

# Waqf Development and Management: A Systematic Literature Review of Best Practices, Challenges, and Strategies

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## Abstract

*Waqf development aims to advance social well-being and charitable activities in Islamic communities. Effective management in planning, developing, and administering waqf assets and funds is crucial for their optimal utilization, as mandated by Shari'ah and the founder's conditions. However, several issues impede the realization of waqf's full potential. Therefore, this systematic literature review (SLR) of 50 articles aims to examine the best practices, challenges, and strategies relevant to waqf development and management. The SLR procedure included formulating research questions, defining inclusion criteria, developing a search strategy, and evaluating the findings from research published between 2015 and 2024. The study utilized four databases (ScienceDirect, IEEE, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar) and employed Google Notebook LM, an AI tool, to systematically conduct queries. The findings indicate that management is the central challenge to waqf development. Key challenges identified are insufficient financial resources, limited human resource expertise, inconsistent regulatory frameworks, a lack of transparency, low public awareness, inadequate technology adoption, and the rigidity of donor conditions. To counter these issues, practical strategies can be implemented, including improving legal and regulatory frameworks, enhancing good governance and sustainable funding, developing human capital, and boosting public engagement and literacy on waqf.*

**Keywords:** *Waqf development, best practices, challenges*

## 1. Introduction

Waqf, often translated as "endowment," is an explicit or implicit dedication of property, with charitable and religious objectives, and to give benefits to human beings [1],[2]. Traditionally, waqf has played a vital role in the socio-economic development of Muslim societies, funding education, public services, healthcare, and social welfare. It is recognised as a social finance instrument with the potential to create value for society and the environment [3].

Waqf institutions worldwide, including in Malaysia and Indonesia, face numerous challenges in their development and management, leading to under-utilisation of waqf assets [4],[5]. However, there are also best practices and strategic approaches to improve their effectiveness and sustainability.

### 1.1. Waqf Development and Management

Waqf development refers to the process of transforming waqf properties and assets from an underutilised state into productive and income-bearing entities [2],[3]. This transformation aims to improve the welfare and quality of life for

communities and address socio-economic challenges such as poverty and unemployment[5],[6]. It encompasses a broad range of initiatives, such as cultivating waqf land for agriculture to developing real estate like commercial buildings and residential development [6]. Waqf development includes investing liquid waqf assets to create a sustainable project [6],[7]. Ultimately, waqf development aims to contribute to economic growth and environmental sustainability, aligning with religious and ethical principles [8],[9].

Waqf development management entails the systematic administration, governance of waqf properties by designated trustees and managers to ensure the effective achievement of waqf objectives[10],[11]. Key aspects of effective management include establishing a legal infrastructure, fostering meaningful and strategic partnerships among relevant agencies (such as State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRC's), corporate sectors, and government bodies), and operational efficiency through technical and financial expertise [12]. However, challenges in waqf management often stem from insufficient legal provisions, inadequate financial resources,

poor information systems, lack of professionalism among administrators, and issues of accountability and transparency [13]. To overcome these management challenges, comprehensive planning, consistent evaluation, a robust financial system, and active dissemination of knowledge are required among all stakeholders [14]. Furthermore, it necessitates the implementation of transparent reporting, monitoring, and performance standards, while cultivating public trust through better communication and non-opportunistic behaviour [15].

## 1.2 Best Practices and Challenges of Waqf Development and Management

Waqf development and management best practices focus on maximising societal welfare and addressing socio-economic challenges [16]. A multi-faceted approach encompassing governance, operational efficiency, and stakeholder engagement leads to effective waqf management [6]. This includes cultivating waqf land for sustainable agriculture for food self-sufficiency [17]. Best practices include developing income-generating properties such as commercial and residential buildings in strategic locations [7], and investing Shariah-compliant instruments such as liquid waqf assets like sukuk or mutual funds [18]. The Social Enterprise Waqf Fund (SEWF) model encourages business and benevolence, while aiming for profitable returns that maximise social prosperity [19]. Ultimately, effective waqf development enhances economic opportunities, fosters community development, and aligns with religious and ethical principles [6].

A supportive legal infrastructure which aligns with existing national provisions and clear and comprehensive waqf laws is fundamental [20]. This framework is complemented by competent nazhirs (managers), who require continuous training, strong ethical grounding, and expertise in Shariah, Islamic finance and relevant country laws. [10]. Waqf institutions (such as SIRC's), corporate sectors, government and non-governmental organisations are crucial for mobilising resources, project development, and coordinated policy implementation [21], i.e. meaningful partnerships have to be created. In addition, management that is transparent and accountable, within a robust information system and careful data management, is timely. The reporting of financial activities and program impact must also be consistent and verified. This includes regular internal, external, and Shariah audits to ensure proper checks and balances, to maintain public trust [16]. In addition, improving

public awareness and understanding of waqf's broader socio-economic potential is vital. This can encourage greater waqf contributions and participation [22]. The implementation of performance standards and clear codes of conduct for all personnel, along with diligent risk management and asset protection, safeguards against mismanagement. Management efficiency can be achieved through the corporatisation of waqf institutions. [23].

For non-traditional waqf ventures and related socio-economic issues, such as assisting small business financial needs, the challenges of waqf development must be addressed. A primary concern is the under-utilisation and under-development of waqf land and assets, which negates the spirit of waqf in generating sustained benefits [10]. The perception that waqf is primarily for social purposes, such as mosques, religious schools, and cemeteries, rather than for productive economic ventures like agriculture, commercial buildings, or infrastructure, is also a challenge [24]. Furthermore, insufficient financial resources and lack of expertise are major obstacles for waqf trustees (SIRC's) in developing properties [13]. The absence of comprehensive and standardised legal frameworks, along with lengthy and complicated procedures for waqf registration and development, creates rigidity and can discourage productive investment [25]. In addition, low public understanding and the public's traditional perspective of waqf's wider potential limit contributions and thus constrain the availability of funds for development [4].

Critical challenges that impede waqf development and management efficiency are the common issue of the lack of professionalism, competence, and sufficient training among nazhirs (managers), leading to inefficient administration. This issue is worsened when managers put a preference for non-productive waqf programs [26]. This is complicated by governance issues, including a lack of transparency and accountability in reporting, poor information systems, ineffective organisational structures, and insufficient legal provisions. These undermine public trust and deter potential donors [24]. Inconsistency in waqf data and the absence of robust data management systems pose a significant hurdle to effective planning and implementation [10]. A non standardised management structures across different states can create coordination challenges and hinder the standardisation of practices [23]. The rigidity in managing waqf and bureaucratic processes also limits innovation strategies required for modern contexts [27]. Lastly, unresolved disputes over waqf properties can lead

to wasting valuable waqf income and delaying development projects [23].

## 2. Methodology

This systematic literature review follows the five-step methodology proposed by [28], which includes: (1) framing the question, (2) identifying relevant work, (3) assessing the quality of studies, (4) summarizing the evidence, and (5) interpreting the findings. A successful systematic review hinges on a well-defined research topic, the selection of high-quality studies, and the robust synthesis and interpretation of data. This study commenced by defining the central research questions: what are the best practices and challenges confronting waqf development and management, and what strategies can be employed to counter those challenges? The initial stage involved searching four online databases—Scopus, Emerald Insight, Science Direct, and Google Scholar—all of which were accessible to the researcher through their library membership. Each of these databases is considered an effective tool for locating scholarly articles and monitoring research trends. The online search engines facilitated the retrieval of articles based on keywords, titles, and abstracts pertinent to the research topic.

For this systematic literature review, we selected articles published within the last decade, specifically from 2014 to 2024, to focus on more contemporary research. The researchers employed the keywords "waqf development and management; wakaf development and management; waqf challenges; waqf best practices" utilising filtering for literature in social scientific disciplines. The search on Science Direct initially produced 21 with one review article, 17 research articles, two book chapters and one case report. The search on Emerald Publishing resulted in 3 research while IEEE found nine conference papers related to articles. A book chapter was found on Scopus, but this did not meet the criteria of selection criteria. An initial search on Google Scholar found 190 articles, but further selection resulted in 34 relevant articles. The researchers finally selected 50 articles that were considered most pertinent for this SLR study. We recognise that alternative databases may provide further pertinent articles; however, the study's limitations encompass the researchers' restricted online access to complete publications due to the university's subscription. The selected papers for evaluation are high-quality, peer-reviewed studies published in reputable databases and are related to the study issue.

Upon obtaining the complete texts of these articles for examination, we uploaded the articles to an AI tool, namely Notebook LM, produced by Google, for additional categorisation according to the researchers' enquiries and suggestions. The impetus for utilising this AI tool was its time-saving capabilities and efficiency [29], as well as the considerable potential for enhancing efficiency in the research workflow.

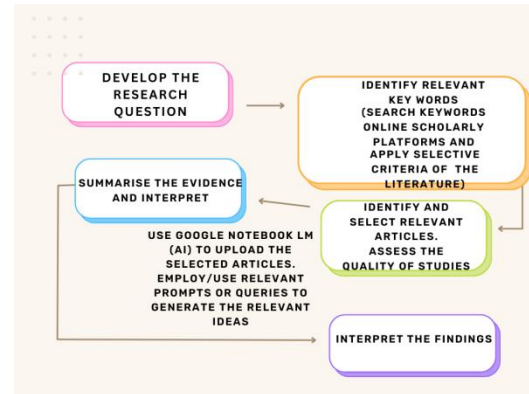


Figure 1: Research workflow Diagram

Through the integration of AI tools into the systematic review process. Authors are responsible for verifying the accuracy of the information presented. Furthermore, AI technologies for scientific writing should be extensively utilised; however, experts caution that researchers and authors must maintain scientific ethics when employing AI [29]. The ethical utilisation of AI can be encapsulated as adhering to truthfulness and integrity, avoiding data distortion, and refraining from pursuing advancement by inequitable means. The selected publications for review are categorised into the following classifications: best practices, constraints and strategies.

## 3. Result and findings

### 3.1 Best Practices, Challenges and Strategies

The AI tool Google Notebook LM functions by linking the articles compiled by the researcher and synthesising information across many publications. The summary or highlighted material in Table 1 is contingent upon the prompts and queries posed by the researchers, as it is a query-based AI system. Consequently, the researcher must authenticate the information and the cited sources. The examination of information corresponds with the emphasis of the researcher's enquiries. The SLR show numerous best practices highlighted in almost all the articles; however, the subsequent Table 1: Best Practices, Challenges and Strategies summarises the best practices, obstacles and resolutions based on the selected

publications, and cross-checked by the researchers. The findings are consistent with other research findings [9] of an SLR for waqf land development, where the main issues are financial resources, human resources, administrative and management, legal and land criteria. However, in this SLR, in addition to the previous issues, other issues highlighted are low public awareness and literacy on waqf, inadequate adoption and optimisation of technology, and rigidity of donor conditions.

Table 1: Best practices, challenges and strategies addressed in the articles

Main Best Practices	Main Challenges	Strategies
I. effective waqf management and governance structures	I.gaps and alignment of syariah principles and national interests	I. Implement Modern Management Systems
ii.transparency and accountability in financial reporting	ii.Insufficient Transparency in management	ii.implement Robust Risk Management Practices
iii. collaboration among relevant parties	iii.Lack of Expertise of Waqf managers	iii.Strengthen Human Resources
Iv.diversified fundraising model,	Iv.Align modern and traditional fundraising models	Iv. Diversify Investment
V. investment of waqf funds in productive sectors,	V.Insufficient Financial Resources for Development and Maintenance	v. Enhance Transparency and Accountability
Vi.developing a comprehensive and supportive regulatory framework	Vi.Inconsistent Regulatory Frameworks	Vi.increase Public Awareness and Literacy
vii. enhancing the competency and expertise of waqf managers	Vii.Limited Focus on Productive Waqf Development	vii. build Strong Relationships and Trust with donors
Viii.maintaining good relationships and communication with donors	Viii.Lack of Strategic Planning and Clear Development Plans for Waqf Properties	Viii. Develop Comprehensive Regulatory Frameworks
ix. focusing on socio-economic development	Ix.Low Public Awareness	ix. Foster Strategic Collaboration
x. technological advancements for improved waqf management.	X. Lack of human expertise and financial resource	X.Invest in Technology

### 3.2 Implementation of Best Practices and Strategies to counter the Challenges

The following elaborates on the best practices and strategies to overcome the challenges of waqf development and management highlighted. Effective waqf management is implemented through the establishment of robust governance structures [30],[31],[32] and professional management by capable administrators. It is important that the managers focus on the strategic and productive utilisation of waqf assets [33]. This approach is crucially supported by transparent and accountable financial reporting, and continuous efforts to address low public awareness and understanding of waqf [34],[35]. Strong collaborations among waqf institutions, government bodies, financial institutions and the community can ensure long-term sustainability and maximise benefits [36]. Additionally, communication with donors and maintaining good relationships is of utmost importance and can be achieved through transparency, accountability, regular reporting, and personalised engagement [37],[38].

To develop a clear and comprehensive regulatory framework, SIRC's primarily enact specific waqf legislation and continuously review and update existing legal frameworks. These act to address gaps and align with national interests and Shariah principles. Proper procedures must be clear for the registration, gazetting, and overall management and development of waqf properties [39].

Investment of waqf funds in productive sectors is primarily conducted by authorised State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRC's) or corporate entities. They invest and focus on income-generating assets like real estate and agriculture [40]. Waqf development requires the involvement of broad collaboration among waqf institutions, government bodies (federal, state, and local agencies), the private sector (including corporations, financial institutions, and developers), and the community (individual donors and the public)[20].

Key challenges frequently highlighted in the SLR are the low public literacy and understanding of waqf, a lack of professionalism and competency among waqf managers, and financial constraints or insufficient funds [41],[42]. Additionally, legal framework rigidities and gaps, inefficient or outdated management systems, and a lack of transparency and accountability in reporting, particularly detailed financial statements, hinder optimal waqf utilisation[43],[44]. Thus, extensive collaboration among waqf institutions, government bodies, the private sector, and the community can help to address the low public participation issue and understanding towards the

sustained socio-economic goals of waqf [45]. This could entail strategically implementing a variety of Islamic financial instruments like Mudarabah, Ijarah, and Sukuk and various fundraising approaches. These include establishing partnerships and crowdfunding. This can lead towards a diverse financing model in waqf development and help address idle waqf property issues occurring in communities. Technological solutions using geographical information systems can foster proper asset inventory and a good reference for project implementation [46].

Investment and management of waqf funds in productive sectors face persistent challenges that require strategic solutions. This involves recognising waqf as a powerful social finance and productive investment instrument capable of fostering economic development and social well-being. Solutions for investments in productive sectors include diversifying investments into income-generating assets like real estate and agriculture, and Shariah-compliant financial instruments such as cash waqf-linked sukuk and shares [47]. Professional and innovative management approaches are crucial, as seen in models like value-based capital waqf, and social enterprise waqf fund models [48],[49] alongside traditional and crowd fundraising techniques[50].

#### 4. Conclusion

Traditionally, waqf has played a vital role in the socio-economic development of Muslim societies by funding public services, education, and healthcare. However, waqf institutions globally face several challenges in their development and management, which often leads to the inefficient utilization of waqf assets. This systematic literature review identifies key best practices, challenges, and strategic approaches to enhance waqf's development, effectiveness, and sustainability. The reviewed literature highlights the necessity of a robust governance structure and professional management. Capable administrators must focus on the strategic and productive utilization of waqf assets for both social and economic development. Key strategies also include:

- Improving accountable financial reporting and continuous efforts to address low public awareness of waqf.
- Establishing stronger collaborations among waqf institutions, government bodies, and the community.
- Maintaining good relationships and communication with donors.
- Diversifying funding models by utilizing a wide array of Islamic financial instruments

such as Mudarabah, Ijarah, and Sukuk, along with various fundraising approaches like crowdfunding.

- Focusing on real estate and agriculture on waqf lands as potential income-generating assets, while using technological solutions like geographical information systems to address issues of idle property.

The way forward for waqf development requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes continuously reviewing and updating legal frameworks to be comprehensive and supportive of modern waqf initiatives. It is crucial to enhance the professionalism and competence of waqf managers through targeted training and the appointment of business-minded experts. Raising public awareness and trust is also vital and can be achieved through education and extensive promotional campaigns. To maintain donor confidence, a clear and regular reporting of financial statements and impact assessments is essential. Finally, fostering stronger synergy and collaboration among key stakeholders—including State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRC), government agencies, the corporate sector, Islamic financial institutions, and local communities—while embracing technological advancements, will unlock waqf's full potential for sustainable socio-economic development.

#### Acknowledgement

This work is supported by the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (Reference: FRGS/1/2023/SS06/UITM/02/14; Project Title: Pembentukan Konsep Bandar Madani melalui Pemerkasaan Masjid dan Tanah Wakaf bagi Revitalisasi Bandar Tempatan di Malaysia.

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