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Strengthening Waqf Management in Malaysian Public University: An Exploratory Analysis of Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the key issues and challenges in waqf management within Malaysian public university, aiming to strengthen governance frameworks and enhance operational effectiveness. Despite waqf's historical significance as a sustainable instrument for social and educational development, its administration in higher education remains constrained by structural, financial, and regulatory complexities. Employing the Kawakita Jiro (KJ) method, a qualitative and participatory analytical approach, data were collected through five focus group discussions involving practitioners directly engaged in university-level waqf management across Malaysian states. The KJ method facilitated the systematic organization and clustering of unstructured qualitative data, while subsequent content analysis using ATLAS.ti version 23 enabled the identification of recurring themes. Findings reveal that the most prominent challenges relate to internal governance, state law and policies, and public or university community awareness, followed by human resource and financial constraints. Less frequent but significant issues include administration, technology and data management, relations with agencies, and waqf development and investment. Collectively, these findings indicate that waqf management challenges are multidimensional and interdependent across institutional, legal, and socio-technical domains. Theoretically, this study contributes to the waqf governance literature by demonstrating how internal institutional mechanisms interact with legal and socio-political contexts to shape waqf outcomes in higher education, while also highlighting the effective application of the KJ method as a systematic framework for analysing managerial and operational challenges. Practically, the study underscores the importance of policy reform, capacity building, technological innovation, and stakeholder engagement to enhance the sustainability and impact of waqf in higher education.

Keywords:

Waqf management; issues and challenges; higher education; qualitative analysis; Kawakita Jiro Method

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1. Introduction

Waqf, or Islamic endowment, has been an enduring socio-economic institution that shaped the development of Muslim societies since the early Islamic period. The Prophet Muhammad established the first waqf through the construction of mosques such as Quba and Nabawi, laying the foundation for a tradition of charitable endowment that was later continued by the Righteous Caliphs and subsequent Islamic rulers across the Middle East [1]. Over the centuries, the function of waqf diversified beyond its religious roots to include agricultural lands, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and even financial assets such as cash and shares [1,2]. This evolution enabled waqf to become a dynamic mechanism for promoting social justice, education, health, and economic welfare [1,2].

In the modern era, waqf has been increasingly integrated into Islamic financial systems through innovative instruments such as Islamic unit trust funds, wholesale funds, and sukuk (Islamic bonds) [3,4]. These developments have led to the emergence of new models such as Waqf-Featured Funds (WFF) and Cash Waqf Linked Sukuk (CWLS), reflecting efforts to align traditional waqf principles with contemporary financial innovation [3,5]. Consequently, waqf has reasserted its significance not only as a religious practice but also as an instrument of sustainable economic development and social empowerment [2,3,6].

Beyond its economic dimension, waqf plays a crucial role in achieving social objectives, including poverty alleviation, education enhancement, and healthcare provision [7,8]. Through its redistributive and philanthropic functions, waqf contributes to the realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly by fostering networks between micro-entrepreneurs and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through voluntary donations [6]. However, the effectiveness of waqf in fulfilling its intended objectives is highly dependent on sound governance and accountability mechanisms. Robust governance structures, transparent monitoring systems, and comprehensive management policies are critical to ensuring that waqf assets are administered responsibly and sustainably [9,10].

In the Malaysian context, the integration of waqf into public universities presents both substantial opportunities and notable challenges. Universities possess significant potential to serve as institutional catalysts in waqf governance by mobilizing resources for research, student welfare, and community development [11]. Although previous studies have highlighted various issues and challenges in waqf administration [8,12], the specific managerial and operational dimensions of waqf within public universities remain insufficiently examined. Moreover, most existing research is predominantly conceptual or literature-based, lacking empirical insights into actual management practices. To address this gap, the present study seeks to answer the research question: "What are the key managerial and operational challenges in waqf management within a Malaysian public university?" Guided by this question, the study employs the Kawakita Jiro (KJ) method, a qualitative and participatory analytical approach, to systematically identify, categorize, and analyze the underlying themes related to waqf management and governance challenges. This approach provides a structured analytical lens, moving beyond mere listing of issues to reveal patterns, relationships, and actionable insights for strengthening institutional governance and operational effectiveness.

2. Literature Review

This study is guided by a comprehensive review of the literature on waqf management, governance practices, and institutional operations. Rather than applying formal theoretical frameworks, the study draws on existing empirical and conceptual research to organize and interpret

managerial and operational challenges in waqf administration. The literature provides a structured lens for categorizing issues into domains such as governance, transparency and accountability, legal frameworks, and institutional and financial capacity. By relying on literature as a conceptual foundation, the study ensures that the analysis is grounded in prior knowledge while remaining exploratory and evidence-based.

2.1 Concept and Historical Development of Waqf

The institution of waqf has long been recognized as one of the most enduring socio-economic mechanisms in Islamic civilization, embodying the principles of perpetual charity (sadaqah jariyah) and social solidarity. Fundamentally, waqf refers to the dedication of a property or asset by a Muslim for religious, philanthropic, or communal purposes, in which ownership is retained in perpetuity and its benefits are channelled toward societal welfare [13,14]. Over time, the concept has evolved beyond its traditional association with land and buildings to include modern assets such as cash, stocks, securities, and intellectual property [15]. This evolution illustrates the adaptability of waqf to contemporary financial systems while maintaining its original spiritual and social intent.

The practice of waqf dates back to the time of Prophet Muhammad, who initiated it through the establishment of the Quba and Nabawi Mosques. The Righteous Caliphs and subsequent Muslim rulers continued this tradition, leading to the widespread development of waqf in regions such as Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Sudan, Kuwait, and Syria [1,7]. Over the centuries, waqf expanded from religious facilities to include agricultural land, plantations, educational institutions, housing, money, and shares.

Educational waqf, in particular, has played a central role in nurturing intellectual growth within Muslim societies. Historical institutions such as the Qarawiyyin University in Morocco exemplify early waqf-supported systems that integrated education and community service [7,16]. Beyond education, waqf has significantly contributed to social justice, welfare, healthcare, public policy, environmental preservation, and cultural development [1,2,13]. It has also shaped urban landscapes by creating communal spaces that promote sustainable development [17].

In modern times, waqf has become an integral part of Islamic finance through Shariah-compliant instruments such as Islamic unit trust funds and wholesale funds [3]. Cash waqf, where monetary contributions are invested for public benefit, offers opportunities to reduce economic inequality [2, 18]. Globally, countries like Malaysia and Indonesia have revitalized waqf through innovative management and the development of waqf assets for community empowerment and sustainable growth [3,19].

Overall, waqf possesses a rich historical legacy and continues to serve as a vital instrument for socio-economic progress in Muslim societies. Its evolution from traditional endowments to diverse financial mechanisms underscores its enduring relevance and potential in addressing contemporary challenges [1,13,15]. Understanding its conceptual and historical development thus provides essential context for analysing current issues in waqf management, particularly within Malaysian public university.

2.2 The Role of Waqf in Higher Education

Waqf, an Islamic endowment, has long played a significant role in supporting higher education by providing financial resources and enhancing the quality of academic institutions. It serves as an alternative funding mechanism that contributes to educational accessibility, institutional development, and long-term sustainability. Through its perpetual nature, waqf provides a stable

financial base for universities, complementing conventional funding sources that are often limited and highly competitive. This mechanism helps to alleviate financial barriers for students, particularly those who are self-financed, by supplementing government allocations and tuition-based income [11,20,21]. Returns generated from waqf funds are also utilized to provide scholarships, research grants, and other forms of academic assistance, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds [11,20]. In doing so, waqf not only widens access to education but also promotes inclusivity, social mobility, and the equitable distribution of educational opportunities.

Beyond supporting students, waqf plays an essential role in institutional growth and academic excellence. Waqf-based funding has been instrumental in the construction and maintenance of educational infrastructure, including classrooms, libraries, dormitories, and laboratories, thereby enhancing the learning environment and supporting academic advancement. Moreover, waqf resources can be channelled to cover operational expenditures, ensuring the sustainability of higher education institutions while reducing overreliance on government budgets [11,22]. Such financial independence enables universities to pursue long-term development goals and research innovation more effectively.

Successful models of waqf implementation can be observed across various educational contexts. In Malaysia, universities such as Universiti Putra Malaysia and the International Islamic University Malaysia have integrated waqf principles into their governance and financing structures to strengthen infrastructure and expand academic programs [21,23]. Similarly, Turkish foundation universities illustrate how waqf can serve as a sustainable model for higher education, balancing financial autonomy with academic excellence [23]. A classic example is Al-Azhar University in Egypt, where a productive waqf model continues to support educational and social initiatives. This long-standing system demonstrates the enduring potential of waqf to sustain higher learning institutions while preserving their religious and social missions [22].

The effectiveness of waqf initiatives in higher education, however, depends largely on individual and collective commitment to charitable giving. Philanthropic traits such as religiosity, altruism, personal satisfaction, and institutional loyalty have been identified as key factors influencing the willingness to contribute to waqf for educational purposes [24]. Equally important is the role of public participation. Studies have emphasized that community engagement, awareness campaigns, and participatory programs significantly enhance the success and sustainability of waqf initiatives in higher learning institutions [25]. Building trust and a shared sense of purpose among stakeholders is therefore essential to ensuring the long-term viability of waqf schemes.

In essence, waqf serves as a transformative instrument in advancing higher education by providing sustainable financial resources, improving institutional infrastructure, and broadening access to learning opportunities. Its continued success depends on the establishment of robust governance frameworks, supportive legal environments, and active community involvement. With greater public awareness, professional management, and strategic institutional planning, waqf can play a pivotal role in strengthening the sustainability and global competitiveness of higher education institutions [11,20,21].

2.3 Issues and Challenges in Waqf Management

While waqf continues to play a pivotal role in advancing socio-economic and educational development, its management faces persistent challenges that limit its full potential, particularly within Malaysian public universities. Recent systematic reviews have identified five recurring issues in waqf administration: managerial, legislative, funding, awareness and understanding, and fatawa-related challenges [8]. In a similar vein, Abd. Jalil [12] highlighted seven interrelated obstacles

affecting waqf practices across different contexts, including legal complexities, limited awareness, insufficient funding, idle assets, management inefficiencies, incomplete records, and illegal land invasion. Collectively, these findings reveal the complex and multifaceted nature of waqf management and emphasize the need for comprehensive institutional reform and capacity building to ensure long-term sustainability. These challenges can be broadly categorized into four major domains: governance, transparency and accountability, legal frameworks, and institutional and financial capacity. Each domain presents distinct yet interconnected barriers that influence the overall effectiveness of waqf management, particularly within the context of higher education institutions.

2.3.1 Governance Challenges

Effective governance is essential for waqf sustainability, yet many institutions in Malaysia and other Muslim-majority countries operate within fragmented regulatory environments. The absence of a National Waqf Land Code has led to cumbersome ownership registration and vesting procedures under the National Land Code 1965, resulting in inefficiencies and development delays [26]. In Indonesia, overlapping administrative roles between the Indonesian Waqf Board and the Ministry of Religious Affairs have similarly hampered coordination and accountability [27,28]. Governance problems are compounded by the limited professional capacity of nazhir (waqf managers). In Yemen, inadequate expertise and weak systems have rendered many waqf assets idle [29]. Comparable issues occur in Malaysia and Indonesia, where insufficient managerial training and lack of specialized knowledge constrain institutional performance [30]. The limited adoption of digital management systems also restricts data integration and monitoring efficiency [28]. Strengthening governance thus requires professionalization, technological modernization, and policy alignment.

2.3.2 Transparency and Accountability Challenges

Transparency and accountability are crucial for maintaining public trust, yet weaknesses in documentation, financial reporting, and auditing persist. Poor record-keeping exposes waqf assets to mismanagement and loss [30,31]. Within Malaysian universities, inconsistent reporting and limited disclosure of fund utilization further weaken stakeholder confidence [32]. The absence of standardized disclosure systems and comprehensive audits exacerbates these problems. Integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles into waqf accounting has been proposed to promote ethical and transparent management [33]. Additionally, technologies such as blockchain and smart contracts could enhance traceability and automate financial transactions [26, 34]. However, limited institutional readiness and technical expertise continue to delay their adoption.

2.3.3 Legal Obstacles

Legal complexities further impede the administration of waqf assets. In Malaysia, reliance on the National Land Code 1965 creates procedural inefficiencies in land registration and development approvals [26]. Indonesia faces similar challenges due to fragmented regulations governing productive waqf and unclear institutional mandates [30]. Coordination among State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRCs) also remains inconsistent because of state-specific interpretations [35]. Prolonged dispute resolution represents another barrier. The absence of specialized legal mechanisms results in jurisdictional uncertainty, suggesting the need for Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods such as mediation [36]. Cross-border waqf introduces further legal ambiguities due to differing

national laws [37]. Integrating waqf into modern property law systems also raises questions about ownership, leasing, and the jurisdictional boundaries of civil and Shariah courts [38].

2.3.4 Institutional and Financial Constraints

Financial sustainability remains a major concern as many waqf assets remain underdeveloped due to weak investment strategies, low market viability, and poor financial planning [29,39]. The absence of risk management frameworks further undermines financial stability. Zainuddin *et al.*, [33] highlight the need for structured risk identification and Shariah-compliant mitigation strategies to ensure sustainable returns. Institutional limitations are also reflected in low public engagement. Limited awareness among alumni and potential donors constrains the growth of waqf funds [40]. Strengthening waqf therefore requires not only financial reform but also the cultivation of public understanding of its socio-economic potential through improved transparency and financial literacy.

Existing research underscores that while waqf continues to serve as an essential instrument for socio-economic and educational advancement, its management is often hindered by challenges related to governance, transparency, legal complexity, and financial sustainability. These issues are particularly pronounced in public universities, where waqf administration intersects with institutional governance structures, financial accountability, and academic priorities. Although the significance of waqf in supporting educational and community development is widely acknowledged, limited scholarly attention has been given to understanding its management dynamics within the higher education context. Therefore, this study seeks to synthesize existing knowledge and critically examine the key issues affecting waqf management in Malaysian public university, with the objective of offering strategic insights to strengthen governance, improve administrative efficiency, and promote long-term institutional sustainability.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using the KJ Method, also known as affinity diagrams, to systematically examine focus group data and capture group consensus [41]. The KJ Method facilitates the organisation of extensive and unstructured data by discerning inherent relationships between data points, producing clusters or visual maps that highlight interconnections based on meaning, association, and frequency of occurrence [42]. Five focus groups, each comprising four to five participants directly involved in public university waqf management across all Malaysian states, were conducted to capture diverse perspectives and achieve data saturation [43]. During the sessions, participants individually recorded key issues and challenges on cards, which were then discussed collectively, grouped, and labeled to identify recurring themes and patterns.

The clustered data were further analysed using ATLAS.ti version 23, enabling a systematic content analysis. Researchers initially immersed themselves in participants' narratives, reading and rereading the data to develop a deep understanding. Discrete units of text, or "codes," were assigned to represent individual issues or challenges. An inductive coding approach allowed new codes to emerge directly from participants' descriptions, capturing nuanced and diverse experiences. Concurrently, a deductive coding process was applied to categorise codes into predefined classes informed by existing literature [44], resulting in a structured and comprehensive analytical framework.

The proposed categorisations, collaboratively developed by participants and researchers, were validated through review and feedback from a panel of two subject matter experts: one in financial management and one waqf expert with both academic and practical experience, following the methodological recommendations of Singh and Aggarwal [45]. This combination of participant-driven

clustering, affinity diagramming, and rigorous content analysis ensured a robust, reliable, and nuanced representation of the issues and challenges in waqf management at a Malaysian public university with campuses scattered across the country.

4. Results

The Sankey diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the frequency and distribution of issues and challenges in waqf management across multiple domains. The visualisation underscores the multidimensional nature of these challenges, which are categorised into nine major areas: Administration, Finance and Funding, Human Resource, Internal Governance, Relations with Agencies/State, State Laws and Policies, Technology and Data, Waqf Development and Investment, and Public/University Community Understanding and Awareness. Collectively, these categories reveal the complex interplay between governance structures, institutional capacity, and stakeholder engagement in shaping the effectiveness of waqf management within higher education institutions.

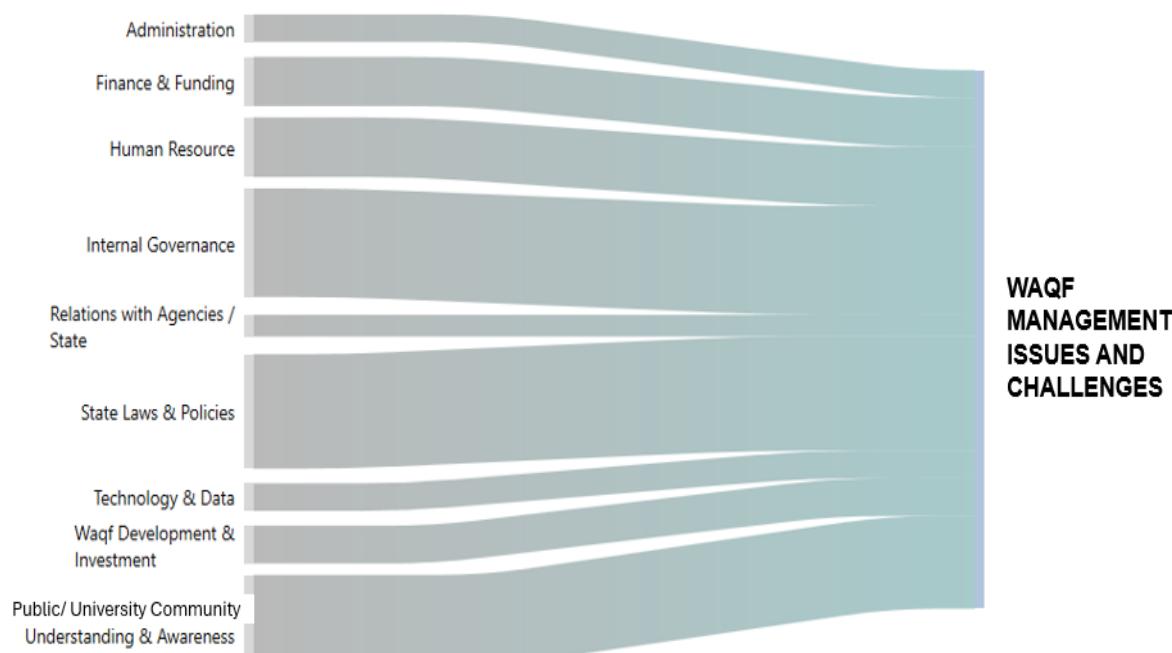


Fig. 1. Waqf management issues and challenges

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of waqf management issues and challenges across nine identified categories. The analysis reveals that Internal Governance ($n = 21$) and State Law and Policies ($n = 20$) emerged as the most frequently cited challenges, reflecting significant structural, procedural, and regulatory limitations affecting the management of waqf within higher education institutions. These findings suggest that unclear policy frameworks, lack of formal directives, and variations in governance models across states constitute major obstacles to effective waqf administration. Challenges related to Public and University Community Understanding and Awareness ($n = 17$) also feature prominently, indicating that limited engagement among university staff and the public, as well as misconceptions about waqf, remain critical socio-institutional barriers. Human Resources ($n = 11$) and Finance and Funding ($n = 9$) demonstrate moderate frequencies, highlighting the influence of insufficient expertise, staff shortages, workload constraints, limited financial resources, and underdeveloped investment mechanisms on operational efficiency. In contrast, Administration ($n = 5$), Technology and Data ($n = 5$), Waqf Development and Investment (n)

= 7), and Relations with Agencies/State (n = 4) were less frequently cited, although they continue to play a vital role in shaping overall management effectiveness. The lower frequency of these categories may reflect localized or context-specific operational challenges. However, their impact on governance, accountability, and asset utilization remains significant. Overall, these findings indicate that waqf management challenges are multifaceted and unevenly distributed, with governance, legal frameworks, and community awareness emerging as the most pressing areas. Addressing these challenges requires strategic interventions that enhance institutional policies, regulatory alignment, stakeholder engagement, and human and financial capacity to ensure the sustainable administration of waqf within Malaysian public university.

Table 1
Frequency distribution of waqf management issues and challenges

No.	Category	Frequency
1	Administration	5
2	Finance & Funding	9
3	Human Resources	11
4	Internal Governance	21
5	Relations with Agencies/ State	4
6	State Law & Policies	20
7	Technology & Data	5
8	Waqf Development & Investment	7
9	Public/ University Community Understanding & Awareness	17
Total		99

Table 2 presents a representative sample of issues and challenges identified across different categories in waqf management within higher education institutions. It is important to note that these examples capture only a portion of the broader challenges reported by participants and do not reflect the full spectrum of issues. In the Administration category, participants highlighted difficulties in coordinating waqf activities across departments, inefficiencies in property registration and documentation, and issues with payment receipts. Finance and Funding challenges included insufficient promotional costs, limited financial resources, and difficulties in managing waqf assets, emphasizing the need for sustainable financial mechanisms and transparent resource management. Within Human Resources, participants reported a lack of expertise, insufficient training, staff shortages, and heavy workloads among personnel responsible for waqf management. Internal Governance challenges were reflected in the absence of comprehensive guidelines, unclear policy frameworks, and the lack of trust deeds from the university for reference by the State Islamic Religious Council, underscoring the importance of coherent institutional policies and regulatory alignment.

Relations with Agencies and State were constrained by limited collaboration, slow responses from State Islamic Religious Councils, and weak networking initiatives, highlighting the need for strengthened inter-agency partnerships. Challenges under State Law and Policies included variations in governance models across states, restrictive enactments limiting university implementation of waqf, and inconsistencies in land administration practices, reflecting the influence of external regulatory environments. Technology and Data constraints were also notable. Participants identified inadequate waqf-related technology, limited innovation, poor integration, and outdated databases, which collectively hinder the development of data-driven management systems. In Waqf Development and Investment, challenges included underutilized lands, cash flow issues such as rental arrears and abandoned projects, and difficulties in sustaining waqf properties, emphasizing

the need for strategic planning and effective resource utilization. Finally, challenges related to Public and University Community Understanding and Awareness were observed. Low engagement among university staff, public misconceptions about waqf, and limited understanding of its scope and significance highlight the importance of targeted educational and promotional initiatives to enhance awareness and participation.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that waqf management challenges are multifaceted and interconnected across administrative, financial, human resource, governance, legal, technological, and socio-institutional domains. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated approach that integrates clear institutional policies, capacity building, strengthened inter-agency collaboration, and sustained efforts to enhance awareness and engagement among both university personnel and the wider community.

Table 2
Sample of issues and challenges in waqf management

Category	Sample of Issues and Challenges
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Coordination between departments/units implementing waqf (Group 1)</i>▪ <i>Issues in waqf property registration and documentation (Group 4)</i>▪ <i>Issues with payment receipts (Group 1)</i>
Finance & Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>High promotional costs (Group 1)</i>▪ <i>Limited financial resources (Group 3)</i>▪ <i>Financial issues in managing waqf assets (Group 4)</i>
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Lack of expertise / insufficient training (Group 3)</i>▪ <i>Shortage of support staff (Group 1)</i>▪ <i>Workload constraints for staff handling waqf management – need for dedicated personnel (Group 5)</i>
Internal Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Lack of significant guidelines (Group 3)</i>▪ <i>No university waqf trust deed for reference by the State Islamic Religious Council (Group 2)</i>▪ <i>Unclear policy framework (Group 4)</i>
Relations with Agencies/ State	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Issues in collaboration with state agencies (Group 1)</i>▪ <i>Slow response from State Islamic Religious Councils (Group 2)</i>▪ <i>Lack of strong networking (Group 3)</i>
State Law & Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Differences in governance models across states (Group 1)</i>▪ <i>State Islamic Religious Council enactments prohibiting university from implementing waqf (Group 5)</i>▪ <i>Issues in waqf land administration and inconsistency in Land Office practices (Group 3)</i>
Technology & Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Issues related to waqf technology (Group 1)</i>▪ <i>Lack of innovation and technology integration (Group 3)</i>▪ <i>Limited and outdated data (Group 4)</i>
Waqf Development & Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Waqf lands not developed optimally (Group 1)</i>▪ <i>Waqf assets underutilized – cash flow issues (rental arrears, abandoned projects) (Group 3)</i>▪ <i>Challenges in sustaining waqf properties (Group 4)</i>
Public/ University Community Understanding & Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>University staff not interested or unaware of waqf initiatives (Group 2)</i>▪ <i>Public confusion about the concept of waqf – lack of awareness/promotion (Group 3)</i>▪ <i>Low public understanding of waqf scope (Group 5)</i>

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that waqf management in Malaysian public university encompasses multifaceted challenges spanning governance, regulatory, administrative, financial, human resource, technological, and socio-institutional dimensions. These challenges are not merely

operational; they are shaped by underlying institutional, legal, and political dynamics, which constrain the effective administration of waqf. Internal governance and state legal frameworks emerged as the most frequently cited challenges, reflecting structural inefficiencies and misalignments between institutional objectives and external regulatory mandates. Fragmented governance systems, overlapping responsibilities, and the absence of standardized policies persist due to complex jurisdictional arrangements and limited coordination mechanisms between universities and State Islamic Religious Councils [26,28]. This indicates that governance issues are systemic, rooted in institutional inertia, legal fragmentation, and political considerations. The observed lack of standardized policy directives and coherent institutional guidelines highlights the necessity of a harmonized governance framework to align national and institutional objectives.

Challenges related to state laws and regulations further illustrate the influence of external dynamics on institutional performance. Variations in state-level enactments and the absence of a unified legal framework result in procedural inconsistencies, delays in land registration, and constraints in asset utilization, limiting universities' autonomy in managing waqf properties [26,30, 35,37]. These legal variations reflect broader political and institutional constraints, including competing priorities among state authorities, limited enforcement mechanisms, and jurisdictional ambiguities, which collectively shape management outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires establishing a national regulatory mechanism that aligns the roles of universities, State Islamic Religious Councils, and federal agencies to enhance policy coherence and accelerate decision-making processes.

Socio-institutional challenges, particularly public and university community awareness, emerged as critical and persistent. Limited understanding of waqf's purpose and mechanisms reflects both historical neglect in awareness programs and the absence of systematic institutional engagement strategies. Misconceptions and low participation among staff and students hinder resource mobilization and reinforce reliance on traditional administrative channels [25]. These challenges are embedded within organizational culture, social norms, and stakeholder perceptions, rather than being mere operational deficiencies. The findings emphasize the importance of sustained educational campaigns and participatory initiatives to cultivate a shared sense of ownership and responsibility. By improving awareness and engagement among both internal and external stakeholders, universities can foster a culture of philanthropy, strengthen institutional commitment, and enhance the long-term sustainability of waqf initiatives.

Human resource and financial constraints are closely interconnected with governance and regulatory issues. Persistent shortages of trained personnel and limited technical expertise reflect the lack of institutional prioritization for capacity building, while financial limitations are exacerbated by restrictions on asset utilization and conservative investment practices [29,30,33,39]. These interdependencies demonstrate that operational difficulties are intertwined with structural, policy, and regulatory factors. Addressing these challenges requires targeted professional development, enhanced financial literacy, and the implementation of sustainable, Shariah-compliant investment frameworks to maximize the productive use of waqf assets and support long-term institutional sustainability.

Technological and inter-agency challenges further underscore systemic factors influencing waqf management. Limited digital infrastructure and fragmented data management impede transparency and accountability [28]. Weak collaboration with State Islamic Religious Councils persists due to unclear mandates, misaligned incentives, and bureaucratic silos, rather than solely technical deficiencies. While digital solutions such as blockchain or electronic records could enhance accountability, their adoption is constrained by budgetary limitations, regulatory uncertainty, and low technical capacity [26,34]. Strengthening partnerships with external agencies, particularly State

Islamic Religious Councils, is essential to improve coordination, streamline administrative processes, and increase the impact of waqf development initiatives.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the view that effective waqf management relies on a governance ecosystem that integrates institutional capacity, regulatory clarity, stakeholder engagement, and socio-political considerations. Managerial, legislative, and awareness-related challenges are interdependent, indicating that addressing one dimension in isolation is insufficient [8,12]. This study contributes to the waqf governance literature by empirically demonstrating how internal institutional mechanisms interact with broader legal and socio-political environments to shape waqf outcomes in higher education. In addition, it advances theory by illustrating the effective application of the KJ method in waqf research, offering a systematic framework for identifying, categorizing, and synthesizing complex managerial and operational challenges. Practically, the results highlight the need for integrated reforms. These include developing standardized operational policies, strengthening inter-agency collaboration, implementing digital monitoring systems, and introducing professional certification for waqf administrators. Financially, universities should diversify Shariah-compliant investment portfolios and adopt robust risk management strategies, while socially, structured awareness campaigns and participatory initiatives are required to foster a culture of philanthropy and shared responsibility.

Overall, sustainable waqf development within this Malaysian public university requires a coordinated approach that addresses governance, legal, technological, financial, and socio-institutional dimensions simultaneously. Recognizing that these challenges are perpetuated by institutional inertia, legal fragmentation, political complexity, and stakeholder dynamics is essential. Integrating these dimensions can enhance institutional capacity, improve waqf management effectiveness, and strengthen waqf's broader contribution to educational advancement, social equity, and national development.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the multifaceted challenges of waqf administration within a Malaysian public university, emphasizing that governance, legal, financial, technological, and socio-institutional factors are interconnected and collectively shape management outcomes. The analysis highlights that sustainable waqf management requires systemic alignment among institutional structures, regulatory frameworks, and stakeholder engagement, rather than isolated interventions. Theoretically, the study contributes to waqf governance literature by demonstrating how institutional mechanisms interact with broader legal and socio-political environments to influence outcomes. The application of the KJ method provided a structured, participant-driven approach, enabling the identification of patterns and relationships that inform actionable recommendations for both governance and operational improvement. Practically, it underscores the need for integrated strategies, including clear policies, standardized procedures, professional capacity development, technological adoption, strategic financial planning, and proactive community engagement. The study has several limitations, as data were collected from a single public university, which limits generalizability, and the cross-sectional design captures only a single point in time. In addition, participant responses may be influenced by individual perceptions or biases, and differences in state-level legal frameworks may affect the broader applicability of the findings. Despite these constraints, the findings provide strategic guidance for enhancing waqf sustainability. Addressing governance, legal, technological, financial, and socio-institutional dimensions in a coordinated manner can transform waqf into a durable socio-educational and financial mechanism. Such integration strengthens institutional capacity, promotes social welfare, and supports broader community

development, highlighting waqf's potential as a strategic instrument for higher education and societal advancement.

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