

Legal Reconstruction of Maintaining Prayer in Qur'an 2:238: *Tafsir Ahkam* on *Al-Salat Al-Wusta* and Devotional Discipline

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the legal meaning of the command to maintain prayer in Qur'an 2:238, the juristic-exegetical significance of *al-salat al-wusta*, and the relationship between devotional discipline and moral formation. A qualitative library design combined thematic exegesis with qualitative content analysis. The primary corpus comprised Qur'an 2:238, four thematically related passages, and four classical and contemporary tafsir works, while 26 journal articles published in 2017–2025 formed the supporting corpus. The analysis showed that the imperative to maintain prayer conveyed a norm of continuous observance rather than episodic performance. The specific mention of *al-salat al-wusta* functioned as a normative emphasis on safeguarding a vulnerable or specially prioritized obligation without erasing interpretive disagreement over its identity. The command to stand before God in obedience linked legal compliance to inward attentiveness. The study therefore reconstructed prayer maintenance through four connected stages: ritual preservation, inward presence, value internalization, and behavioral transformation. Educational and psychological benefits were treated as supporting implications rather than substitutes for the verse's normative-theological meaning.



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INTRODUCTION

Prayer (*salah*) occupies a foundational position in Islam because it joins worship, temporal order, and moral consciousness in a recurring act of devotion. Qur'an 2:238 does not frame prayer merely as an act to be performed. Its wording combines three normative emphases: the command to maintain all prayers, the specific mention of *al-salat al-wusta*, and the instruction to stand before God in obedience. Read together, these elements move the verse from a minimal notion of performance toward continuity, prioritization, and qualitative submission. The long-standing disagreement over the identity of *al-salat al-wusta* confirms that the verse belongs to a juristic-exegetical discourse in which transmitted reports, linguistic reasoning, and contextual interpretation interact (Syamsiyah, 2020; Yono, 2025). The central question is therefore not only which prayer is intended, but also what legal and ethical meaning is produced by the command to maintain prayer.

A *tafsir ahkam* perspective makes this distinction particularly important. A legal reading of worship cannot be reduced to the binary question of whether an act has formally occurred. The imperative to maintain prayer directs attention to the durability of compliance: prayer is to be guarded against neglect, organized within prescribed time, and sustained as a repeated obligation. This normative layer is compatible with studies of the educational content of prayer. Erizon et al. (2022) show that movement, recitation, and orientation of the heart operate as an integrated educational structure, while Hady and Azani (2024) identify cleanliness, humility, sincerity, balance, submission, consistency, and monotheistic consciousness as values embedded in prayer. These studies support the broader implications of the verse, but the present study places the Qur'anic command itself—not educational benefit—as the primary analytical center.

Educational research provides contextual evidence for the practical implications of this legal-normative structure. Habituation of Dhuha prayer has been associated with religious character, while school programs combining prayer and Qur'anic learning have reported discipline, honesty, responsibility, and religious commitment among students (Aprilia & Sajari, 2022; Siregar et al., 2022). Such findings cannot establish that prayer alone causes character formation because educational

outcomes are also shaped by institutional culture, mentoring, rules, and other learning activities. They nevertheless illustrate how repeated worship may become a setting for value habituation when practice is accompanied by interpretation and consistent reinforcement. In relation to Qur'an 2:238, this evidence is best treated as an applied implication of the duty to maintain prayer rather than as proof of the verse's meaning.

The inward dimension of prayer has also attracted psychological attention. Mindfulness during prayer has been associated with better mental-health outcomes, and an intervention involving *khushu'* training was followed by increased happiness scores among family caregivers of stroke patients (Ijaz et al., 2017; Millah et al., 2020). Indonesian scholarship has connected prayer with emotional management and spiritual calm (Sundari & Efendi, 2021), while psychophysiological discussion has proposed restorative mechanisms involving relaxation and attentional regulation (Suseno, 2023). Phenomenological research likewise describes prayer through experiences of connection, emotional change, spiritual transformation, and perceived knowledge (Williamson, 2018). These findings are relevant, but they cannot replace the theological orientation of the Qur'anic text: inward attention in prayer remains directed toward God and embedded in a normatively structured act of worship.

The academic problem is that ritual regularity does not automatically equal moral transformation. Qur'an 29:45 relates prayer to restraint from indecency and wrongdoing, which requires the practice to be examined through the connection between outward observance, inward consciousness, and ethical consequence. Hasanudin et al. (2025) argue that the preventive function of prayer is associated with spiritual awareness, self-control, and internalization of ethical values, while Rahmanto et al. (2023) relate *khushu'* to the dynamics of *nafs* and a more regulated inner state. This distinction prevents the discussion of the wisdom of prayer from becoming a list of assumed benefits. It also creates a basis for explaining how continuity of worship may interact with attentiveness, internalization, and conduct without claiming a simple causal mechanism.

Previous scholarship has established several relevant lines of inquiry but has generally treated them separately. Syamsiyah (2020) maps interpretations of *al-salat al-wusta* through al-Maraghi and Jalalain, whereas Yono (2025) compares al-Qurtubi and Al-Mishbah and demonstrates different argumentative patterns concerning its identity. Erizon et al. (2022) and Hady and Azani (2024) focus primarily on educational values, while Aprilia and Sajari (2022), Siregar et al. (2022), and psychological studies examine practical outcomes or lived experience. This literature has clarified exegetical plurality, educational meaning, character formation, and psychological experience, but it has not sufficiently integrated those strands around the legal structure of the imperative in Qur'an 2:238.

The novelty of this study lies in a legal-exegetical reconstruction that makes the structure of Qur'an 2:238 the organizing principle of the analysis. Instead of treating the verse as a gateway to a general catalogue of prayer benefits, the study reconstructs the duty of prayer through three connected normative dimensions: continuity derived from the command to maintain all prayers, priority derived from the specific emphasis on *al-salat al-wusta*, and qualitative obedience derived from the command to stand before God in submission. Educational, social, and psychological studies are then used as secondary dialogue partners to explain how these dimensions may operate in contemporary life. This ordering distinguishes the study from prior work: tafsir and normative reasoning establish the interpretive framework, while empirical literature tests the plausibility and limits of its practical implications.

Methodologically, this objective is compatible with thematic exegesis because the approach requires related verses to be read as a coherent network rather than as isolated proof texts. Rokim and Triana (2021) describe systematic stages in *maudhu'i* interpretation, while Sholihat and Shintia (2023) emphasize the need to attend to context, inter-verse relations, and analytical procedure. Qur'an 2:238 is therefore treated as the focal text and read alongside verses concerning remembrance of God, prescribed time, *khushu'*, and moral consequence. Classical and contemporary tafsir are used to identify continuity and variation in interpretation, whereas recent scholarship is used to assess the educational, social, and psychological implications of the reconstructed norm.

Accordingly, this study aimed to analyze the legal meaning of maintaining prayer in Qur'an 2:238, explain the interpretive and normative significance of *al-salat al-wusta*, and formulate an integrative account of devotional discipline and moral formation. Its theoretical contribution is a maintenance-oriented model of obligation that moves from ritual preservation to inward presence, value internalization, and behavioral transformation. Its practical contribution is a framework for Islamic

education and religious formation that evaluates prayer not only through attendance or formal correctness, but also through continuity, attentiveness, and ethical coherence. The model is conceptual rather than causal and is presented as a proposition for further empirical testing.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive library design using thematic exegesis (*tafsir maudhu'i*) and qualitative content analysis. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the objects of analysis were Qur'anic text, exegetical arguments, and scholarly literature rather than variables intended for statistical measurement. Library research enabled systematic searching, purposive selection, close reading, comparison, and interpretive reconstruction of relevant sources (Fadli, 2021; Adlini et al., 2022). Thematic exegesis was used to prevent Qur'an 2:238 from being read in isolation and to locate the command to maintain prayer within a broader Qur'anic network concerning time, remembrance, submission, and moral conduct.

The material object was Qur'an 2:238, while the formal object was the normative meaning of maintaining prayer and the implications derived from the verse's command structure. Because this was a library study, statistical population and sample categories were replaced by corpus and unit of analysis. The primary interpretive corpus consisted of the focal verse, four related Qur'anic passages used in the thematic cross-reading (20:14; 23:1–2; 29:45; and 4:103), and four tafsir traditions emphasized in the manuscript: al-Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir, Al-Mishbah, and Al-Azhar. The supporting corpus consisted of 26 journal articles published between 2017 and 2025. Selection was purposive and based on direct relevance to the research questions rather than numerical representativeness.

The supporting literature was traced through journal-publisher portals, Garuda Kemdiktisaintek, DOI records, and publication metadata. Indonesian and English search terms included “shalat wustha,” “Al-Baqarah 238,” “tafsir *maudhu'i*,” “thematic tafsir,” “educational values of prayer,” “prayer and character,” “*khushu'* in prayer,” and “prayer and mental health.” Sources were retained when they had verifiable publication identities and made a direct conceptual, exegetical, educational, social, or psychological contribution to the research focus. Duplicates, non-academic material, bibliographically unclear items, and sources that mentioned prayer without analytical relevance were excluded. After screening, 26 journal articles remained as the final supporting corpus. The study did not claim the exhaustiveness of a systematic review; the purpose of screening was transparency and analytical relevance.

Data were collected through documentation and structured extraction. Each source was read in the sections relevant to the research question, and information was recorded in a working matrix containing source identity, textual or conceptual focus, interpretive position, principal finding, and relevance to the normative, spiritual, moral, social, educational, or psychological category. This procedure maintained traceability between analytical claims and their evidentiary basis. Qur'anic and exegetical materials were treated as interpretive data, whereas journal articles were treated as supporting evidence for comparison and contemporary contextualization. Systematic organization was important because the credibility of library research depends on the transparency of source selection and reading (Adlini et al., 2022).

The exegetical analysis proceeded in five stages. First, the study identified the principal expressions in Qur'an 2:238: the imperative to maintain the prayers, the specific designation *al-salat al-wusta*, and the command to stand before God in obedience. Second, related verses were examined to clarify the themes of prescribed time, remembrance, *khushu'*, and moral consequence. Third, exegetical positions were compared by attending to linguistic reasoning, transmitted reports, contextual argument, and methodological tendency. Fourth, areas of convergence and disagreement were preserved, particularly regarding the identity of *al-salat al-wusta*. Fifth, the findings were reconstructed through a *tafsir ahkam* lens to distinguish the verse's normative core from its educational and psychological implications. These stages follow the systematic logic of thematic interpretation described by Mulyaden and Fuad (2021), Rokim and Triana (2021), and Hanifah et al. (2024).

Qualitative content analysis was then applied to identify patterns of meaning and relations among arguments rather than to count the frequency of concepts. The process involved reduction of irrelevant material, thematic coding, grouping, cross-source comparison, and interpretation. Initial categories included continuity, priority, inward obedience, moral implication, and educational-social application; their final content was determined by textual evidence rather than imposed as fixed

conclusions. This approach allowed the study to build contextual inferences while retaining the distinction between normative interpretation and empirical support (Sumarno, 2020). In the discussion, each interpretive claim was compared with previous research to identify convergence, difference, or conceptual extension.

Interpretive credibility was maintained through source triangulation and argumentative traceability. Classical and contemporary interpretive tendencies were compared, and the resulting synthesis was tested against relevant contemporary studies without allowing empirical findings to override the text. Disagreements among interpreters were retained whenever the evidence did not justify harmonization. Validity was also strengthened through consistency among the research focus, corpus, analytical categories, and conclusions. The study therefore sought transparent and contestable interpretation rather than statistical generalization. Its main limitation is that the proposed model has not been empirically validated as a causal sequence (Fadli, 2021; Sholihat & Shintia, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The corpus produced four connected findings. First, the command to maintain prayer establishes continuity as a normative feature of the obligation. Second, the explicit mention of *al-salat al-wusta* introduces a principle of priority within that continuity. Third, standing before God in obedience makes inward orientation part of the verse's legal-theological structure. Fourth, the practical significance of these elements becomes visible when ritual discipline is internalized as value and reflected in conduct. These findings are interpretive rather than new empirical data. Accordingly, the discussion distinguishes the normative meaning derived from the verse from supporting evidence supplied by educational, social, and psychological studies.

Table 1 Analytical Synthesis of Qur'an 2:238

Qur'anic element	Legal-exegetical function	Normative implication	Literature support
Maintain all prayers	Continuity and safeguarding	The obligation is preserved across time rather than treated as an episodic act	Erizon et al. (2022); Hady & Azani (2024)
<i>al-salat al-wusta</i>	Specific emphasis and priority	Interpretive plurality does not remove the duty to protect an obligation vulnerable to neglect	Syamsiyah (2020); Yono (2025)
Stand before God in obedience	Qualitative submission	Formal observance is joined to attentiveness and God-oriented obedience	Ahmad & Suyuthi (2019); Rahmanto et al. (2023)
Related prayer verses	Normative integration	Time, remembrance, <i>khushu'</i> , and moral restraint form a coherent network of meaning	Hasanudin et al. (2025); Hanifah et al. (2024)

Normative Structure of Qur'an 2:238: From Performance to Maintenance-Oriented Obligation

The strongest legal-exegetical feature of Qur'an 2:238 is its sequence of commands. The verse first requires believers to maintain all prayers, then singles out *al-salat al-wusta*, and finally directs them to stand before God in obedience. This sequence can be reconstructed as continuity, priority, and quality. Continuity rejects episodic compliance; priority requires special protection of an obligation vulnerable to neglect or specially emphasized by the text; quality locates external observance within a posture of submission to God. The interpretive question therefore extends beyond identifying the "middle prayer." It asks what kind of obligation is created by the command to maintain. The exegetical plurality mapped by Syamsiyah (2020) and Yono (2025) does not weaken that broader normative structure.

The expression "maintain" carries a wider legal meaning than merely "perform." Performance may describe a discrete act, whereas maintenance implies continuity, protection, attention, and resistance to neglect. Three layers can therefore be distinguished. The temporal layer concerns regularity and observance within prescribed time. The procedural layer concerns preservation of the basic form and discipline of worship. The substantive layer concerns the orientation and ethical seriousness that prevent ritual from becoming empty repetition. Educational studies support the plausibility of this layered reading by showing that prayer can integrate bodily practice, recitation, intention, and value formation (Erizon et al., 2022; Hady & Azani, 2024). These studies illustrate the implications of maintenance, but the normative basis remains the Qur'anic command.

This reconstruction also clarifies what is meant by “law” in the present study. The argument does not replace classical discussions of validity, pillars, conditions, or legal excuses. Rather, it identifies an additional normative dimension internal to the verse: an obligation is not fully described by the occurrence of a single valid performance but also by the requirement to safeguard it across time and competing activities. A narrowly formal reading risks separating legal compliance from the verse's command structure, whereas a purely psychological reading risks turning prayer into a technique for calm or self-improvement. The *tafsir ahkam* approach adopted here maintains both dimensions: formal worship remains indispensable, but its preservation is directed toward sustained obedience to God. Oknita (2021) similarly emphasizes transcendental orientation in the meanings carried by prayer.

The thematic network of Qur'anic verses strengthens this interpretation. Qur'an 20:14 relates prayer to remembrance of God; 23:1–2 connects the success of believers with *khushu'*; 29:45 links prayer with restraint from indecency and wrongdoing; and 4:103 emphasizes prescribed time. Read together, these passages show that maintenance in Qur'an 2:238 belongs to a system of worship that integrates time, remembrance, inward submission, and ethical consequence. Hasanudin et al. (2025) likewise interpret the preventive function of prayer through spiritual awareness, self-control, and ethical internalization. The legal meaning of maintenance is therefore not a free moral addition to the text; it is a synthesis supported by the interrelation of prayer-related Qur'anic themes.

Al-Salat Al-Wusta: Interpretive Plurality and the Norm of Priority

The phrase *al-salat al-wusta* generates the most visible disagreement in Qur'an 2:238. Syamsiyah (2020) shows that the exegetical tradition records several identifications, while Yono (2025) reports different argumentative patterns in al-Qurtubi and Al-Mishbah. The former gives substantial weight to transmitted reports identifying the Asr prayer, whereas the latter also opens linguistic and contextual considerations. Two conclusions follow. First, the identity of *al-salat al-wusta* is an authentic field of *ikhtilaf* and should not be simplified into a claim of interpretive unanimity. Second, disagreement over identity does not remove the verse's broader normative direction because every position remains situated within the prior command to maintain all prayers.

The specific mention of one prayer after a general command has normative significance even when its precise identity remains disputed. Analytically, the specification functions as emphasis: what is already included within the general duty receives additional protection. If the Asr identification is followed, the emphasis is intelligible because its time may intersect with work and daytime activity. If another identification is adopted, the underlying logic still concerns safeguarding an obligation at a point where competing demands may increase the risk of neglect. The defensible contribution of this study is therefore not to close the exegetical dispute, but to reconstruct *al-salat al-wusta* as a textual marker of priority within the broader duty of prayer maintenance.

This norm of priority has contemporary relevance without requiring the verse to be redefined by modern circumstances. Educational schedules, employment, travel, digital distraction, and dense social routines may compete with the practical observance of an obligation that is doctrinally accepted. Contemporary conditions are therefore treated as contexts of application, not as independent sources of the verse's meaning. Research on school prayer programs shows that religious discipline is more sustainable when supported by habit, institutional culture, and role modelling (Aprilia & Sajari, 2022; Siregar et al., 2022). The connection is limited but useful: the Qur'anic norm establishes safeguarding, while educational practice shows one way in which safeguarding can be organized.

A legal-exegetical boundary must nevertheless be maintained. *Al-salat al-wusta* cannot be reduced to “time management,” just as the verse cannot be detached from the practical problem of competing commitments. Priority is an implication of maintenance, not a complete definition of *al-salat al-wusta*. This distinction preserves the theological and exegetical content of the verse while allowing its normative logic to inform contemporary devotional discipline. It is also consistent with thematic interpretation, which requires contemporary application to remain anchored in the coherence of the Qur'anic theme rather than in isolated analogy (Rokim & Triana, 2021; Hanifah et al., 2024).

Obedience, *Khushu'*, and the Regulation of Attention

The third element of Qur'an 2:238 is the instruction to stand before God as *qanitin*. Linguistically and conceptually, *qanitin* should not simply be equated with *khushu'*. The former carries the sense of obedience, submission, and devoted compliance, whereas *khushu'* is commonly discussed

in relation to inward humility and attentiveness. Their practical domains overlap because both resist purely mechanical performance, but the distinction matters for legal interpretation. Modern psychological language such as mindfulness may illuminate attentional processes, yet it cannot define the theological content of prayer. Ahmad and Suyuthi (2019) make a similar distinction by treating prayer as mindfulness training with an explicitly Islamic orientation in which attention is directed toward worship of God rather than toward the self as an end.

Empirical studies help clarify the relation between repetition and attention when used cautiously. Ijaz et al. (2017), studying 174 Muslim participants, found better mental-health scores among those reporting regular and mindful prayer than among comparison groups. Ahmed and Yousaf (2025), working with 78 participants in the United Kingdom and Pakistan, identified themes of connection with God, broader life perspective, relief from daily burdens, and the importance of attention during prayer. Their quantitative findings also associated prayer frequency, perceived importance of attention, and religious orientation with variation in prayer mindfulness. These studies support the proposition that regularity and attention are related dimensions of devotional experience, but they do not determine the legal meaning of *qanitin* or *khushu'*.

Indonesian evidence points in a similar direction while illustrating the need for methodological restraint. Millah et al. (2020) reported improved happiness scores after *khushu'* prayer training among a small group of family caregivers of stroke patients. Hardjanto et al. (2022) reported positive changes in selected performance indicators after developing a *khushu'* prayer education method in an organizational setting. Both studies are context-bound and should not be used to make universal causal claims. Their value for the present analysis is narrower: they suggest that structured attention and interpretation can shape the experience of repeated worship. The normative center remains submission to God, not psychological outcome.

Psychophysiological and Islamic-psychological discussions reinforce that distinction. Suseno (2023) proposes restorative mechanisms involving relaxation, focus, and nervous-system regulation, whereas Rahmanto et al. (2023) link *khushu'* to the dynamics of *nafs* and a more directed inner state. Williamson (2018) also records themes of divine connection and spiritual transformation in lived prayer. The synthesis proposed here therefore treats attentional regulation as a mechanism that may help worship become more present and meaningful, not as the ultimate purpose of prayer. This protects *tafsir ahkam* from psychological reductionism while still allowing contemporary research to explain how inward quality may support the maintenance of a normatively required practice.

Temporal Discipline, Habituation, and Moral Transformation

The next question is how continuity and inward obedience relate to moral conduct. Qur'an 29:45 is central because it connects prayer with restraint from indecency and wrongdoing. This relation should not be read mechanically, as if every occurrence of prayer automatically produces good behavior. Human conduct is shaped by multiple factors, and the Qur'anic language of establishing prayer itself implies more than the bare existence of movement. Hasanudin et al. (2025) interpret the preventive function of prayer through spiritual awareness, control of desire, and internalization of ethical value. Qur'an 2:238 contributes a temporal mechanism to that account: values require repeated preservation if they are to become stable orientations rather than momentary intentions.

Five daily prayers provide a recurring structure for habituation. Individuals repeatedly interrupt other activities, prepare themselves, observe an ordered sequence, direct attention, and then return to ordinary life. This pattern can train discipline and self-regulation, but repetition by itself may also become mechanical. The legal-normative concept of maintenance therefore needs the qualitative dimension of obedience. External consistency provides structure; inward submission gives the structure meaning. Hady and Azani (2024) similarly show that prayer movements and recitations can be read as media of value education. The point is not that ritual discipline and meaning compete with each other, but that the verse joins them within a single maintained practice.

Field studies in education offer a concrete but limited comparison. Aprilia and Sajari (2022) report religious-character formation through Dhuha prayer habituation in an Islamic educational environment, while Siregar et al. (2022) identify religiousness, discipline, honesty, and responsibility in a program combining Dhuha prayer and Qur'anic learning. These outcomes were produced within institutional ecosystems involving teachers, rules, collective routines, and other religious activities. It would therefore be methodologically excessive to describe them as effects of prayer alone. A stronger

conclusion is that maintained prayer can function as a medium of character habituation when supported by interpretation, modelling, and a consistent educational environment.

This finding also distinguishes supervised compliance from internalized commitment. A student may attend congregational prayer because of institutional control without yet converting discipline or responsibility into self-regulation. The maintenance-oriented reading of Qur'an 2:238 points toward a gradual movement from external regulation to sustained personal commitment. Conceptually, the quality of this movement may be observed through three indicators: consistency without immediate coercion, the ability to preserve intention and attention during worship, and the transfer of devotional values into moral decisions outside prayer. These indicators are analytical propositions, not validated measurement instruments, and should be treated as hypotheses for future research rather than as measures of individual piety.

Educational and Social Implications: From Individual Worship to Relational Ethics

The implications of prayer are not confined to the individual. Qur'an 2:238 does not explicitly discuss congregational prayer, but Muslim prayer practices commonly unfold within social spaces in which timing, rows, leadership by an imam, coordinated movement, and repeated encounters create relational discipline. Budianto (2020) reports social and moral values in school-based congregational prayer, while Rohim et al. (2024) associate devotional obedience among students with discipline, patience, attention to shared needs, and readiness for congregational participation. These findings do not imply that frequent prayer automatically generates good social conduct. They show instead that worship may provide a pedagogical setting in which relational norms are repeatedly practiced.

For Islamic education, this distinction matters because values are often weakened when taught only as concepts. Prayer provides a practical setting for punctuality, order, cleanliness, shared space, leadership, and equality in a row. Yet symbolic participation does not guarantee ethical transfer. Educational programs can therefore connect worship with guided reflection: whether punctual prayer is accompanied by punctual learning, whether orderly rows correspond to respect for fair rules, and whether equality in worship is reflected in respect for others. Such reflection preserves the sacred orientation of prayer while resisting a separation between ritual and ethics. It also keeps the educational application subordinate to, rather than substitutive of, the normative meaning of the verse.

Research on habituation further shows that sustained practice is environmentally supported. Siregar et al. (2022) studied a school context integrating Dhuha prayer with Qur'anic learning, and Aprilia and Sajari (2022) also locate habituation within institutional culture. These findings suggest that personal responsibility and social facilitation should not be treated as opposites. The command to maintain prayer addresses the believer, but the practical capacity to maintain a habit can be strengthened by realistic scheduling, adequate facilities, educator modelling, and a culture that guides rather than humiliates. In educational settings, the legal duty remains personal while the environment can either facilitate or obstruct its disciplined performance.

The social dimension also limits excessive individualization of psychological benefits. Prayer may be experienced as calm, meaning, or relief from burden (Sundari & Efendi, 2021; Ahmed & Yousaf, 2025), but such experiences occur within religious identity, family, mosque, and community contexts. The present study therefore does not treat prayer as a substitute for professional psychological or social intervention. Psychological outcomes are contextual consequences that may accompany worship; they are not the legal purpose by which the verse is interpreted. This analytical ordering is essential to the revised argument because it keeps normative theology at the center while allowing interdisciplinary evidence to illuminate lived implications.

Integrative Model and Theoretical Contribution

The analysis produces a four-stage conceptual model: ritual preservation, inward presence, value internalization, and behavioral transformation. Ritual preservation begins with time, preparation, procedural discipline, and consistency. Inward presence refers to submission and attention directed toward God, preventing disciplined practice from becoming merely mechanical. Value internalization occurs when recitation, movement, and devotional experience are connected with discipline, humility, responsibility, patience, and self-control. Behavioral transformation is the ethical test of the process: whether these values become visible beyond the ritual setting. The stages are analytically connected but

not mechanically causal. A break may occur at any point, which explains why regular performance does not necessarily yield equivalent moral change.

The model improves on descriptive lists of the “benefits of prayer” because it specifies a process and its limits. Discipline is not assumed to result simply from five daily repetitions; it emerges through repeated organization of time and commitment. Calm is not treated as an automatic product of movement; it is associated with attention, orientation toward God, and interpreted meaning (Ijaz et al., 2017; Suseno, 2023; Ahmed & Yousaf, 2025). Moral conduct likewise requires internalization rather than ritual frequency alone (Hasanudin et al., 2025). The model therefore explains both the potential and the failure of transformation without making deterministic claims about piety.

This model also makes the study's novelty more precise. Syamsiyah (2020) and Yono (2025) primarily map the interpretive plurality of *al-salat al-wusta*; Erizon et al. (2022) and Hady and Azani (2024) emphasize educational values; and psychological studies examine attention, well-being, or subjective experience. None of those research strands is displaced. The contribution here is to reorder them around a legal-exegetical architecture derived from Qur'an 2:238: maintenance establishes continuity, *al-salat al-wusta* marks priority, and *qanitin* anchors the quality of obedience. The four-stage model then shows how that normative architecture may generate educational and ethical implications while retaining the distinction between textual interpretation and empirical support.

The theoretical implication is that maintaining prayer is better understood as a dynamic quality of obligation than as a binary status of “praying” or “not praying.” Maintenance includes regularity, priority, attentiveness, understanding, and ethical coherence. For Islamic education, this allows evaluation to move beyond attendance while avoiding intrusive judgments about inner piety. Programs may continue to monitor regularity, but they can also facilitate reflection on meaning, management of distraction, and ethical application. Hardjanto et al. (2022) show that *khushu'* education can be developed with evaluative instruments in an organizational context, while school studies demonstrate the importance of habituation and environment. These findings support educational design that combines structure with interpretation.

Ultimately, Qur'an 2:238 functions in this study as more than a proof text for the existence of prayer obligation. Its command structure supplies a norm of sustained observance: maintenance teaches continuity, *al-salat al-wusta* marks priority, and standing before God in obedience directs inward quality. When read with Qur'anic themes of remembrance, prescribed time, *khushu'*, and moral restraint, the verse provides a coherent basis for linking devotional law with ethical formation. The link remains probabilistic rather than deterministic because the empirical studies vary in design, population, and strength. The principal contribution is therefore a testable conceptual framework: sustained ritual preservation and inward presence increase the opportunity for value internalization, while stronger internalization makes consistent moral and social conduct more plausible.

Table 2 Integrative Model of Prayer Maintenance and Moral Formation

Stage	Main process	Potential outcome	Analytical qualification
Ritual preservation	Time, preparation, procedural order, and consistency	Discipline and stable devotional practice	Insufficient without inward meaning
Inward presence	Submission, attention, and God-oriented meaning	Spiritual awareness and attentional regulation	Not identical with secular mindfulness
Value internalization	Connecting ritual structure with ethical meaning	Humility, responsibility, patience, and self-control	Shaped by education and environment
Behavioral transformation	Applying devotional values outside prayer	More coherent moral and social conduct	A testable potential, not an automatic effect

CONCLUSION

Qur'an 2:238 contains a legal-theological structure that is broader than a minimal command to perform prayer. The imperative to maintain all prayers establishes continuity; the specific mention of *al-salat al-wusta* marks normative priority without eliminating legitimate exegetical disagreement over its identity; and the instruction to stand before God in obedience places inward orientation within the practice of legal compliance. On this basis, the study reconstructs prayer maintenance as a four-stage conceptual sequence of ritual preservation, inward presence, value internalization, and behavioral transformation. Educational, psychological, and social findings support the contemporary plausibility of this sequence, but they do not replace the normative authority of the Qur'anic text or establish

automatic causal effects. The study's main contribution is therefore a *tafsir ahkam* framework that connects continuity, priority, and qualitative obedience while preserving the distinction between valid ritual performance, meaningful maintenance, and ethical outcome.

Practically, Islamic education in schools, families, *pesantren*, and religious communities should not limit prayer formation to attendance, memorization, and procedural correctness. It can integrate explanation of meaning, management of distraction, reflective ethical learning, modelling, and non-punitive evaluation. Because this study was library-based, the proposed model remains conceptual. Future research should test the relationships among prayer regularity, *khushu'* or attentional quality, value internalization, and moral-social behavior through mixed-method designs, broader samples, validated instruments, and comparisons across age groups and educational contexts. Such testing would clarify where the proposed sequence is supported, where it breaks down, and how devotional discipline can be studied empirically without reducing worship to either legal formalism or psychological technique.

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