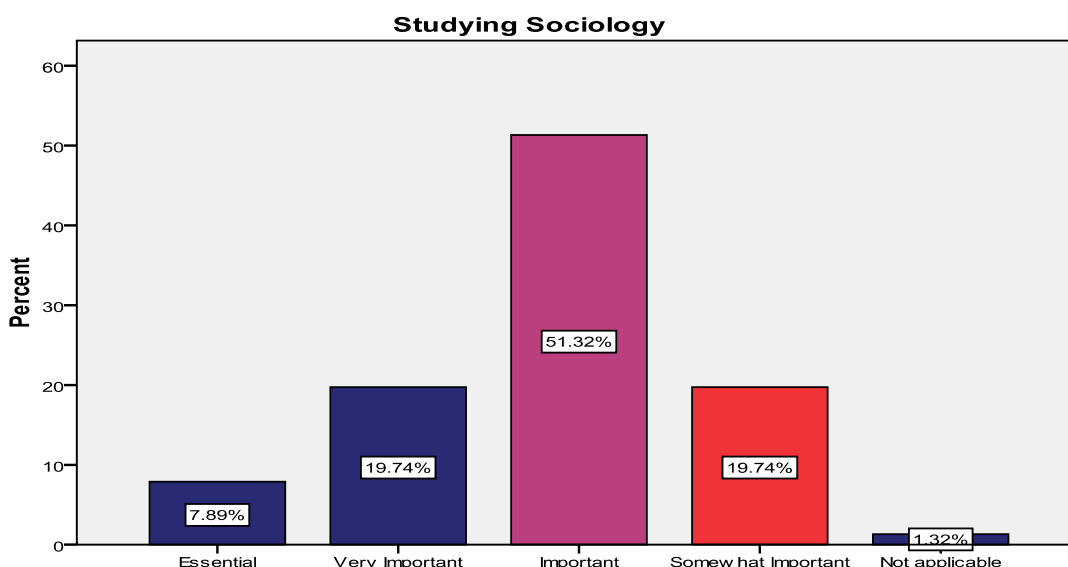
Figure 4.15: Studying Sociology

4- Philosophy

Concerning the area of Philosophy, 6.5 percent of the imams said that it is essential, while 14 percent regard it is being very important. The majority of the imams (71%) gave philosophy a priority lower than "essential" and "very important." A relatively high number of

imams (8 percent) think that the study of philosophy is not applicable to the imams' performing their responsibilities.
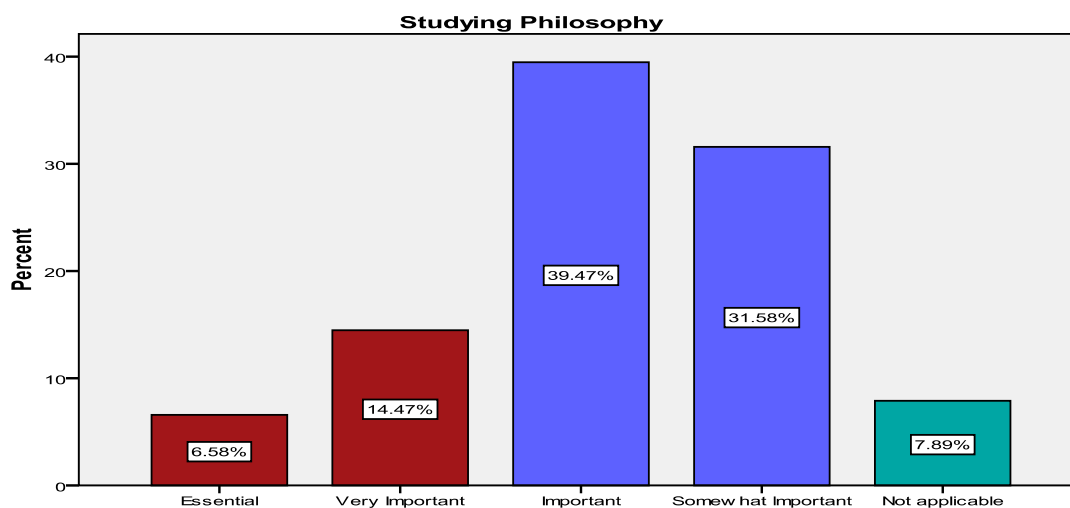
Figure 4.16: Studying Philosophy

It can be observed from Figure 4.16 that, by and large, the majority of imams have the view that studying the previously discussed "supplementary" fields of knowledge (Psychology, Sociology and Philosophy) are not essential for the imam, although they did not completely reject them but rated them lower than other fields of knowledge.. Moreover, there is a reasonable percentage of imams who believe that these sciences are crucial to the imam's scholarship. Hence, to balance between the two approaches, the imam does not need a deep specialized study of these sciences, but he should be cognizant of their main principles and theories to a degree that helps him to be able to understand and communicate with people who are educated in these sciences and who are members of the community.[109]

---

[109] Yusuf al-Qaradāwī, *Thaqafat al-dāʿiyah,* 117.

<div align="center">Skills of the Imam</div>

The imams were also asked to identify the most important skills necessary in order for the imam to perform his responsibilities. The most important skills according to the responding imams are as follows.

1- Communication skills

The majority of imams (around 90 percent) consider communication skills are the most important skills that imams should acquire and that these skills should be part of their training.

<div align="center">Table 4.1: Communication Skills</div>

Imams' view	Percent
The Most important	89.5
Important	3.9
The least important	6.6
Total	100.0

2- Leadership skills

<div align="center">Table 4.2: Leadership Skills</div>

Imams' view	Percent
The Most important	84.2
Important	7.9
Slightly important	1.3
Low importance	1.3
The least important	5.3
Total	100.0

The second most important skill is leadership, with 84 percent of imams declaring it to be the most important, while around 8 percent deem it to be important.

3-Public speaking skills

Public speaking skills have been viewed by over two-thirds of the imams (68.4%) as the third most important duty of an imam, while 23 percent of the imams have rated it as important. Table 4.3 gives a breakdown of the imams' views.

Table 4.3: Public Speaking Skills

Imams' view	Percent
The Most important	68.4
Important	23.7
Low importance	1.3
The least important	6.6
Total	100.0

4-Conflict resolution skills

Table 4.4: Conflict Resolution Skills

Imams' view	Percent
The Most important	50.0
Important	32.9
Slightly important	10.5
Low importance	1.3
The least important	5.3
Total	100.0

Half of the surveyed imams believe that conflict resolution skills are the most important skills needed by the imam in order to be successful in his role with the community.

5- Computer Skills
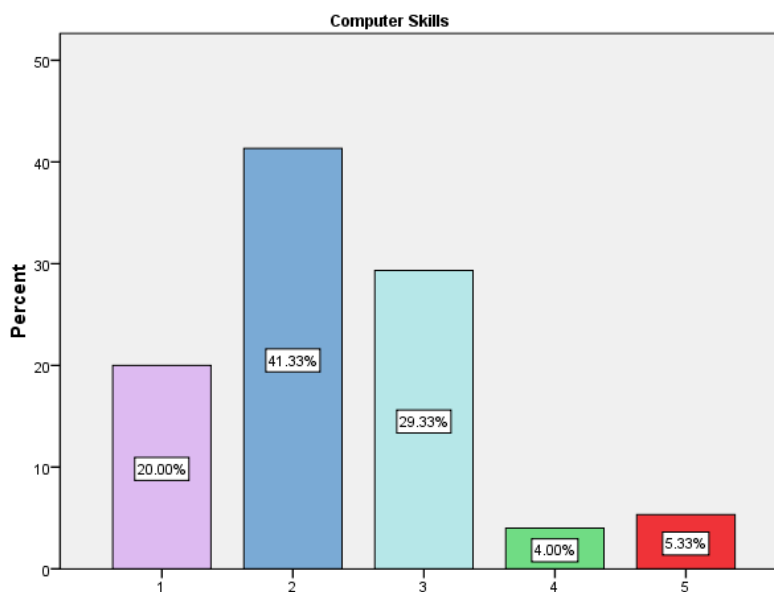
Figure 4.17: Computer Skills

Surprisingly, the responding imams rated the computer skills lower than expected, given this information age and the general importance of computer technology today. Only 20 percent view that it is the most important skill, and 41 percent think it is important; while about 40 percent consider it to be less than important.

The Imam's Manners

One of the main important qualifications of the imam is to possess good manners and an ideal character. The imam is the representative of the people and his personality is crucial in acquiring people's love and trust and hence in leading them to change for the better in their

lives. The moral aspect of the imam's character is no less than important than his scholarly

qualifications. It may sometimes even become more crucial than scholarly qualifications. If the

imam's personality is humble and people credit him with having good character that may

compensate for minor deficiencies in his level of scholarship or other required skills. One

reason for this is that religious knowledge aims at building good character in people. Thus,

figuratively, the ethical side of the imam is the mirror of the fruitful knowledge he possesses.

In addition, his actions are a reflection of his character, and people follow a living example

more than they do dead words. Al-Shāṭibī (d. 790 AH) mentioned that people benefit from the

righteous actions and good manners of great people more than the sayings that they may not

understand.[110] It is unacceptable for and imam to preach people to say the truth when he is a

liar, to instruct them to be generous when he is a miser, to urge them to obey Allah when he is

a sinner, to advise them to be honest while he is a dishonest, and to tell them to be

straightforward while he is a corrupt. He will mislead people and present a bad image of his

religion. Ibn al-Qayyim clarified this meaning when he said "Corrupt scholars sit in front of the

doors of Paradise calling people to enter it with their sayings, but in fact they call them to

Hellfire by their bad actions. If their sayings call people to come to Paradise, their bad actions

say "Do not listen to them. If their sayings were true, they would have followed what they

called you to."[111]

This meaning of the importance of harmony between knowledge and actions has been

explicitly stated in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān calls scholars to acquire good manners before

teaching them to people and warns them against the opposite saying: "What! do you enjoin

men to be good and neglect your own souls while you read the Book; have you then no sense?"

---

[110] Ibrāhim ibn Mūsá al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt*, 5:262.
[111] Muḥammad Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *al-Fawā'id* (Beirut: 1973), 61

(Qur'ān 2:44).[112] The verse clearly condemns those whose words are not consistent with their deeds. The knowledge of the imam and his "beliefs are meaningless unless his actions and behavior become a practical translation of those beliefs."[113] In his book *al-Ihya'*, al-Ghazālī states that having good manners is one of the conditions of the imam. He holds that the imam should have perfect character when he (al-Ghazālī) states that the imam should purify himself even from *al-sagha'ir* (small sins). For him the imam is like an intercessor for people, especially in prayer, so he has to be the best one among them.[114] Therefore it is reported that the Prophet said that the best among the Muslims should lead them (*ya'um al-qawma afḍaluhum*).[115] It was also reported that when the Prophet was ill in the last days of his life, he ordered Muslims to make Abū Bakr their imam, because he was the best among them.[116]

In general, Islam stresses that all people should strive to have good manners; hence the imam should have the best character because he is the leader. The prophet said, "I was sent to complete the best manners (*makarima al-'akhlāq*)."[117] The Prophet made acquiring *makarima al-'akhlāq* the ultimate goal of his message. In another hadith he stated that "The most beloved of you to me and the one who shall sit closest to me on the Day of Resurrection, will be the best of you in character."[118] Here, the Prophet pointed out that the best of the Muslims is the one who has a good character. Therefore, the imam should seek to have the best manners so as to successfully and effectively lead the Muslim community. For this purpose this section will talk about the part of the survey where the Imams were asked to evaluate a group of behaviors which the Imams should possess. The study will denote the behaviors that were rated most

---

[112] Shakir's Translation.

[113] Sayyid Qutub, In The Shade of the Qur'ān (UK: Islamic Foundation), Translated by Adil Salih & A. Shamis, 1:70.

[114] Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihyā' 'ulum al-dīn* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma`rifa), 1:175.

[115] Abu Bakr al-Baqilanī, *KitabTamhid al-'Awa'ilwatalkhīs al-Dala'il* (Beirut: 1987), 474.

[116] Al-Ghazali, 1:174

[117] Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubra*(India: Majlis Da'irat al-Ma`arif al-Nidhamiyyah, 1344 AH), 10:191.

[118] Majd al-Dīn Abu al-Sa'adātibn al-Athir, *Jami` al-Usul fi ahadith al-Rasul*(Maktabit al-Halawani, 1969), 4:6, hadith number 1978.

highly by the participants according to their degree of importance. The following ten are the behaviors that were regarded by the Imams as being most important:

1- Sincere

Almost all the imams (98%) except two percent state that it is highly important for the imam to be sincere (*mukhlais*).

2-Honest

The second highest attribute of the imam according to the majority of participant is being honest. Over four-fourths (86%) of imams state it is essential and about 8 percent see it as very important.

3-Patient

Being patient was also rated very high by imams. Little over four fifths of them (81%) think it is essential and 17 percent see it very important.

4-Morally Upright

Over three-fourths (77%) of imams hold the view that being morally upright is essential for the imam and 17 percent consider it as very important.

5-Pious

The fifth attribute is piousness. Around 76 percent said it is essential while 17 percent say it is very important.

6-Commited to Service

Around 73 percent of imams said being committed to service is essential, while 19 percent declared it as very important.

7-Respectful

About 73 percent of imams pronounced being respectful is essential while 19 percent stated as very important.

8-Humble

The eighth important part of character is humbleness. Roughly 73 percent of imams considered it to be essential while 15 percent see it as very important

9-Wise

Wisdom for the imam is very important. About 70 percent of imams consider it essential and 22 percent as very important. Overall 92 percent of imams view that it should be one of the most important attributes for the imam.

10-Compassionate

The tenth most important character for the imam is being compassionate with the people. Around two-thirds of imams (65.8%) see it as essential and 23 percent consider as very important. Being compassionate is the last among the most important behaviors that the imam should acquire. The imam should seek to achieve these characters as much as he can and make them an integral part of his personality as the leader of his community.

The Best Way of Educating and Training Future Imams

All these previous qualifications should be considered in the future training of the imams, but there is a question should be raised here how should Muslims do that? Imams have been asked a question about the best way for training future imams and they have been given four choices. They were "studying in some overseas Islamic universities", "studying in some American universities offering Islamic studies program", "establishing a new comprehensive training program in America" or "other". As in the below chart, the majority of imams (55.3%) view that a new comprehensive training program that takes into consideration all the

necessary qualifications should be established in America. About 16 percent of imams think that imams should study in some overseas Islamic universities and 14 percent are of the opinion that studying in some American universities offering Islamic studies program could suffice. The rest of imams (14.4%) choose the "other" category. The major view of those who chose "other" was combining between both studying overseas and in American universities. In fact, the view of the majority is more related to the need of the Muslim community and aim of this study that to have American-born imams who understand the American context and culture instead of importing imams who lack a lot of the experience of the society they are serving in, lack its language and are not able to communicate with the diverse community in this society. Imams studies outside bear with them the cultural background of the environments they lived in and if they cannot adjust themselves to the different life in the new society, they will face and make a lot of problem till they learn what is suitable and what is not especially if their studies in overseas universities as stated in the first chapter are local and traditional. I mean by local and traditional that the curriculums of overseas university are not established for graduating imams who can serve specifically in the American society. Moreover, the study in the American universities is not sufficient for the same reason to graduate imams for serving Muslim communities. Therefore, the study suggests inaugurating a new school in America that takes the responsibility of educating, preparing, training students to graduate as qualified imams for serving Muslim communities in America based on the findings of this study.

The Best Way for Training Future Imams
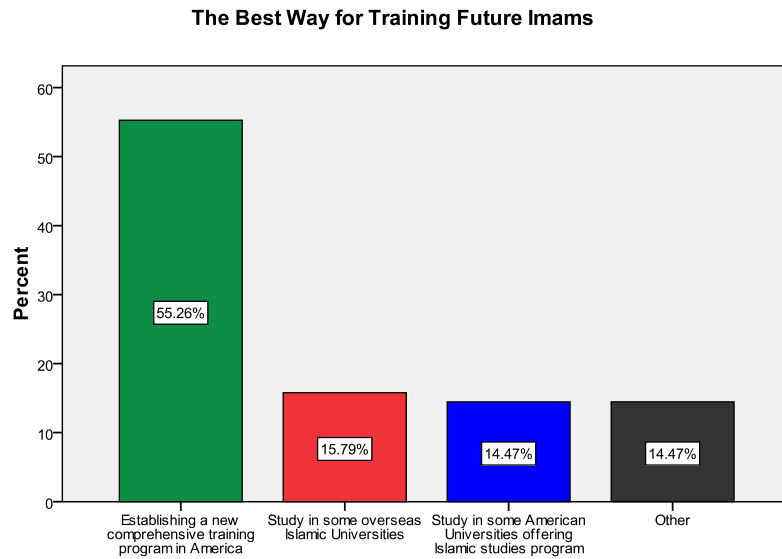
Figure 4.18: The Best Way for Training Future Imams

At the end, this chapter of the study aimed at displaying the main important qualifications for the imam. It discussed the scholarly qualifications of the imam and presented the main fields of knowledge that the imam needs to study and to be included in the curriculum of the future imam's education and preparation. The chapter also talked about the necessary skills for the position of the imam and presented them according to their degree of importance as stated by the participants. And finally the chapter introduced the required behaviors for the efficiency of the imam and being a role model among his congregation. The next chapter will discuss the main contemporary challenges and problems facing the imam in America.

CHAPTER 5

THE CHALLENGES FACING IMAMS IN AMERICA: A VIEW FROM THE FIELD

This chapter investigates the problems and challenges facing imams in America. What are the main problems and challenges facing them as they see them? Based on the methodology of asking a heterogeneous sample of experts' opinions in accurately identifying the problems of any working group,[119] this chapter and the previous one used this method to reach a better understanding of the imams' situations and perspectives. The researcher contacted a group of around ten working and experienced imams all of whom had worked for a number of years (2-15) in the American society. By engaging in discussions with this group of imams the researcher discovered a group of existing problems that are financial, administrative, and professional. These three general categories of problems were in turn presented in a questionnaire sent to about 300 imams to evaluate the seriousness and extent of the problems. The imams were asked to rate relatively each one of these problems on a five-point Likert scale[120] ranging from "strongly agree, agree, slightly agree, neutral, slightly disagree, and disagree." The descriptive analysis was done using the SPSS program and the reported findings of the study were presented. Since knowing a disease is the first step for curing it, this chapter will present and identify the main problems facing the imam in

---

[119] Daniel E. O'Leary, "Discussion of Information System Assurance for Enterprise Resource Planning Systems: Implementation and Unique Risk Considerations," Journal of Information Systems, Spring 2002 Supplement, 16: 1, 115-126.

[120] A method of ascribing quantitative value to qualitative data, to make it amenable to statistical analysis. A numerical value is assigned to each potential choice and a mean figure for all the responses is computed at the end of the evaluation or survey. (See "Likert scale," Business Dictionary, accessed July 29, 2011, http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/Likert-scale.html.

American society as viewed by the imams working in the field— in order to find appropriate solutions for these problems. Subsequently, the study will suggest some solutions for some of these problems and suggest directions for future research.

<div align="center">Financial Problems</div>

The most significant financial problems facing imams are the lack of health insurance, low salary, lack of a retirement package, and a lack of resources. These could be addressed by the establishment of a national waqf (religious endowment).

1-Inability to Have Health Insurance

The overwhelming majority of imams (90%) agree that not being covered by health insurance is a major problem. This percentage consists of approximately 70 percent of the imams who "strongly agree" and 14 percent who simply "agree" that one of the main problems of imams in America is the inability to have medical insurance for himself and his family. In contrast, only 6.5 percent of imams slightly agree and about 8 percent are neutral, while only 1 percent disagrees (and would therefore assert that not having health insurance is not a problem). Having such a problem negatively affects the imam's efficiency and productivity in his work, in addition to the financial consequences of large bills and health risks to which he and his family are exposed.[121] Moreover, according to a study about uninsured people in America, the uninsured imams (like any uninsured person) are:

- More likely to postpone or fail to receive needed medical care;
- Less likely to be screened for serious illnesses;
- More likely to enter the health care system in poorer health;
- More likely to receive less treatment, even for serious acute or chronic health conditions; and

---

[121] Stan McMillen Manager et al, *Uninsured: the Costs and Consequences of Living without Health Insurance in Connecticut* (Connecticut, Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut, 2004), 1.

- More likely to have worse health outcomes, both in general and for specific diseases.[122]

The researcher witnessed a case of one of the imams who was infected with a very serious

disease requiring lengthy treatment. He could not afford the costs of treatment and people had

to collect donations to pay for his medical bills.
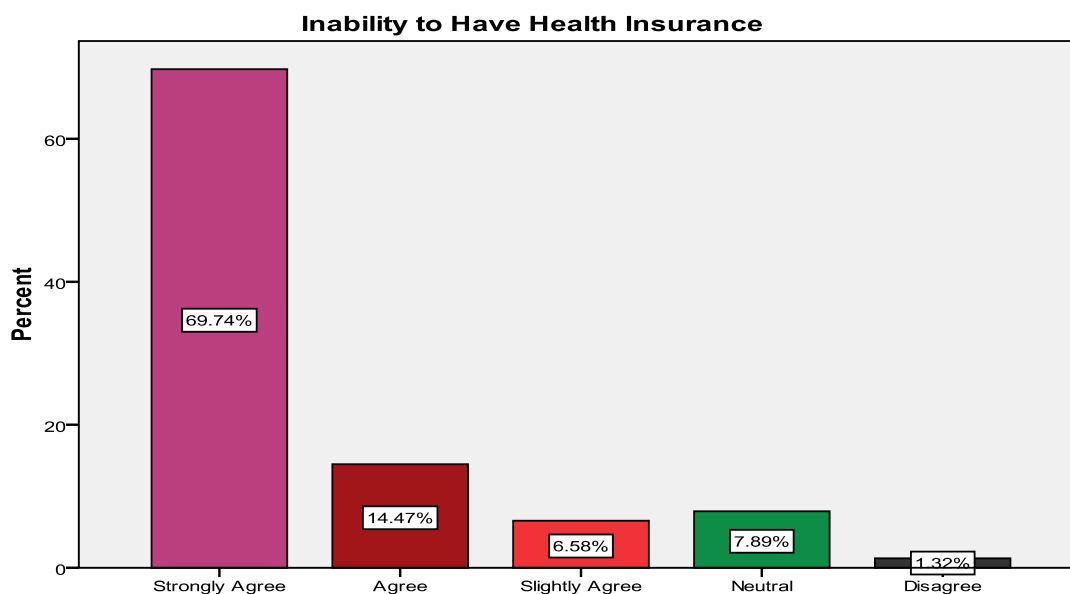
Figure 5.1: Inability to have Health Insurance

2-Low Salary

Another financial problem facing the imam is relatively low income. More than half of

the imams (55%) "strongly agree" and 31 percent "agree" that imams in America are paid low

---

[122] Jack Hadley, *Consequences of the Lack of Health Insurance on Health and Earnings Cover Missouri Project: Report 1* (Missouri: Missouri Foundation for Health, 2006), 2.

salaries. About 4 percent slightly agreed and about 8 percent were neutral, while only one

percent "disagreed" and felt that low salary was not a problem.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the responses of the surveyed Imams regarding their views about

whether or not Imams are being paid a low salary. Furthermore, this researcher observed that

low income has negatively affected the Imams' performance since it forces him either to

search for other work besides his position as imam in order to fulfill his needs or to leave the

job completely. This issue also has an effect on those who graduate with a degree in Islamic

studies and are thinking of working as imams. When they find that the salary of an imam is

low and cannot provide them with a comfortable and secure life, they will search for another

career.
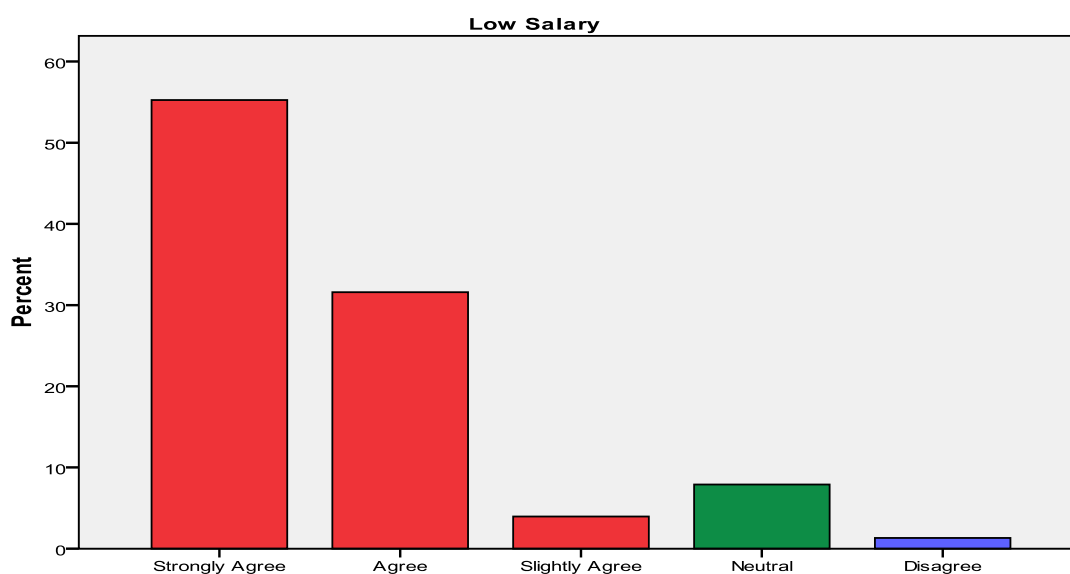
Figure 5.2: Low Salary

One of the imams said in comments box of the questionnaire that "We are underpaid. We as full-time imams are disrespected due how little we are paid." He also stated that "The imams have to have the resources to provide for their families in order for them to focus and perform their duties." These phrases express the degree of frustration that the imam experiences because of having a low income. It was stated before in the second chapter that 50 percent of imams are earning less than $35,000 a year and about 12 percent work for no salary.

3- No Retirement Package

The third problem, which is also a financial one, is that the majority of imams have no retirement package. More than half of the imams (55%) "strongly agree" and about one-fourth (22.4%) "agree" that there is no retirement package for imams in America. This issue also makes him feel insecure. He fears disability, sickness, or old age and wonders how he will be able to earn his living if he becomes ill and unable to work. What will be the situation of his family? Who will provide for them? Such insecurities need to be addressed. Hence, there should be a retirement plan for imams. As a solution to this issue, one suggestion could be that Muslims Organizations like NAIF develop health and retirement plans for imams that local mosques could purchase at a discount.

4-Lack of Resources

Imams expressed their need for a group of resources that could help them to perform their duties more efficiently. The majority of the imams see that it is important for the imam to have a good professional library, technological supplies such as phone, computer, connection to the internet, copy machine and fax, in addition to an office space and having his own car. Imams also expressed the need for having access to exercise equipment and access to a lawyer. Acquiring such resources is important for the imam, but it depends on the financial

situation of the mosque. Some mosques would find it to be a challenge to provide such facilities.

Al-Waqf (Religious Endowment) as a Suggested Solution

As it appears from the previous discussed problems of imams in America, they are most obviously financial in nature and hence a financial solution is in order. This disadvantaged financial position of imams in America may be attributed at times to the low incomes of mosques. It should also be noted that imams are not working in governmental institutions like the case of mosques of the Muslim world, but they are working in the U.S. in non-profit organizations. Mosques in America depend largely upon member donations, which are not stable and even low compared to other religious congregations in America.[123] Regarding this financial constraint the study suggested that a solution to these financial issues could be to create a national an American Islamic endowment system (*al-waqf*). In the survey imams were asked if they agree or disagree with such a solution. The majority of imams (90%) agreed that applying *al-waqf* in America could be a good solution for the financial problems of imams. This is clearly illustrated in Figure 5.3.

The Islamic endowment system was for centuries one of the main sources of sponsoring mosques, scholars, students and the needy in the Islamic civilization. It means "a privately owned property, corpus, is endowed for a charitable purpose in perpetuity and the revenue generated is spent for that purpose."[124] Ahmed Raissouni gives more explanation of the meaning of the *waqf* saying,

> Endowment is a canonical Islamic concept, which refers to a special kind of charity given for the purposes of benevolence. The word is used for charities and gifts that have permanence and continuity, so that people can benefit from them for years,

---

[123] Bagby, "Imams and Mosque Organization," 124.
[124] Murat Çizakca, "Awqaf in History and its Implications for Modern Islamic Economies," *Islamic Economic Studies*, 6:1 (November 1998) 43.

generations or even centuries. This means that Waqf endowment is made of entities from whose usefulness, yield and fruit people can benefit, while the capital asset of the entity lasts and stays for a short or long period of time, such as a lot, a construction, a well and a tree.[125]

Therefore this study encourages American mosques and Islamic institutions to try to reinvigorate the Islamic institution of *waqf* by establishing a waqf in USA as a solution for many of financial challenges facing Muslims in general and imams in particular and as a general tool of economic development for Muslim communities and American society as a whole.

Applying the Islamic System of Endowment

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Slightly Agree
- Neutral

2.63%
17.11%
61.84%
18.42%
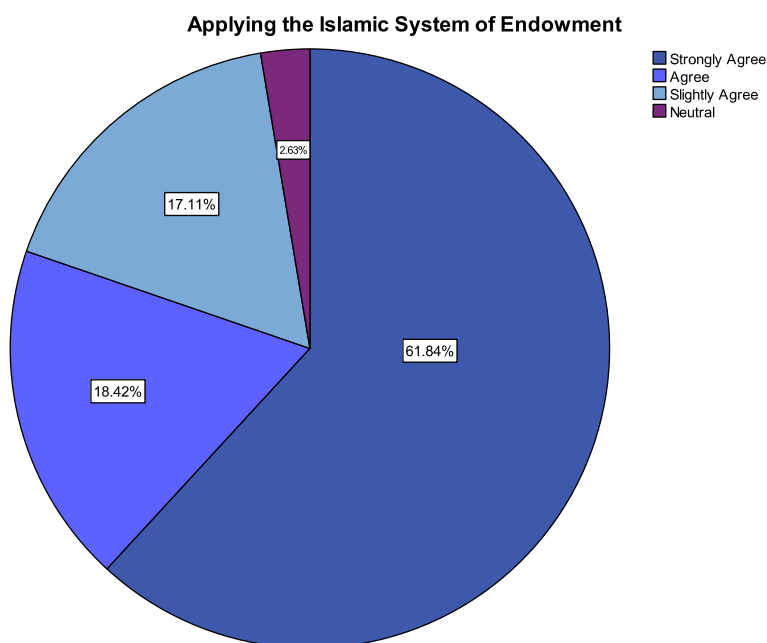
Figure 5.3: Applying the Islamic System of Endowment

---

[125] Ahmed Raissouni, "Islamic 'Waqf Endowment' Scope and Implications," Trans. Abderrafi, ISESCO, accessed July 7, 2011, http://www.isesco.org.ma/english/publications/WAQF/waqf.php.

<div align="center">Administrative Problems</div>

The primary administrative problems facing American imams are interference by mosque administrators, responsibilities that compete for his time, limitations on freedom of speech, and delays caused by mosque administrators in the imam's gaining permanent U.S. residency.

1-Interference in the Imam's Work by Mosque Administrators

The responses of the Imams when asked about interference in their work by mosque administrators are illustrated in Figure 5.4. These stem from conflicts between and imam and the members of the mosque board. The overwhelming majority of imams, almost three fourths of them (73.7%) agree that board members interfere in the imam's work.
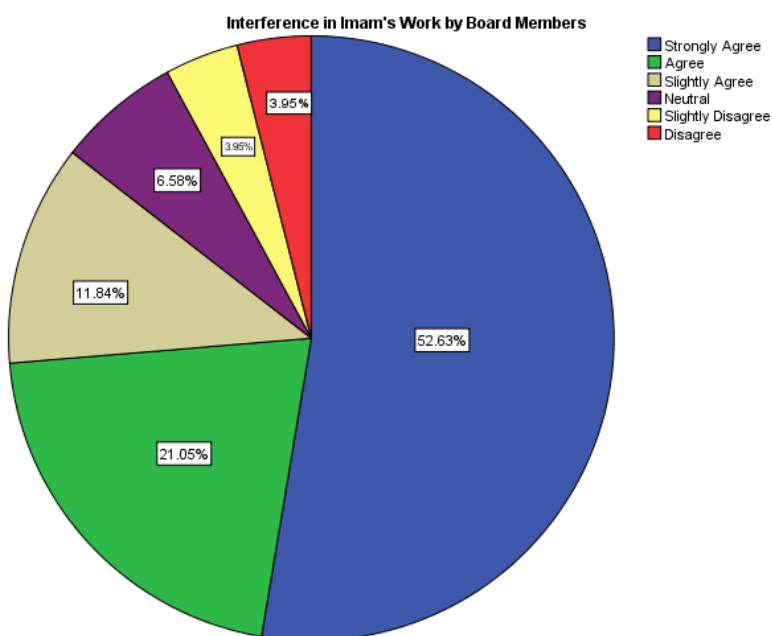
Figure 5.4: Interference in the Imam's Work by Board Members

2-Contradiction between the Responsibilities of the Imam and Running of the Mosque

Contradiction between Imam's Responsibilities and Administration of the Mosque

Strongly Agree
Agree
Slightly Agree
Neutral
Slightly Disagree
Disagree

6.58%

2.63%

9.21%

39.47%

15.79%

26.32%
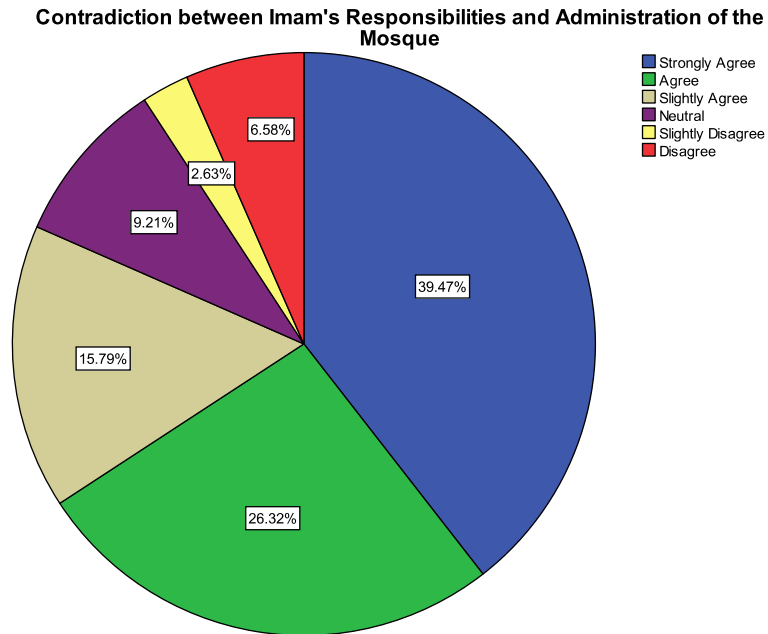
Figure 5.5: Contradiction between the Imam's Responsibilities and Running of the Mosque

In addition to the previous challenge, the second administrative challenge facing the imam in America is the conflict between his religious work as an imam and his responsibility of administering the mosque. This problem happens when the imam is both the administrator of the mosque as well as the provider of religious services or if there are administrative members, in some cases they delegate the running of the mosque or some of the administrative tasks to him. This means the imam is not simply concentrating on his religious work. Approximately two-thirds (65.8%) of the imams surveyed agree that there is such a contradiction.

3- Limiting the Imam's Freedom of Speech by Mosque Administrators

One of the specific ways that mosque administrators interfere in the work of imams is by censoring their speeches and public talks. Around two-thirds of the imams (64.4%) agree that the mosque administration sometimes limits their freedom of speech in their public talks and Friday sermons.

Limiting Imam's Freedom of Speech by Mosque Administration

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Slightly Agree
- Neutral
- Slightly Disagree
- Disagree

Values: 36.84%, 27.63%, 14.47%, 10.53%, 1.32%, 9.21%
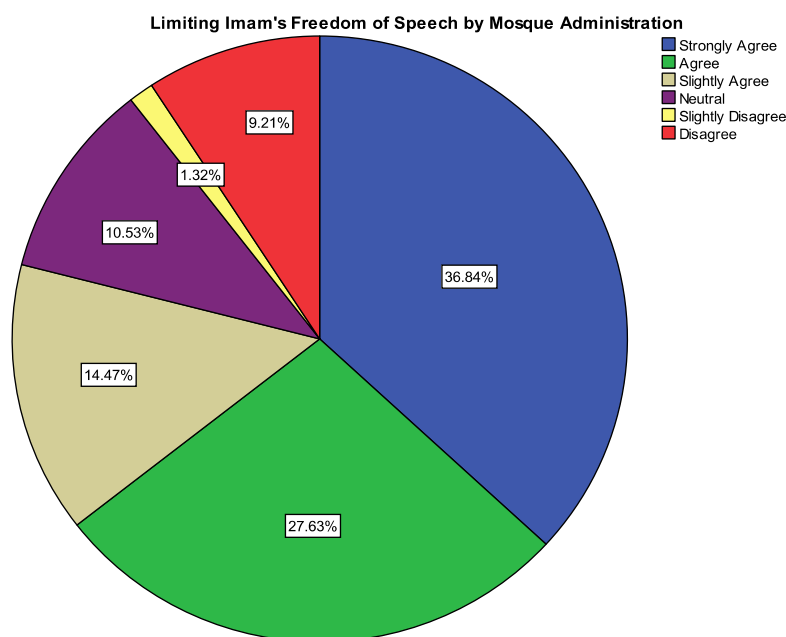
Figure 5.6: Limiting Imam's Freedom of Speech by Mosque Administration

This censorship may be political, social, or even religious. One of the issues that 66 percent of imams expressed is that they are asked by the mosque board not to discuss in their speeches some unlawful activities from an Islamic perspective, activities that are practiced by some board members or even some wealthy Muslims, such as selling alcoholic beverages in their stores. More than one-third of the imams (36.8%) strongly agree and 30 percent simply agree with the statement "Imams are asked not to address in their speeches non-Islamic activities

done by some members." It is known for example, according to the majority of Islamic

scholars, that selling wine is unlawful in Islam; but there are some Muslims who are not

abiding by this rule. Some of these Muslims may be general members of the Muslim

community and sometimes they may be members of the board of administration in the

mosque. If the imam talks about such an act in his speeches and condemns it, they will ask him

not to address such a topic again.
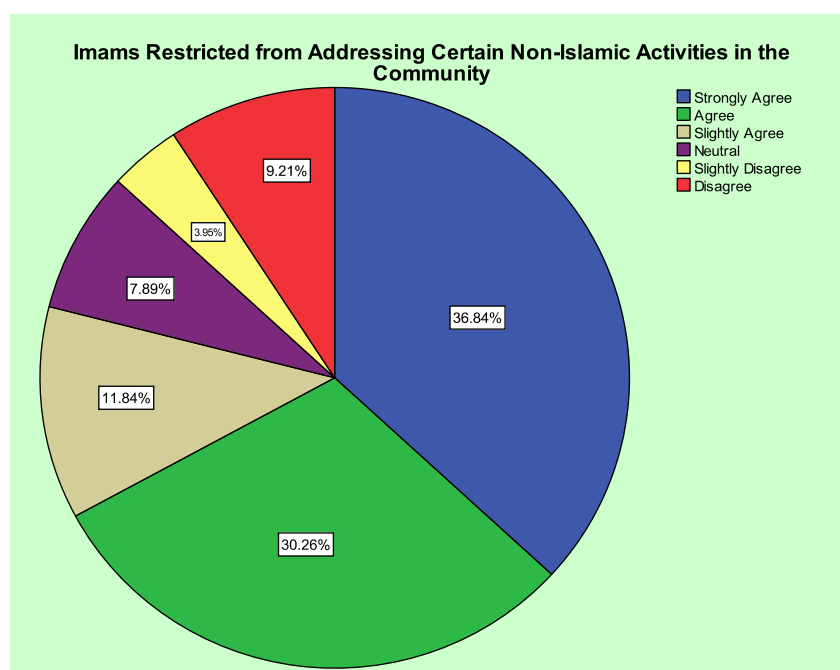
Figure 5.7: Limitations on Addressing Certain Issues

Given the previously discussed administrative problems, it seems that what is

occurring are power struggles between administrative members and the imams. It appears also

that there is confusion of the responsibilities of both entities. One of the imams in the

comments section of the survey said "There is no clear contract which shows the rights and

responsibilities of an imam and a board." In other words, there should be a separation between

both authorities; and both of them should cooperate for the welfare of the whole community, with each carrying out the responsibilities of his own position. Hence, if there is something related to the area of the imam's authority, he should be the one who has the last word on it. For example, the perspective of the imams is that mosque administrations or congregations should not have the authority to vote on matters related to ḥalāl (lawful) or ḥarām (unlawful) in Islam (which voting has been reported as occurring in some mosques). Nevertheless, especially when imams from abroad lack proper training in contextual and reality-based jurisprudence (fiqh al-wāqiʿ) and lack in depth knowledge of the everyday lives and problems facing congregants, members of administrative boards may be justifiably unwilling to give imams *carte blanche* to say and do whatever such imams' limited experience and training may misguide them toward.

Some of the administrative problems also spring from a lack of respect for the imam's position by some of the wealthy and powerful elite of the community.[126] The imams could gain their independent authority, however, if there were to exist a separate entity or institution sponsoring them— otherwise mosques administrations will continue to practice their interference as long as they are the sponsors and employers of the imams. One of the imams stated in the comments section that "Establishing Islamic endowment may help the imam to be more independent." Hence, the endowment Islamic system would not only be a financial solution (as noted above at the end of section A), but it would also help in solving some of the administrative problems and in providing the imam with religious independence and the respect that he deserves, since the mosque administration would not be able to be able to cut his salary or fire him based on personal biases in a community.[127] Another imam said, "All

---

[126] Bagby, *Imams and Mosque Organization in the United States*, 120.
[127] Ibid., 124.

masajid [mosques] should be under one organization which hire, fire, and pay salaries and make rules." Establishing the endowment system could establish a national institution that could be responsible for hiring imams or firing them. This institution could serve in the future as an organization with which all mosques would be affiliated and whose rules and regulations they would follow and abide by.

Type of the Mosque Leadership

The structure of the mosque leadership of American mosques is generally represented in two main ways, although two less common structures are also possible. The first main structure is a mosque led by the imam, while the second is a mosque led by a board of directors.[128] This study did not ask the imams about the structure of their mosque leadership, because this has been done in previous studies; but they have been asked what they prefer or what they think would be better from their perspective. More than half of the imams (57.9%) state that they prefer the type of the mosque led by the imam; about 20 percent prefer the type of the mosque led by a board of directors; while 22 percent chose the category of "other."

The majority of those who chose "other" prefer combining both authorities into a third type of mosque structure. They like to have a strong imam together with a board of directors, where both parties have authority but where there is a separation between the religious responsibilities of the imam, on the one hand, and the managerial and administrative responsibilities of the board of directors, on the other hand.

---

[128] Ibid., 117.

Type of Mosque Leadership
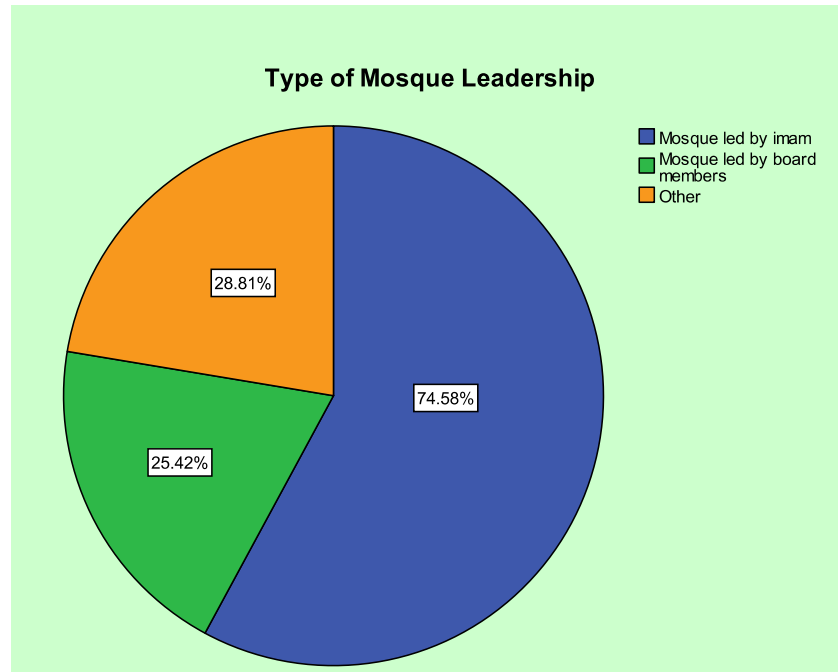
Figure 5.8: Type of Mosque Leadership

A fourth structure of mosque leadership has come to an existence recently. At one of the NAIF conferences this researcher met an imam who is affiliated with an institution that runs a chain of mosques under its auspices. The institution hires the imams in its mosques, where they are the leaders who run the mosques, while the institution supervises their work performance. This is a new model of mosque leadership emerging in the United States. If it proves to be efficient, there will be a possibility of popularizing its example. More research about the nature of this institution needs to be done, however, specifically how it works and gets its funding. If successful, it could be a real example for solving the administrative and financial problems of the imams in America.

4- Delaying the Process of Gaining Permanent Residency

Delaying the Process of Gaining Permanent Residency

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Slightly Agree
- Neutral
- Slightly Disagree
- Disagree

26.32%
22.37%
17.11%
25.00%
1.32%
7.89%
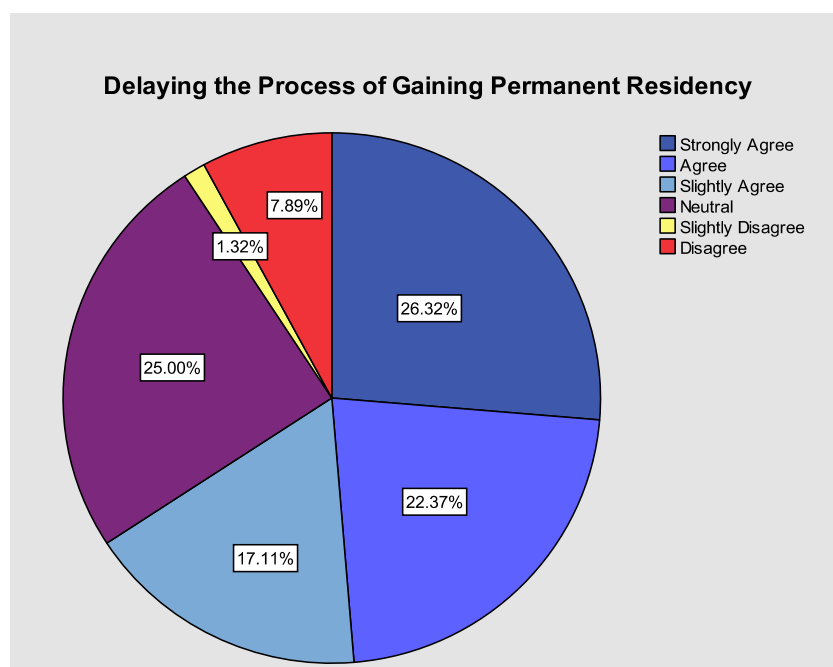
Figure 5.9: Delaying the process of gaining Permanent Residency

Another specific administrative problem that is related only to the non-resident immigrant imams is when mosque boards delay the processing of imams' paperwork for their permanent residency. Figure 5.9 illustrates the breakdown of this concern of the Imams. Over one-fourth (26%) of imams "strongly" agree and 22.4 percent simply agree that some mosque administrations delay the processing of the papers necessary for an imam's gaining permanent residency. A reason behind this delay may be the desire of the administration to restrict the imam to staying in the community for a longer duration at a lower income because the administration realizes that if the imam gets his residency permit, he may search for another mosque or job and leave the low income job at their mosque. In other words, by delaying the processing of the paperwork of an imam, the mosque administration gets the labor of the

imam at a relatively inexpensive cost, since an imam will tend not to leave even a relatively low paying job as an imam in the hopes that the mosque will enable him to get a green card. If they were paying him well, however, he would not think of leaving the community. Therefore, from the perspective of the imams, mosque administrations should seriously consider supporting imams in getting their residency and at the same time should write a contract that guarantees that he will not leave their employment for the duration that they desire.

<div align="center">Professional Challenges</div>

The professional challenges and issues related to the tasks of the imam's position itself that affect his work performance are related to the need for fluency in English, lack of respect for the imam, the gap between the youth and the imam, multiplicity of responsibilities, the need to relate to a diverse congregation, and U.S. governmental delays in processing immigration paperwork.

1-The English Language

Acquiring the English language is one of the most important qualifications for the profession of an imam. Hence, roughly half of the imams (48.7%) strongly agree and about one-fourth (23.7%) agree that gaining fluency in the English language is one of the biggest challenges facing imams in America. Only about 7 percent disagree, and the majority of them are English-speaking imams (African American). Imams need to master the English language in addition to Arabic in order to provide their services to the diverse Muslim community. The "bilingual imam can communicate with the English-speaking members of his mosque and can deliver the sermon (*khutba*) in a language comprehensible to them."[129]

---

[129] Haddad and Lummis, *Islamic Values*, 65.

The English language is a Challenge

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Slightly Agree
- Neutral
- Slightly Disagree
- Disagree

Pie chart values: 48.68%, 23.68%, 6.58%, 13.16%, 1.32%, 6.58%
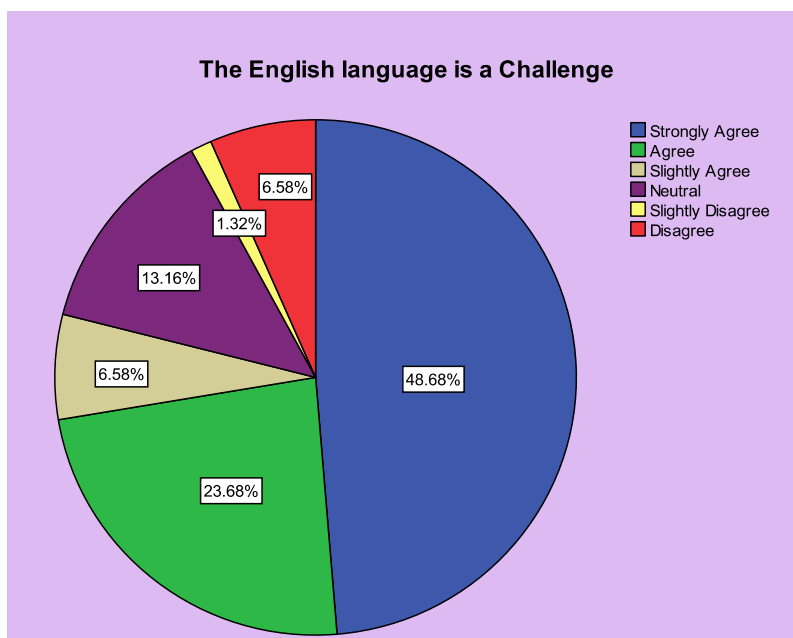
Figure 5.10: The English Language is a Challenge

For such reasons members of mosques prefer a bilingual imam more than an imam who speaks only one language. For example, a woman born in America of Lebanese parents said,

> I enjoyed the imam because he spoke in Arabic and explained it in English. Let's face it, you have a lot of American born Muslims here who don't understand Arabic, and my son don't understand that much Arabic because we were gone too long and they weren't expose to it enough. In order for them to enjoy a sermon they are going to have to understand it....Even my daughter-in-law, she is not an Arab and does not understand Arabic, she enjoyed it. I am very satisfied with the imam.[130]

This opinion expresses the need for a bilingual imam in American communities. In addition, support for such a perspective can be found in the Qur'ān where Allah says "And we sent not a Messenger except with the language of his people, in order that he might make (the Message) clear for them" (Qur'ān 14:4). This verse shows the importance and value of an imam's knowing the language of people with whom he is communicating so that he can clarify the message of Islam for them.

---

[130] Ibid., 65-66.

2- Lack of Respect from some Members of the Community

In addition to the need to be fluent in English, another professional challenge for American imams is to gain the respect of their community. Islamically, due respect should be presented to one who is an imam, since imams are the scholars who bear religious knowledge and convey it to the people. The Prophet described the scholars as "warathat al-*anbiyā'* (the inheritors of the Prophets)."[131] This hadith of the Prophet necessitates that Imams should be respected by the whole community, but unfortunately this is not always the case. Some members of Muslim communities relate to the imam as just a worker, an employee, or "hired help" and forget about his religious position and the respect he deserves.

Figure 5.11 demonstrates the response of the imams with regard to the issue of a lack of respect from the community members. Surprisingly, 42 percent of imams "strongly agree" that this is a significant problem, and 22 percent simply "agree" that there is a lack of respect for the imam by some members in the community. There are, however, 14 percent of the imams who only slightly agree that it is a problem; and about 12 percent who are neutral, In contrast, around 10 percent disagree with the assertion that there is a lack of respect given to the imam by his community. We can safely assume that this 10% feels that their communities respect them sufficiently.

---

[131] Abu `Eisa Mohammad At-Tirmidhi, English Translation of Jami` At-Tirmidhi, trans. Abu Khaliyl (Saudi Arabia: Dar-us-Salam, 2007). Hadith number 2682.
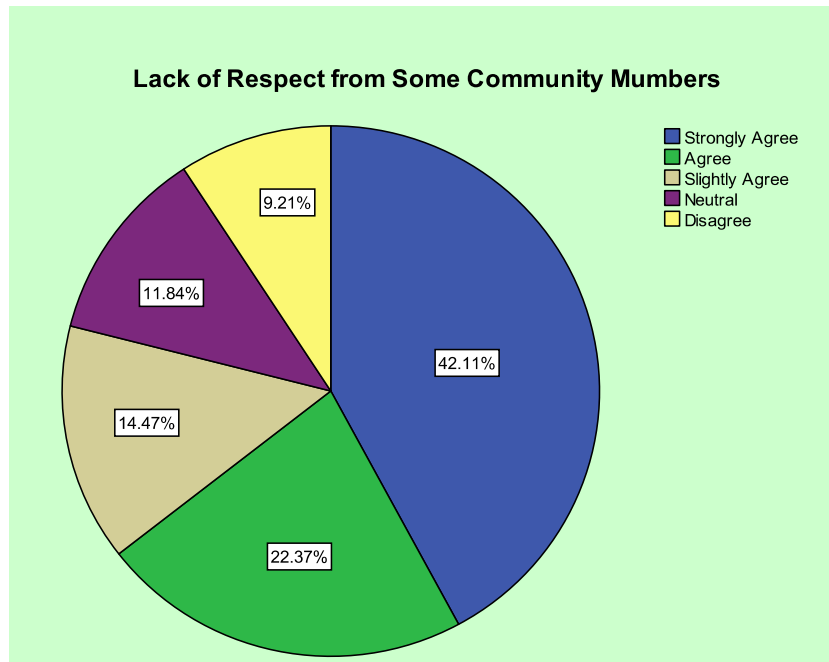
Figure 5.11: Lack of Respect from Some Community Members

This means the problem is not absolute, varying from community to community. Probably there are some other factors behind this matter, such as the level of imam's education, his communication skills, and his flexibility in dealing with a diverse community. Further research should investigate the causes of the lack of respect for imams by taking into account these above-mentioned factors.

3- The Gap between the Imam and the Youth of his Community

Besides the need for English fluency and gaining the respect of one's community, one of the professional challenges facing imams in America is how to build a strong relationship with the younger generation in order to strengthen their faith and build their Islamic identity. More than one-third of imams (35.5%) "strongly agree" and another third (31.6%) "agree" that there is a gap between the imam of the mosque and the youth in the community. There are, however, 5.4 percent who "disagree" and about 4 percent who "slightly disagree" in addition

to a 14 percent of imams who are "neutral". This means that there is a percentage of imams who have managed to overcome this challenge or who are simply (unconsciously) in denial that there is a gap between the Muslim youth of his community and the imam..

The Gap between Imams and Youth of the Community
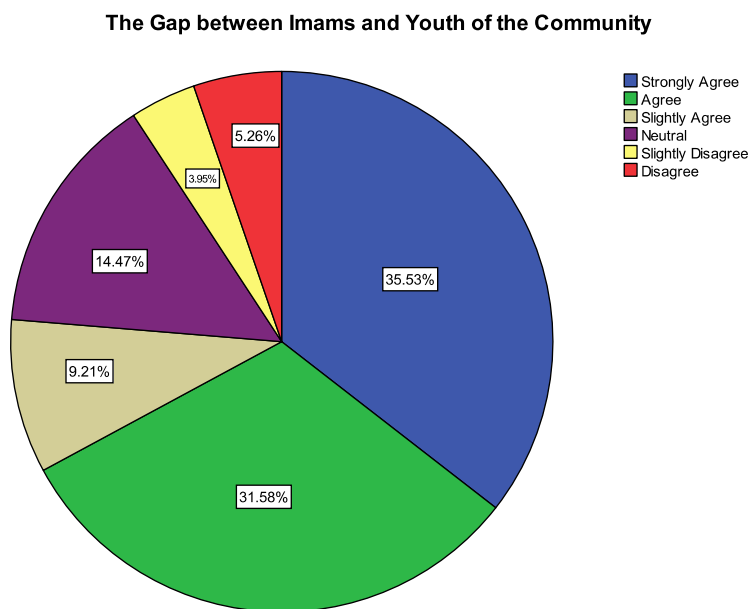
Figure 5.12: The Gap between Imams and Youth of the Community

Traditional ways of diminishing the gap between the youth and the imam, such as Islamic lectures and speeches, do not much appeal to many youth. They need activities that are appropriate for their age, such as sport tournaments, intellectual and cultural competitions, recreation programs, scouting, camping and trips. Through such activities the imam will be more likely to be able to strengthen his personal relationship with the youth, which in turn will help in inculcating Islamic principles into their characters. Being involved with the youth in activities will give him the opportunity to enrich their character by being a role model for them. One possible solution for reducing the gap between the youth and the

imam, as this researcher observed in some mosques, is to appoint a youth coordinator other than the imam. This youth coordinator is usually close in age to the youth and has good experience in dealing with them and in creating programs that meet their needs.

4-The Multiplicity of the Imam's Tasks and Responsibilities

One of the professional challenges of the imam is to be multi-task oriented. This, however, is often easier said than done. Therefore, 30 percent of imams "strongly agree" and 38 percent "agree" that the multiplicity of the imam's tasks and responsibilities is one of his biggest challenges.

Multiplicity of the Imam'sTasks

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Slightly Agree
- Neutral
- Slightly Disagree
- Disagree

- 30.26%
- 38.16%
- 14.47%
- 10.53%
- 2.63%
- 3.95%
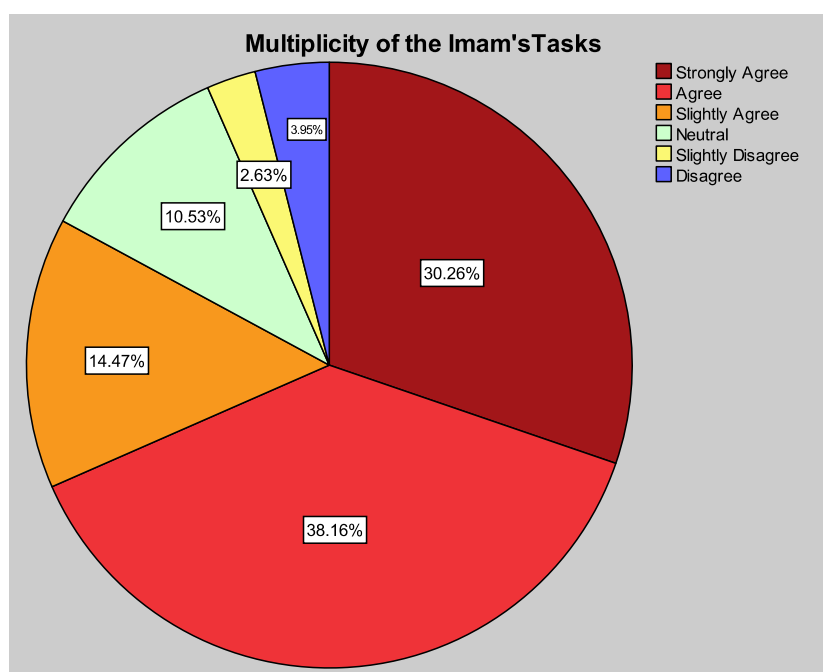
Figure 5.13: Multiplicity of the Imam's Tasks

In fact the imam's tasks are numerous and enormous. As discussed in chapter three, there are many duties, and every duty is a job in itself. If one takes youth activities as an example, and if the imam is the one in charge of them (as is the case in number of mosques), that alone is

enough to keep him busy. When we add to that programs for children and women, outreach and in-reach programs for the Muslim community, not to mention Sunday school, after school, interfaith and intra-faith programs, it is no small wonder that imams feel overwhelmed with the multiplicity of tasks for which they are responsible. The imam is often supposed to carry out all these duties and tasks in addition to the ritual ones whether they be daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly. Therefore, he is in great need of organizing, balancing, and prioritizing all of them, and most especially is in need of delegating and building a team of mosque members who like to cooperate in developing and improving the community with their skills.

5- Communicating with a Diverse Community

A professional challenge concerning which over one-fourth of imams (28.9%) "strongly agree" and another one-fourth (26.3%) "agree" is their need to address successfully the diversity of most mosque communities with their various ethnicities, *madhhabs*, and cultures. Those imams who only "slightly agree" that this is an important challenge are 26.3% of the imams. In contrast about 10 percent are "neutral," while 5.3 percent "slightly disagree," and 3.9 percent "disagree" that diversity at the mosque is a challenging issue. This means that about half of the imams consider it to be a serious problem while the others do not share their perspective. One of the reasons for the dissent on this issue may be that some mosques, especially in big urban areas, may be more mono-cultural.

Communicating with a Diverse Community is a Challenge
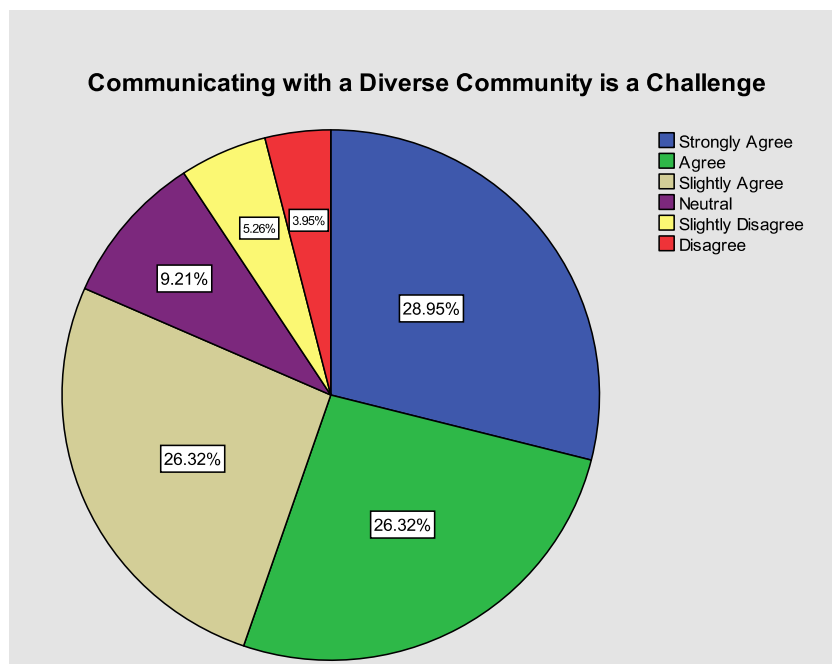
Figure 5.14: Communication with a Diverse Community

6-Delay of the imam's paperwork by US immigration authorities

The final major professional challenge concerning which over one-fourth of imams (27.6%) "strongly agreed" and about 20 percent "agreed" is that often imams face a delay in their paperwork that is caused by US immigration authorities. The other half of the imams do not see it as a serious problem, however. In general, the causes behind such delays are unclear, although it is fairly well-known that after 9/11 immigration procedures became more complex and lengthier.
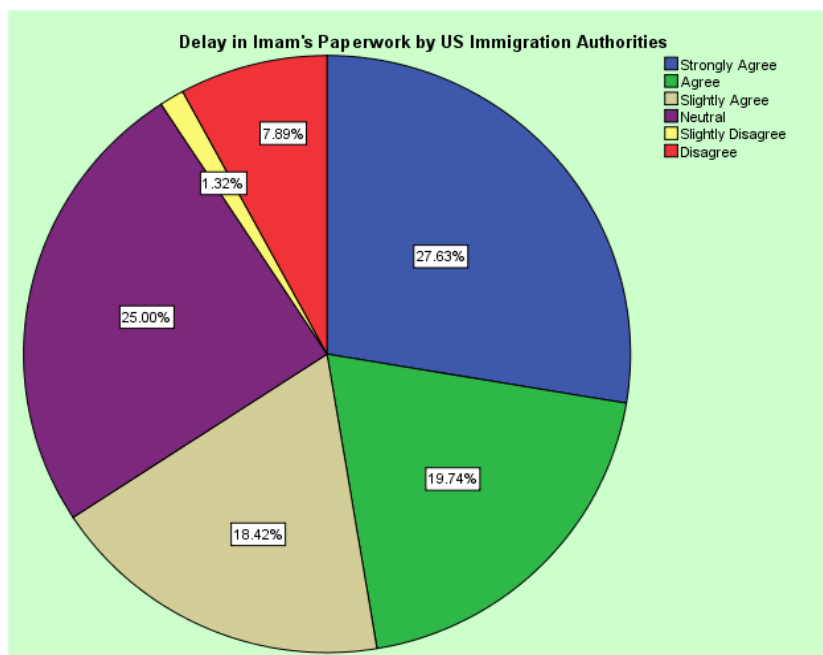
Figure 5.15: Delay in Imam's Paperwork by US Immigration

In conclusion, this chapter presented a detailed study about the main problems and challenges of imams in America. The first set of problems or difficulties as rated by imams consist of financial challenges such as the lack of health insurance, relatively low salaries, and the lack of retirement benefits in their contracts, and the need for more professional resources. The study also suggested establishing Islamic endowment system as a solution for such financial issues. The second set of problems addressed were administrative. These challenges consisted of interference in the imam's work by the mosque administration, the conflict between the religious tasks of the imam and administration of the mosque, limitations on the imam's freedom of speech, and the mosque board's delaying the imam's application for permanent residency. The third group of problems were professional issues, most significantly the challenge of gaining fluency in English in order to be a more effective communicator in the U.S. Other professional challenges is order of agreement of their significance consist of

disrespect from some of the members of the community, the gap between the imam and the youth in the community, the multiplicity of their tasks, the challenge of a diverse congregation, and in certain cases the delaying of their residency paperwork by US immigration authorities. In sum this chapter analyzes the current issues facing the imams and suggests some solutions to improve the role of imam in the community.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Until this study, as far as we have been able to determine, there have not been any

studies or comprehensive surveys that have analyzed the various issues facing imams in

America. The objective of this study, first of all, was to identify the main characteristics of the

imams in America in order to better understand them. Second, it explored in depth the main

duties of the imam in America and prioritized, from the viewpoint of the imams, the

importance of each duty accordingly. Third, the study introduced a comprehensive synopsis of

the main qualifications of the imam such as scholarly qualifications, skills needed for daily

activities, and the expected manners of an imam as a role model and a leader for his faith

community. Lastly, the study captured some of the main problems and challenges that the

imams currently face while serving the Muslim community in America.

For the purpose of this study the researcher used the quantitative method by sending

to imams a survey that covered all the previous points. For analysis of the data the study used

the descriptive statistics based on SPSS program in addition to understanding the data from an

Islamic religious and scholarly point of view and through the observations and experiences of

the researcher during his volunteer work in different Islamic centers, his participation in

imams' conferences, and during his academic training in the Tallahassee Islamic Center. The

major results of the study were as follows:

Regarding the main characteristics of the imams, the study found that the average age of the imams is 44 years and that they are from diverse countries of origin, however the Arab imams represent the highest percentage of the participating imams. The results show that there is lack in the imams' formal Islamic education. At least one-third of the imams have no formal Islamic education, a fact that affected their employment status. The majority of those who do not have a high school diploma and good Islamic formal education work as part-time imams and earn lower salaries than others. This means that imams with good Islamic education have more chances of having a full-time job and higher salaries, which result in more stability and productivity in their work as imams. Hence they can concentrate on their required tasks and not worry about earning their living and seeking another job simultaneously.

The participating imams had an average of 11 years of employment as imams, which provided them with enough experience in the American environment. This experience first of all gives more credibility to the results since they have been serving in the community for a longer period of time and since they understand from experience the problems and issues faced by the imams. Secondly, the results of the study can also be used in the future not only to evaluate the good experiences of imams but also to evaluate their strategies for successfully fulfilling their duties and for dealing with the problems that imams have faced.

The study also found that there are many low-paid imams. The medium salary is $35,000 a year, which means that half of the imams earn less than the mean salary. Over 10 percent of them work for no salary. It should be noted that the majority of the low-salary imams are working in small congregations. The mainstream approach of participant imams is contextual which means the majority of imams think that the situation of Muslims in America

requires a unique Islamic response from Muslim religious scholars, a response that takes into consideration the realities of life in America. In other words, these imams contend that Islamic responses to the problems experienced in different countries cannot be carried to America without any modification. When imams were asked about their competence in the English language, 57.6 percent of imams who are non-native English speakers said sometimes speaking in English hinders them from communicating their ideas. Thus, the study found that mastering the English language as means of communication in American society is one of the challenges faced by immigrant imams in America. This challenge requires that the imams should enroll in English proficiency courses and improve their linguistic skills while the mosques bear the financial cost of such trainings. This shortcoming can be overcome by providing future imams with enough training in the English language.

Regarding the duties of the imam, the study found that imams gave a high degree of importance to educational and social duties over some of the ritual duties. Educating the members of the community, interacting and building good relationships with them and solving their problems to bring them closer to Islam, in addition to interacting with the outer society are among the main roles of the imam, all of which show that he is not just a prayer leader. The participant imams ranked the main responsibilities of the imam in the following manner.

1- Delivering the Friday Sermon (*Khuṭbat al-jumuʿah*)

2- Leading Prayer

3- Arbitration in Disputes of the Muslim community

4- Giving weekly religious lectures

5- Counseling

6- Conducting Funerals

7- Helping the Poor and the Needy

8- Performing marriage ceremony

9- Engaging in Youth Programs

10- Visiting the sick

11- Communicating the Message of Islam through Media

12- Encouraging Muslims to Participate in the Political Process

13- Building Relationships with Diverse Cultural Groups

14- Participating Interfaith Dialogue

15- Visiting Prisoners for Spiritual Guidance

These are the main duties of the imam within the American community and the wider society around them according to the view and priorities of the surveyed imams. Based on this data, the study suggests that these tasks should be considered in the future for educating and training imams in order for them to better serve the Muslim communities in America and to be a successful professional imam. This list of tasks can also serve as a job description for the imam's position that could be included in the imam's contract.

As for the necessary qualifications that enable the imam to fulfill these multiple tasks, the study investigated the imam's scholarly qualifications, his required skills and the behaviors necessary for contributing to a sound character and ideal personality. The results of the study showed that traditional education of imams overseas is not sufficient for working in the American context. Imams need specific fields of knowledge besides traditional Islamic studies. These fields of knowledge that imams rated very high were mainly the fields that take into consideration the circumstances and conditions of special situation of Muslims living in

America as a minority. These fields of knowledge that were highly recommended by the imams working in America may be called Islamic socio-religious studies. The main fields are as follows.

1- *Fiqh al-Wāqi'* (Dealing with Real Life and Current Problems)

2- *Ḥadīth*

3- Rules of Qur'ān recitation (*Tajwīd*)

4- *Tafsīr* and *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*

5- Memorization of the Qur'ān

6- *Fiqh al-awlawīyat* (Priorities)

7- *Fiqh al-maqāṣid* (Objectives)

8- *Fiqh* and its principles (*Uṣūl al-fiqh*)

9- *Fiqh al-aqallīyāt* (Minorities)

10- Islamic History

11- Knowledge of comparative religions

12- American culture and history

There are some other supplementary fields such as studying beliefs of different Islamic sects, psychology, sociology, and philosophy, but the former ones are the major fields that qualify the imam to serve successfully and professionally the Muslims living in America. Imams also highlighted the necessity for the imam to have strong communication skills, leadership skills, public speaking skills, conflict resolution skills, and computer use skills. Moreover the imams believed that for the imam to be a role model for the whole community, he should be sincere, honest, patient, morally upright, pious, committed to service, respectful, humble, and a compassionate person.   For purpose of providing future imams with sufficient preparation

and training, this study —based on the survey and the view of the majority of the imams— suggests establishing a school in America or departments that have a new comprehensive training program and an Islamic educational curriculum that take into consideration all the previous qualifications and presents them to the imam during his period of study. However, the study recommends establishing a school in America and having American born students to be the future imams; it also recommends that the Islamic universities overseas consider these findings and establish programs and departments only for students who want to graduate to be imams in America specifically or in the West in general.

Finally, regarding the current situation of imams, the study found that imams are facing a group of challenges and problems in America. One set of problems and difficulties as rated by imams are the financial ones, such as a lack of health insurance, lower income, and the non-existence of retirement benefits in their contracts. Imams also expressed their need for professional resources that due to financial challenges are difficult to acquire. Although it is not very difficult for a Muslim community to support financially and reasonably the imam and his family, the study suggested establishing a national Islamic endowment system as a solution for such financial issues and in order to have independent imams. A second set of problems was related to administrative issues. These challenges were as follows: interference in the imam's work by the mosque administration, the contradiction between the tasks of being an imam and being an administrator of the mosque (especially in mosques led by imams), limitations placed on the imam's freedom of speech, and the mosque administration's delaying the imam's application for permanent residency. A third group of problems was related to professional issues. The first of these challenges was gaining fluency in the English language as a medium of communication with the Muslim community in America. Imams also

agree that they face a kind of disrespect from some of the members of the community, a gap with the youth in the community, an often bewildering multiplicity of tasks, a challenge in dealing with the diversity of the community, and the delaying of their paperwork by the US immigration authorities in certain cases. In general the study argues that such problems can be overcome or dealt with more effectively by training and educating both imams and communities. In particular, imams should receive training in administrative, management, technical, and organizational skills; they should thoroughly study English, the rights of religious scholars in Islam, communication skills, and time management skills. In addition, they should be familiar with their legal rights in America and should be aware of avenues for seeking the help of human rights organizations and lawyers proficient in dealing with problems with immigration authorities—if it is believed that there is any kind of discrimination that is delaying their application for residency.

Future research

Overall the study has made an attempt to introduce a picture of imams in American society for the sake of improving the welfare of Islam in America. However, the topic of imams in America is a field that needs a great deal of research and continuous study in order to improve the status and effectiveness of imams in America. Through this study of a sample of American imams, we attempted to understand the current situation and roles of the imam in America and the necessary qualifications for being a successful imam, from an Islamic religious perspective. Since the field is still new and in its beginning stages, the study suggests especially another complementary study focusing on the members of the Muslim community itself in order to understand both what they expect their imams to be and how they see the current situation of imams in America. Do they think imams are doing well? Or do they think

that there is more that should be done? What are the main problems with their imams that Muslim communities have faced? Do they prefer imams coming from overseas or having American imams trained in America?   In addition to research on the needs and expectations of congregations concerning their imams, this study highlighted certain issues that need more investigations and research, such as the problems faced by imams with the immigration authorities and identifying the factors and reasons behind this claim. In sum, this study has contributed important findings to research concerning imams in America and has indicated some directions that additional research should take.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Al-Qaraḍāwī, Yūsuf. *Thaqafat al-dāʻiyah.* Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2009.

Al-Shāṭibī, Ibrāhim ibn Mūsa. *Al-Muwāfaqāt.* Saudi Arabia: Dar Ibn ʻAffān, 1997.

Al-Sibāʼī, Muṣṭafá. *Al-Sunna wa-makānatuhā fiʼl-tashrīʻ.* Damascus: Dār al-Warrāq, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2000.

Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. *Jāmiʻ al-bayān fi taʼwīl al-Qurʼān.* Cairo: Dār al-Risālah, 2000.

Al-Wakīlī, Muḥammad. *Fiqh al-Awlawīyāt: Dirāsah fi al-ḍawābiṭ.* Herndon, VA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1997.

Al-Zuhaylī, Wahbah. *Al-Fiqh al-islāmī wa-adillatuhu.* Damascus: *Dār al-Fikr*, 1985.

At-Tirmidhī, Abū ʻĪsá Muḥammad. English Translation of Jāmiʻ al-Tirmidhī. Translated by Abu Khaliyl. Saudi Arabia: Dar-us-Salam, 2007.

Auda, Jasser. *Maqāṣid al-Shariʻah a Beginner's Guide.* London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008.

Bagby, Ihsan, Paul M. Perl, and Bryan T. Froehle. *A Portrait of Detroit Mosques: Muslim Views on Policy, Politics and Religion.* Institution of Social Policy and Understanding, 2004.

Bagby, Ihsan. "Imams and Mosque Organization in the United States: A Study of Mosque Leadership and Organizational Structure in American Mosques." in *Muslims in the United States*, edited by Philippa Strum and Danielle Tarantolo, 113-134. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2003.

Bagby, Ihsan. "The Mosque and the American Public Square." in *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square, Hope Fears, and Aspirations*, edited by Zahid H. Bukhari et al, 330. New York: Altamira Press, 2004.

Bagby, Ihsan. "Isolate, Insulate, Assimilate: Attitudes of Mosque Leaders toward America." in *A Nation of Religions*, edited by Stephen Prothero, 23. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Çizakca, Murat. "Awqaf in History and its Implications for Modern Islamic Economies." *Islamic Economic Studies* 6, no. 1 (1998): 43-70.

Cowan, J Milton. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic.* Beirut: Library of Lebanon, 1980.

Curtis, Edward E. "Five myths about mosques in America," *The Washington Post.* Accessed June 1, 2011.

Education Development Center. "Survey of Roman Catholic Pastors," Education Development Center, Inc., last accessed June 13, 2011. http://surveys.edc.org/cleveland/dacum3.htm.

Gilliat-Ray, Sophie. *Muslims in Britain an Introduction.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Haddad, Yvonne and Adair T. Lummis. *Islamic Values In The United States a Comparative Study.* Oxford University Press, 1987.

Hadley, Jack. *Consequences of the Lack of Health Insurance on Health and Earnings Cover Missouri Project: Report 1.* Missouri: Missouri Foundation for Health, 2006.

Hartford Institute for Religion Research. "Fast Facts," Hartford Institute for Religion Research, accessed June 10, 2011. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#numclergy. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/26/AR2010082605510.html.

Ibn 'Ashūr, Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir. *Al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr.* Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Ta'rīkh al-'Arabī, 2000.

Ibn 'Ashūr, Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir.. *Treatise on Maqasid al-Shari`ah.* Translated by Mohamed el-Tahir el-Mesawi. London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006.

Ibn al-Athīr, Majd al-Dīn Abū al-Sa'ādat. *Jāmi' al-usūl fī aḥādīth al-rasūl.* Damascus: Maktabat al-Halawānī, 1969.

Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, Abū al-Ḥusayn Muslim. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim.* Beirut: Dār al-Jīl and Dār al-Āfāq, no date.

Ibn Kathīr, Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar. *Tafsīr al-qur'ān al-'aẓīm.* Cairo: Dār Ṭayba, 1999.

Ibn Khaldūn, 'Abd al-Raḥmān. *The Muqadimah: An Introduction to History.* Translated by Franz Rosenthal. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Ismā'īl, Muḥammad Bakr. *Maqāṣid al-sharī'ah ta'sīlān wa-taf'īlān.* Muslim World League, 1427.

Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. *Maqasid al-Shari`ah Made Simple.* London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008.

Khan, M. Muhsin. *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari.* Saudi Arabia: Dar-us-Salam, 1997.

Maḥfūẓ, ‘Alī. *Fann al-Khaṭābah wa-I‘dād al-Khaṭīb.* Cairo: Dār al-I‘tisām, no date.

Makhdūm, Muṣṭafá. *"Fiqh al-wāqi‘,"* Al-Wsat Net, accessed July 1, 2011.
        http://www.alwsat.net/articles.php?ID=85&do=view.

Manager, Stan McMillen, Kathryn Parr, and Moh Sharma. *Uninsured: the Costs and Consequences
        of Living without Health Insurance in Connecticut.* Connecticut: Universal Health Care
        Foundation of Connecticut, 2004.

Morgan, John. *Muslim Clergy in America: Ministry as Profession in the Islamic Community.* Lima,
        Ohio: Wyndham Hall Press, 2010.

Naṣr, ‘Aṭīyah. *Ghāyat al-murīd fī ‘ilm al-tajwīd.* Cairo: Dār al-Taqwá, 1992.

O'Leary, Daniel E. "Discussion of Information System Assurance for Enterprise Resource
        Planning Systems: Implementation and Unique Risk Considerations." *Journal of
        Information Systems,* 16: 1 (2002): 115-126.

Pickthall, Muhammad M. *The Glorious Qur'ān.* New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, Inc, 2000.

Qutub, Sayyid and Adil Salahi. *In The Shade of the Qur'ān: English Translation of Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān.*
        UK: Islamic Foundation, 2002.

Rahman, Shafiur, Syed Tohel Ahmed, Shaynul Khan. *Voices from the Minarets.* London, the
        Muslim Council of Britain, 2006.

Raissouni, Ahmad. *Imam al-Shatibi's Theory of the Higher Objectives and intents of Islamic law.*
        Herndon, Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2005.

Raissouni, Ahmed. "Islamic 'Waqf Endowment' Scope and Implications," Translated by
        Abderrafi, ISESCO. Accessed July 7, 2011.
        http://www.isesco.org.ma/english/publications/WAQF/waqf.php.

Sābiq, Al-Sayyid. *Fiqh al-sunnah.* Cairo: Al-Fatḥ lil-I‘lām al-‘Arabī, 2008.

Shakir, M.H. *The Qur'ān Translation.* New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, Inc, 1999.

Thomas, R. Murray. *Blending Qualitative & Quantitative Research Methods in Theses and Dissertations.*
        California: Corwin Press, INC., 2003.

Wehr, Hans. *A Dictionary of Modern Writen Arabic.* Beirut: Library of Lebanon, 1980.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The following is the survey questionnaire which the participating Imams completed.

A Survey of American Imams: Duties, Qualifications and Challenges

A Theological and Quantitative Analysis

Debriefing

Dear Imam,

Thank you for participating in this study on the duties, qualifications, and challenges of imams in America conducted by Dr. Alan Godlas and Mr. Muhammad Abuelezz at the University of Georgia. The purpose of this research is to study the professional tasks of imams, their required qualifications, and the challenges facing them in the American context. It aims at evaluating imams' responsibilities in their communities and improving their position in order to be more professional and productive.

Imams working in America are invited to complete this survey.

It will take 15-30 minutes of your time, perhaps longer or shorter for some. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

All your responses and information collected are completely confidential. No identifiers will be included with the data. Results will only be reported in aggregated form. Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once the researcher receives the materials, standard confidentiality procedures will be employed.

No individual participant will be identified in any way. We will not mention any information about you and/or your mosque in any reports resulting from this research.

The results of this research will be used for academic and professional publications or presentations for the sake and benefit of imams in America. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. Information about the study or a summary of its findings will also be made available to any participant who requests it.

Should you have any questions or wish to report a research-related problem, please email Muhammad Abuelezz at abulezz_islam@yahoo.com or call him at 706-351-2093. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By completing and returning this questionnaire via email, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Again, we thank you for your participation!

Yours Sincerely,

Alan Godlas   Muhammad Abuelezz
Associate Professor of Islamic Studies,   Fulbright Masters Student and Al-Azhar Graduate
Department of Religion,   Department of Religion
University of Georgia   University of Georgia

1) Year you were born

2) Country of Origin

3) Your Ethnicity

Caucasian	
African American	
South Asian	
Arab	
Other (Please Specify):	

4) In which state do you live?	
Alabama	
Alaska	
American Samoa	
Arizona	
Arkansas	
California	
Colorado	
Connecticut	
Delaware	

District of Columbia	
Florida	
Georgia	
Guam	
Hawaii	
Idaho	
Illinois	
Indiana	
Iowa	
Kansas	
Kentucky	
Louisiana	
Maine	
Maryland	
Massachusetts	
Michigan	

Minnesota	
Mississippi	
Missouri	
Montana	
Nebraska	
Nevada	
New Hampshire	
New Jersey	
New Mexico	
New York	
North Carolina	
North Dakota	
Northern Marianas Islands	
Ohio	
Oklahoma	
Oregon	

Pennsylvania	
Puerto Rico	
Rhode Island	
South Carolina	
South Dakota	
Tennessee	
Texas	
Utah	
Vermont	
Virginia	
Virgin Islands	
Washington	
West Virginia	
Wisconsin	
Wyoming	

5) What is your highest level of education?	
High School	
Bachelor	
Master's Degree	
PhD degree	
Other (Please Specify):	

6) Do you hold a degree in Islamic Studies or a special sub-field of Islamic Studies? Please choose from the following:	
Bachelor/License from overseas Islamic University	
M.A. or PhD. from overseas Islamic University	
M.A. or PhD. from American University	
Certificate	
No formal Islamic education	
Other (Please Specify):	

7) Your Position	
A full-time imam	
A part-time imam	
A Volunteer imam	

8) Number of years as an imam

9) Did you hold a career in another field prior to becoming an imam?	
Yes	
No	

10) If so, in which field?

11) What is your average salary per year?	
$10,000	
$20,000	

$30,000	
$40,000	
$50,000	
$60,000	
$70,000	
$80,000	
Other (Please Specify):	

12) Estimated number of the families represented at your mosque	
0-100	
100-250	
250-500	
500-1000	
1000-2000	
2000-3000	
3000+	

13) What is the average attendance at Friday prayer at your mosque?	
0-100	
100-250	
250-500	
500-1000	
1000-2000	
2000-3000	
3000+	

14) Predominant ethnicity of the mosque	
South Asian	
African American	
Arab	
Mixture with high percentage of both south Asians and Arabs	
All other combinations	

15) Duties

How important are the following tasks to your success as an imam in America?

Please rank each task according to its importance, using the rating scale ranging from "Essential" to "Not Applicable".

	1 Essential	2 Very Important	3 Important	4 Somewhat Important	5 Not applicable
Leading daily prayer					
Delivering Friday sermon (Khutba)					
Giving weekly religious lectures					
Leading Tarawih in Ramadan					
Visiting the sick					
Mediation or Arbitration in disputes of the Muslim community					
Performing marriage ceremony					
Conducting funerals					

Counseling					
Helping the poor and the needy					
Visiting Muslim families					
Helping new immigrants					
Participating in community celebrations (wedding, `Aqiqah, etc.)					
Visiting prisoners for spiritual guidance					
Supervising Islamic school					
Engaging in youth programs					
Teaching Arabic classes in your mosque					
Giving special lectures for women					
Teaching new-Muslims programs					

Interfaith dialogue					
Building relationships with diverse cultural groups					
Communicating the message of Islam through various media					

16) Are there any duties or tasks essential to your success as an imam in America that are not captured by this survey? If so, please list here.

17) Knowledge of an Imam

Please identify from the following the most important areas of knowledge that an imam needs, in order to fulfill his responsibilities successfully. Please rank each one according to its importance, using the rating scale ranging from "Essential" to "Not Applicable".

	1 Essential	2 Very Important	3 Important	4 Somewhat Important	5 Not Applicable
Knowledge of comparative religions					
Fiqh al-awlawiyyat (Priorities)					

Fiqh and its principles (usul al-fiqh)					
American culture and history					
Fiqh al-aqaliyyat (Minorities)					
Tafsir and Ulum al-Qur'ān					
Fiqh al-maqasid (Objectives of Shari`ah)					
Fiqh al-waqi` (dealing with real life, current problems)					
Hadith					
Memorization of the Qur'ān					
Rules of recitation (tajweed)					
Philosophy					
Sociology					
Psychology					
Beliefs of different Islamic sects					

Islamic History					

---

18) Are there any fields of knowledge you see essential to the success of an imam in America that are not captured by this survey? If so, please list here.

---

19) Skills of an Imam

Please identify from the following list the most important skills that an imam needs to fulfill his responsibilities successfully. For rating scale please rate them from 1-5. 1=most important 5=least important.

	1	2	3	4	5
Communication skills					
Leadership skills					
Computer use skills					
Conflict resolution skills					
Public speaking skills					

---

20) Imam's Behaviors and Manners

From the following list of behaviors please identify the most important to fulfilling your responsibilities successfully as an imam. For rating scale please rank them from 1-5.					
	1 Essential	2 Very Important	3 Important	4 Somewhat Important	5 Not Applicable
Patient					
Sincere					
Able to accept criticism					
A critical thinker					
Having sense of humor					
Pious					
Able to weigh alternatives					
Balanced					
Collaborative					
Committed to service					
Compassionate					
Creative					
Empathetic					

Enthusiastic					
Flexible/open-minded					
Generous					
Globally conscious					
Grateful					
Hard working					
Honest					
Hospitable					
Humble					
Wise					
Morally upright					
Multi-task oriented					
Non-judgmental					
Optimistic					
Punctual					
Respectful					

Responsible					
Self-confident					
Self-critical					
Sensible					

21) Resources

From the following list, what are the most necessary resources for an imam to perform his duties? For rating scale rank them from 1-5. 1=most important 5=least important.

	1 Most Important	2 Important	3 Slightly Important	4 Low important	5 The Least Important
A good professional library					
Office space					
Office equipment/supplies including phone, computer (networked) copy machine, fax machine.					
Car					

Access to exercise equipment					
Access to a lawyer					

22) Are there any resources essential to your success as an imam in America that are not captured by this survey? If so, please list here.

23) Problems and Current Situation

From the following list what are the most important problems facing an imam in America. For rating scale please circle the number using the scale provided below.

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Slightly Agree	4 Neutral	5 Slightly Disagree	6 Disagree
Low salaries						
Inability to have health insurance for himself and his family						
Lack of respect from some members of the community						

The mosque administration's delaying of the processing of the papers necessary for gaining permanent residency for the imam					
Delay of the imam's paperwork by US immigration authorities					
The challenge of the English language					
The diversity of ethnicities, mazahib, etc. in the community					
Multiplicity of the imam's tasks and responsibilities					
Limiting the imam's freedom of speech by mosque administrators					
Contradiction between the responsibilities of an imam					

and running of the mosque						
Interference in the imam's work by board members						
Indulgence of some board members in activities that violate shari'ah and their requiring or requesting that the imam not address those issues in his speeches						
The gap between an imam and the youth of his community						
There is no retirement package for imam						

24) Are there any problems facing imams that are not captured by this survey? If so, please list here.

25) What do you suggest as solutions for some/all the previous problems you chose?

26) In trying to make Islamic decisions on any religious problem you face, which of the following do you believe is the most proper approach?	
Refer directly to the relevant sources in the Qur'ān and Sunnah and follow an interpretation that takes into account the purpose of those relevant sources and modern circumstances	
Refer directly to the Qur'ān and Sunnah and follow a literal interpretation	
Follow the well-established views of a particular madhhab (legal school)	

27) In your point of view should imams have a role in encouraging Muslims to participate in the political process in America?	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Slightly Agree	
Neutral	
Slightly Disagree	
Disagree	

28) Do you see that applying the Islamic system of endowment (al-waqf) in America could be a good solution for a lot of financial issues of imams?	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Slightly Agree	
Neutral	
Slightly Disagree	
Disagree	

29) According to your opinion, what should be done so that Imams become effective communicators of the message of Islam in America?

30) What do you see the best way for training future imams?	
Study in some overseas Islamic Universities	
Study in some American Universities offering Islamic studies program	
Establishing a new comprehensive training program in America	
Other:	

31) What is your native language?

32) What other languages do you speak?

33) Are you fluent in English?

Yes	
No	

34) If English is your second language, do you think that speaking in this foreign language sometimes hinders your ability to effectively communicate your ideas?

Yes	
No	

35) How do you deliver the Friday khutba (sermon)?

In Arabic	

In English	
English first (bayan) and then the Arabic khutba	
Mixed Arabic and English	
Other (Please Specify):	

36) How do you decide which topic to choose for each Friday?

37) When writing the Khutbas do you consider the concerns and problems of women as much as men?	
Yes	
No	

38) Do you offer a separate class/lesson for women?	
Yes	
No	

39) Do you agree with making a partition to separate men from women in the mosque?	
Yes	
No	

40) Do you visit prisons in order to give spiritual guidance?	
Yes	
No	

41) If you visit prisons, how many times do you visit per month?	
Once	
Twice	
Thrice	
Other (Please Specify):	

42) Do you have an effective youth program in your mosque?

Yes	
No	

43) Do you sometimes play basketball, soccer, or any other kind of sport with the youth?	
Yes	
No	

44) Do you participate in any kind of interfaith programs with other religions?	
Yes	
No	

45) Do you visit any other places of worship for different religions?	
Yes	
No	

46) How many times approximately have you visited other places of worship for other religions since you served as an imam?

47) Which type of mosque organization do you prefer?	
Mosque led by imam	
Mosque led by board members	
Other (Please Specify):	

48) Thank you for your participation. Do you have any comments you would like to offer?