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Islamic Social Enterprise: A Systematic Literature Review of Models, Strategies, and Impacts

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comprehensive Systematic Literature Review (SLR) exploring the evolving landscape of Islamic Social Enterprise (ISE)—a paradigm that unites Islamic economic principles with social entrepreneurship to advance both social and spiritual well-being. Drawing on 68 peer-reviewed studies published between 2010 and 2024 from databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and ProQuest, this review systematically identifies and synthesizes the models, strategies, and impacts of ISE across diverse global contexts. The findings highlight four predominant models: zakat and sadaqah-based enterprises, productive waqf-based ventures, Islamic microfinance initiatives, and hybrid social-commercial organizations. Key implementation strategies include leveraging Islamic philanthropic instruments, fostering community-based empowerment, adopting digital innovations, and promoting sustainable management practices. ISE has demonstrated multifaceted impacts—ranging from poverty alleviation and financial inclusion to women's empowerment and spiritual growth. However, challenges such as financial sustainability, governance weaknesses, and unclear regulatory frameworks continue to limit its broader scalability. The study's novelty lies in proposing a multi-dimensional conceptual framework that integrates maqasid al-shariah, social enterprise theory, and sustainability principles—providing both theoretical enrichment and actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners. It further recommends a standardized impact measurement approach grounded in Islamic ethical values to enhance accountability and enable cross-regional comparison. Ultimately, ISE is positioned not merely as an adaptation of the Western social enterprise model but as a distinct paradigm that embodies a holistic vision of prosperity—encompassing material, social, and spiritual dimensions.

Keywords: Islamic Social Enterprise, Systematic Literature Review, Waqf, Zakat, Maqasid al-Shariah, Sustainable Development

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Social Enterprise (ISE) has emerged as a new paradigm in social business that integrates Sharia principles into economic activities with meaningful social impact. ISE plays a crucial role in supporting sustainable development through the ethical and responsible management of resources in alignment with Islamic values. Recent studies show a growing body of literature on ISE, particularly in the context of waqf and zakat as key instruments that sustain Islamic social business models (Saputra, 2025).

The implementation of ISE strategies, especially within Indonesian communities, faces various challenges—ranging from public awareness to integrating Islamic values into sustainable business models. Empirical studies indicate that strengthening ISE frameworks must take into account local contexts that are deeply rooted in social and religious values. Developing alternative models that address these opportunities and challenges has therefore become a major focus to support the growth of ISE in Indonesia (Listyadewi et al., 2022).

Research by Kurjono et al. (2025) also highlights the importance of Islamic values as both ethical and motivational foundations in nurturing a socially conscious entrepreneurial spirit that prioritizes collective welfare and environmental stewardship. These values strengthen the commitment of socio-economic actors to carry out their social missions while ensuring business sustainability. Such a concept needs to be translated into more measurable strategies to support effective decision-making.

Although ISE holds vast potential in wealth distribution and empowerment aligned with Islamic principles, the literature reveals a lack of systematic evaluation measuring the social and economic impacts of ISE practices. This limitation underscores the urgent need for more comprehensive quantitative research on ISE policies and implementations. Addressing this research gap could advance the development of more refined impact evaluation methods (Almuraikhi et al., 2022).

The integration of waqf as a key instrument within Islamic Social Enterprise has gained increasing attention due to its potential in promoting social and economic sustainability. Recent systematic studies highlight the relevance of waqf in developing sustainable social business models, especially in managing religious-based funds and assets. The adoption of digital technologies is also seen as an innovative opportunity to enhance the transparency and efficiency of ISE operations (Junarti et al., 2024).

Several educational and Islamic institutions have made efforts to develop Islamic Social Enterprises as part of their mission for dakwah (Islamic outreach) and community empowerment. However, research points to limitations in resource awareness, management capacity, and the institutional integration of strong ISE principles. Therefore, developing education- and training-based models becomes a critical factor to strengthen institutional capacity in implementing ISE (Junarti et al., 2025).

Developing management indicators for ISE based on Islamic values is essential to ensure that all activities are aligned with Sharia principles and generate meaningful social impact. Studies on management index development reveal key themes centered around devotion to God, humanity, and environmental preservation. Reliable and valid measurements serve as crucial instruments for assessing ISE performance (Zainon et al., 2023).

A case study by Thoha et al. (2023) on mosque-based social enterprises demonstrates that religious-social entities can make significant socio-economic contributions through the implementation of ISE. Transforming mosques into Sharia-oriented socio-economic centers represents a new paradigm in dakwah and community empowerment. The success of such models calls for deeper analysis and replication as valuable references for ISE development in other Islamic institutions.

This research aims to provide a strong academic foundation for advancing Islamic Social Enterprise practices by presenting a systematic literature mapping, thematic analysis, and recommendations for future research. The focus lies on enhancing social and economic impact, improving governance, and strengthening the synergy between social and business dimensions within a Sharia-compliant framework.

Previous Studies

Amalia and Mawasti (2021) explored the social enterprise innovation implemented by PT Kampung Marketerindo Berdaya in empowering village communities using a maqashid al-shariah approach. This stands in contrast to earlier studies that primarily focused on legal aspects within Islamic banking. Through a two-stage research method involving online data collection and in-depth interviews, their study found that the Kampung Marketer empowerment model—rooted in a profit-for-benefit social enterprise structure—closely aligns with maqashid al-shariah in its objectives, implementation, and social outcomes.

Building on this Islamic value-oriented social enterprise concept, Setiawan et al. (2024) examined the practice of Islamic social entrepreneurship at the business units of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. Their findings show how Gontor successfully integrates values of tawhid, justice, partnership, and social responsibility across enterprises such as printing, agriculture, and livestock. The qualitative case study demonstrates that this model equips its graduates with the capacity to build ethical social organizations and businesses that contribute meaningfully to society.

Similarly, Asfiah et al. (2022) developed an Islamic Social Entrepreneurship (ISE) business model specifically for women entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on self-sufficiency and improving quality of life within MSME groups under the 'Aisyiyah organization. Their qualitative findings reveal that applying Islamic values in social entrepreneurship helped sustain business operations and social contribution during crisis conditions. Extending this perspective, Siompu and Asfiah (2024) emphasized integrating ethics into entrepreneurial practice and education, highlighting the importance of barakah (holistic blessing), shared prosperity, and justice as core principles guiding responsible and sustainable Muslim entrepreneurship.

However, Mulyaningsih and Ramadani (2017) noted that the concept of social entrepreneurship is often not fully understood in Islamic contexts because many studies rely on Western theoretical frameworks that lack religious dimensions, leaving Islamic perspectives underrepresented. From an Islamic viewpoint, entrepreneurship is part of worship and social service, where success is measured not only by material gains but also by social impact and ethical conduct. In this broader philosophical context, Chowdhury et al. (2021) explained that religiously-driven social businesses hold significant potential to create sustainable social benefit while offering an ethical alternative to interest-based systems. Their study, based on cases in Bangladesh, calls for regulatory support to encourage the growth of Islamic social enterprises.

To strengthen theoretical foundations, Yasmeen (2024) developed a comprehensive Islamic Social Entrepreneurship model through literature review and thematic analysis, integrating Islamic principles with social enterprise concepts. Her findings highlight ISE's commitment to business ethics, social responsibility, and sustainable social impact achieved through innovative collaboration. However, the study also notes the need for quantitative validation and wider geographical application. In terms of practical application, Boulven et al. (2018), using a mixed-method approach in Malaysia, developed a community-empowerment-oriented ISE model rooted in Islamic values, offering guidance for future generations of Muslim entrepreneurs.

Aligned with this discussion, Mohiuddin (2017), based on a study in Bangladesh, observed a lack of academic and policy focus on Islamic social enterprises and called for the establishment of supportive legal frameworks to strengthen the sector—particularly through social capital, shariah-compliant product innovation, and centralized institutional development. In the Indonesian context, Falach (2023) proposed a theoretical framework encouraging Muslim engagement in Islamic ethical social entrepreneurship to foster holistic economic growth and social development.

Amid rising socio-economic challenges, Mundzir et al. (2024) examined an Islamic sociopreneurship model inspired by the practices of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and demonstrated how zakat programs under BAZNAS improved beneficiary welfare by enhancing housing, income, and MSME development. Likewise, Hamdani et al. (2023) investigated the synergy between government and Islamic microfinance institutions such as BMT in addressing poverty and inequality in the post-pandemic era through a sustainable integrated commercial–social enterprise model. Furthermore, Islam et al. (2023) introduced an integrated financing model utilizing Islamic social funds such as zakat and waqf to support social enterprises and Yunus Social Business initiatives, contributing to improved social welfare and economic resilience after the pandemic.

The role of youth is highlighted by Khoirunnisa et al. (2023), who found that Muslim religiosity does not directly influence the intention to engage in social entrepreneurship, but it strengthens positive perceptions and motivation—indicating the importance of moral and spiritual formation in entrepreneurship education to nurture socially responsible Muslim entrepreneurs. Finally, Asfiah (2021) examined Islamic social entrepreneurship as a moderating variable between Islamic leadership and emotional intelligence in MSME performance. The findings show that the combination of Islamic leadership values, emotional intelligence, and social entrepreneurship enhances business resilience and success grounded in Islamic ethical principles.

Research Gap

1. Limited comprehensive synthesis; Although numerous qualitative and case-based studies have explored Islamic social entrepreneurship within specific settings—such as rural empowerment, educational institutions, and women-led enterprises—there remains a lack of an integrated, systematic literature review that consolidates these diverse models, strategies, and social impacts. A holistic synthesis across global contexts is essential to understand the broader scope and evolution of Islamic social enterprise (ISE).
2. Scattered frameworks and models; Current research often proposes localized or sector-specific frameworks for Islamic social enterprises without establishing a unified theoretical foundation. There is no comparative or integrative analysis that identifies shared dimensions, best practices, and guiding principles across different contexts, which limits the ability to generalize findings and develop a cohesive ISE model.
3. Insufficient quantitative validation; Most existing studies rely heavily on qualitative approaches, with minimal quantitative empirical testing of proposed theoretical frameworks. As highlighted by Yasmeen (2024), this lack of quantitative validation weakens the reliability, robustness, and generalizability of ISE research outcomes.
4. Limited multidimensional impact measurement; The measurement of social impact within Islamic social enterprises remains largely descriptive and qualitative. Few studies employ standardized or

multidimensional impact metrics that integrate Islamic ethical and spiritual dimensions with economic, social, and environmental outcomes. This gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of ISE's true societal contributions.

5. Underexplored strategic dimensions; There is limited exploration of the strategic mechanisms through which Islamic values are embedded and operationalized in business models. The ways Islamic social enterprises achieve sustainability, innovation, and scalability while maintaining faith-based ethics remain insufficiently studied.
6. Contextual and regional biases; Existing literature is predominantly concentrated in a few Muslim-majority countries—such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Malaysia—resulting in regional bias. Comparative cross-regional analyses and global perspectives on Islamic social entrepreneurship are scarce, leaving gaps in understanding how ISE operates in different cultural, economic, and institutional contexts across the Muslim world and beyond.

Novelty of the Research

1. Comprehensive integration; This study provides the first systematic synthesis that holistically integrates diverse findings on Islamic social enterprises (ISE) — including models, strategies, and social impacts. By bridging fragmented literature, it establishes a consolidated understanding of ISE practices across global contexts.
2. Development of a multi-dimensional framework; The research contributes a multi-dimensional conceptual framework that unites Islamic ethical foundations, social enterprise strategies, and impact assessment mechanisms. This framework enhances both theoretical depth and practical applicability for scholars and practitioners in Islamic social entrepreneurship.
3. Bridging qualitative and quantitative divides; Addressing the methodological imbalance in prior studies, this research highlights the need for and direction toward quantitative empirical validation of ISE theories. It offers a roadmap for future researchers to test conceptual models empirically, strengthening the scientific rigor of the field.
4. Standardization of impact metrics rooted in Islamic values; The study pioneers an approach for integrating Islamic ethical, spiritual, and communal welfare dimensions into standardized social impact measurement frameworks. This effort promotes more comprehensive and faith-aligned evaluation metrics for Islamic social enterprises.
5. Global comparative perspective; By incorporating insights from various Muslim-majority and minority contexts, this study broadens the geographical and cultural scope of ISE analysis. It facilitates cross-regional comparisons and reveals context-specific adaptations that contribute to a more inclusive global understanding of Islamic social entrepreneurship.
6. Strategic and policy-oriented contributions; The study identifies strategic patterns and operational models that align with maqasid al-shariah (objectives of Islamic law) and sustainability principles. It also provides actionable policy and managerial recommendations to enhance the scalability, resilience, and socio-economic impact of Islamic social enterprises as ethical business models for sustainable development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to identify, analyze, and synthesize scholarly publications on Islamic Social Enterprise (ISE). The SLR method is employed because it enables a comprehensive, transparent, and replicable review process that systematically maps existing research, identifies gaps, and provides an in-depth understanding of the models, strategies, and impacts of ISE.

Literature Search Protocol

Data Sources

The literature search was conducted using several reputable academic databases to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant studies. These databases include: Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Emerald Insight.

Search Keywords

A combination of core concepts and Boolean operators was applied to construct the search string:

("Islamic social enterprise*" OR "Islamic social entrepreneurship" OR "Sharia social enterprise*" OR "Muslim social enterprise*")

AND ("model*" OR "strateg*" OR "impact*" OR "framework*" OR "performance" OR "sustainability")

Additional keyword variations were incorporated to capture the diversity of terms used in the literature, including:

- ✓ "Zakat-based enterprise"
- ✓ "Waqf social enterprise"
- ✓ "Islamic microfinance AND social enterprise"

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they satisfied the following conditions:

- ✓ Published in English or Indonesian
- ✓ Published between 2010 and 2024
- ✓ Classified as peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, or academic book chapters
- ✓ Explicitly addressed Islamic Social Enterprise or closely related concepts
- ✓ Focused on business models, operational strategies, or socio-economic impacts

Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they met any of the following criteria:

- ✓ Were not empirical or conceptual research (e.g., editorials, commentaries, opinion papers)
- ✓ Lacked full-text accessibility
- ✓ Represented duplicate publications
- ✓ Were not directly relevant to the main research objectives

Article Selection Process

The selection process followed four systematic stages to ensure rigor and transparency:

- ✓ Stage 1: Initial Identification; An initial search was performed across multiple databases. The retrieved articles were compiled and organized using reference management tools such as Mendeley or Zotero.
- ✓ Stage 2: Screening;

- ✚ Title and Abstract Screening: Two independent reviewers screened each study based on title and abstract relevance.
- ✚ Duplicate Removal: Duplicate records appearing across databases were removed.
- ✚ Conflict Resolution: Disagreements between reviewers were resolved through discussion or by consulting a third reviewer.
- ✓ Stage 3: Eligibility Assessment; Full-text versions of articles that passed the screening stage were reviewed in detail to confirm alignment with the inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- ✓ Stage 4: Data Extraction; Relevant data were extracted systematically, covering the following dimensions:
 - ✚ Bibliographic information (author, year, title, journal)
 - ✚ Research methodology and design
 - ✚ Study context or geographical location
 - ✚ Model or typology of Islamic Social Enterprise discussed
 - ✚ Implementation strategies
 - ✚ Reported social, economic, and environmental impacts
 - ✚ Key findings and conclusions

Quality Assessment

The methodological quality of each study was assessed using adapted criteria from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). The evaluation focused on:

- ✓ Clarity of research aims and objectives
- ✓ Appropriateness of methodological approach
- ✓ Validity and reliability of data collection and analysis
- ✓ Transparency and clarity of results
- ✓ Contribution to advancing theoretical and practical knowledge

Studies rated as lower quality were retained for completeness but assigned lower analytical weight during synthesis.

Data Synthesis and Analysis

Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was applied to the extracted data to identify recurring patterns, categories, and emerging themes related to:

- ✓ Models: Typologies and structures of Islamic Social Enterprises
- ✓ Strategies: Operational mechanisms, funding models, and sustainability approaches
- ✓ Impacts: Social, economic, and spiritual outcomes

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to present quantitative insights, such as:

- ✓ Distribution of publications by year
- ✓ Geographic spread of studies
- ✓ Predominant research methodologies
- ✓ Industrial or sectoral domains explored

Comparative Analysis

A comparative synthesis was conducted to identify similarities and divergences among various ISE models and strategies across different cultural and regional contexts.

Analytical Framework

The analytical process was guided by an integrated conceptual framework that combines three key theoretical perspectives:

- ✓ Social Enterprise Theory, emphasizing social value creation through hybrid organizational models
- ✓ Islamic Economic Principles (Maqasid al-Shariah), ensuring alignment with ethical and spiritual objectives
- ✓ Sustainability Frameworks, encompassing social, economic, and environmental dimensions

Validity and Reliability

To ensure research rigor, the following procedures were implemented:

- ✓ The entire search and review protocol was documented in detail for replicability.
- ✓ The selection and assessment processes involved multiple reviewers to minimize bias.
- ✓ Inter-rater reliability was tested using Cohen’s Kappa coefficient.
- ✓ A comprehensive audit trail was maintained throughout the review stages.
- ✓ Full transparency was ensured in reporting search strategies, inclusion decisions, and analytical outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the initial stage, the literature search was conducted using several major academic databases. The initial search yielded a total of 847 articles. However, not all of these articles were relevant or met the quality criteria established for this study.

A screening process was then carried out to select articles based on content suitability, topic relevance, and methodological quality. After the first round of screening, 155 articles were shortlisted for further consideration. The final eligibility assessment resulted in 68 articles that fully met the research criteria and were analyzed in depth.

The distribution of articles across databases shows variations in the number of initial results, screened articles, and final selections. For instance, from the Scopus database, 234 initial articles were found, which after screening were reduced to 42, and finally, 23 were included in the final analysis. The complete distribution is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. The Distribution Of Articles Across Databases

Database	Initial Articles	After Screening	Final Articles
Scopus	234	42	23
Web of Science	187	35	18
ProQuest	156	28	12
EBSCOhost	143	24	8
Google Scholar	89	18	5
Science Direct	38	8	2
Total	847	155	68

Source : Research Results, 2025

Characteristics of the Literature

Temporal Distribution

The temporal analysis indicates that publications on Islamic Social Enterprise have shown a significant upward trend since 2015. The period between 2019 and 2023 marks the peak of publication activity, accounting for 50% of the total, reflecting growing academic interest and attention toward this topic in recent years. The detailed distribution by time period is shown below:

Table 2. Temporal Distribution

Period	Number of Publications	Percentage
2010–2014	8	11.8%
2015–2019	26	38.2%
2020–2024	34	50.0%

Source : Research Results, 2025

Geographical Distribution

Geographically, research on Islamic Social Enterprise spans across various countries. The majority of studies are concentrated in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, with Indonesia ranking highest (26.5%), followed by Malaysia (22.1%). Other countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and those in the Middle East have also made significant contributions to the literature in this field.

Table 3. Geographical Distribution

Region/Country	Number of Studies	Percentage
Indonesia	18	26.5%
Malaysia	15	22.1%
Pakistan	8	11.8%
Bangladesh	7	10.3%
Middle East	12	17.6%
Others	8	11.7%

Source : Research Results, 2025

Research Methodology Adopted in The Reviewed Studies

The methodologies adopted in the reviewed studies indicate a dominant preference for qualitative approaches. A total of 45 studies (66.2%) employed qualitative methods. Mixed-method approaches were also relatively common, used in 15 studies (22.1%), while quantitative methods appeared in 8 studies (11.7%).

- ✓ Qualitative: 45 studies (66.2%)
- ✓ Mixed Methods: 15 studies (22.1%)
- ✓ Quantitative: 8 studies (11.7%)

Models of Islamic Social Enterprise

Based on the thematic analysis, four main models of Islamic Social Enterprise (ISE) frequently appear in both academic literature and real-world practice:

Islamic Social Enterprise: A Systematic Literature Review of Models, Strategies, and Impacts

(Wali Saputra)

1. Zakat and Sadaqah-Based Model

This model integrates zakat (obligatory almsgiving) and sadaqah (voluntary charity) as primary funding sources and mechanisms for wealth redistribution aimed at achieving social objectives. Its distinctive features include:

- ✓ Managing zakat funds for productive activities and economic empowerment of mustahik (zakat recipients) to help them achieve financial independence.
- ✓ Transforming mustahik (recipients) into muzakki (contributors) through sustained welfare improvement.
- ✓ Focusing on alleviating structural poverty and enhancing social and economic inclusion.
- ✓ Examples: Rumah Zakat, Dompot Dhuafa, and PKPU Foundation in Indonesia.

2. Productive Waqf-Based Model

This model utilizes waqf (endowment) assets to generate sustainable social and economic value. Its main characteristics are:

- ✓ Developing cash waqf and productive waqf that are invested in social enterprises and sharia-compliant businesses.
- ✓ Using waqf assets to create stable income sources for maintaining social programs and expanding broader development initiatives.
- ✓ Linking the spiritual value of waqf with long-term economic sustainability.
- ✓ Examples: Tabung Haji in Malaysia and the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation.

3. Islamic Microfinance Model

This model applies Islamic finance principles to provide social financing for individuals or groups excluded from the conventional banking system (unbankable communities). Key features include:

- ✓ Utilizing sharia-compliant financing products such as murabahah, musyarakah, and mudharabah without interest (riba-free).
- ✓ Emphasizing a social approach through mentoring and capacity building to support the growth of beneficiaries' businesses and empower communities.
- ✓ Promoting financial inclusion and poverty reduction by providing sharia-aligned access to capital.
- ✓ Examples: The Islamic adaptation of the Grameen Bank model and Bank Muamalat's microfinance programs.

4. Hybrid Social-Commercial Model

The hybrid model combines a strong social mission with financial sustainability through diversified income strategies. Its key characteristics include:

- ✓ Implementing a mixed revenue structure that blends earned income (from selling products or services) with social donations.
- ✓ Reinvesting most of the profits back into social missions and program expansion.
- ✓ Innovating in the development of products or services tailored to the needs of beneficiary communities to ensure relevance and long-term impact.
- ✓ Examples: Islamic Relief Worldwide and Human Appeal International.

Implementation Strategies

1. Funding Strategies

The literature highlights a variety of funding strategies commonly adopted by Islamic Social Enterprises (ISEs), which can be grouped into three main categories:

- a. Islamic Philanthropic Funding
 - ✓ Zakat: Featured in 52 studies (76.5%), zakat serves as the primary source of social funds distributed in accordance with Islamic law.
 - ✓ Waqf: Found in 48 studies (70.6%), used to finance sustainable programs through productive asset management.
 - ✓ Infaq and Sadaqah: Mentioned in 41 studies (60.3%), providing flexible funding for various social initiatives.
 - ✓ Qard Hasan (benevolent loans): Identified in 23 studies (33.8%), offering interest-free financing as an alternative to support social enterprises.
- b. Market-Based Funding
 - ✓ Product/Service Sales: Reported in 38 studies (55.9%), representing revenues from social enterprise activities that ensure financial sustainability.
 - ✓ Islamic Social Investment: Discussed in 28 studies (41.2%), directing capital toward projects that generate both social impact and sharia-compliant financial returns.
 - ✓ Social Sukuk: Highlighted in 15 studies (22.1%), used as Islamic capital market instruments to finance projects with social objectives and sharia compliance.
- c. Strategic Partnerships
 - ✓ Collaboration with Islamic Financial Institutions: Found in 45 studies (66.2%), enhancing access to funding and resources.
 - ✓ Partnerships with Government: Identified in 34 studies (50%), supporting regulatory alignment and funding for social programs.
 - ✓ Corporate Collaborations: Cited in 29 studies (42.6%), involving CSR programs and social investments from private sector entities.
2. Operational Strategies
 - a. Community-Based Approach
 - ✓ Encouraging community participation in decision-making to ensure programs align with local needs.
 - ✓ Empowering group-based economic activities to strengthen community capacity.
 - ✓ Applying a bottom-up approach to ensure relevance, inclusivity, and sustainability.
 - b. Mentorship and Capacity Building
 - ✓ Providing technical and managerial training for beneficiaries and organizational staff.
 - ✓ Delivering Islamic financial literacy education to enhance understanding and proper fund management.
 - ✓ Offering continuous mentoring to ensure program consistency and skill enhancement.
 - c. Social Innovation
 - ✓ Digitalizing services through Islamic fintech to improve accessibility and operational efficiency.
 - ✓ Developing innovative, technology-based business models that adapt to community needs.
 - ✓ Integrating blockchain technology to enhance transparency and accountability.
3. Sustainability Strategies
 - a. Financial Sustainability
 - ✓ Diversifying revenue streams to minimize dependence on a single funding source.

- ✓ Improving operational efficiency to optimize resource utilization and reduce costs.
- ✓ Establishing reserve funds as financial buffers.
- ✓ Applying cost recovery mechanisms through sound pricing strategies.
- b. Social Sustainability
 - ✓ Building the capacity of beneficiaries to foster self-reliance and productivity.
 - ✓ Creating supportive ecosystems that generate synergy among stakeholders.
 - ✓ Strengthening networks and collaborations to expand the social impact of programs.
- c. Institutional Sustainability
 - ✓ Implementing Islamic governance principles to ensure integrity and accountability.
 - ✓ Professionalizing management in organizational and program operations.
 - ✓ Establishing effective monitoring and evaluation systems for continuous improvement.
 - ✓ Promoting transparency and accountability in reporting to all stakeholders.

Impacts of Islamic Social Enterprise

The impact of implementing Islamic Social Enterprises (ISEs) can be categorized into four major dimensions: economic, social, spiritual–moral, and environmental aspects.

Economic Impact

- a. Income Improvement
 - ✓ A total of 58 studies (85.3%) report significant increases in beneficiaries' income, ranging from 35–75% growth within 1–2 years.
 - ✓ This improvement reduces dependency on external aid and strengthens beneficiaries' economic self-reliance.
- b. Job Creation
 - ✓ 45 studies (66.2%) highlight job creation, with each organization generating between 10 and 500 new employment opportunities.
 - ✓ Most programs focus on marginalized groups—such as women, youth, and people with disabilities—and promote entrepreneurship to enhance economic inclusion.
- c. Financial Inclusion
 - ✓ 52 studies (76.5%) show increased financial access, with 40–85% of beneficiaries obtaining financing facilities.
 - ✓ Improved Islamic financial literacy has also been noted, enabling beneficiaries to manage finances better and avoid reliance on informal moneylenders.

Social Impact

- a. Poverty Alleviation
 - ✓ 62 studies (91.2%) report significant poverty reduction, with a shift from short-term alleviation to long-term graduation, emphasizing empowerment and sustainable independence.
 - ✓ The studies identify a notable rise in multidimensional well-being—economic, social, and cultural.
- b. Women's Empowerment
 - ✓ 48 studies (70.6%) demonstrate increased economic participation among women, along with greater decision-making power within families and communities.
 - ✓ Women also experience improved access to education and healthcare services.
- c. Social Cohesion

- ✓ Strengthened community solidarity and trust, reduced socio-economic disparities, and the growth of stronger social capital are among the most consistent outcomes.

d. Education and Health

- ✓ 41 studies (60.3%) indicate improved access to education, while 37 studies (54.4%) note better health outcomes through scholarship programs and affordable or free healthcare services.

Spiritual and Moral Impact

a. Reinforcement of Islamic Values

- ✓ ISE initiatives promote the internalization of Islamic economic principles and encourage the practice of ibadah (worship) such as zakat and sadaqah.
- ✓ They also nurture Islamic character traits such as amanah (trustworthiness), shiddiq (truthfulness), tabligh (communication), and fathonah (wisdom).

b. Mindset Transformation

- ✓ Beneficiaries evolve from mustahik (zakat recipients) to muzakki (zakat contributors), developing entrepreneurial mindsets grounded in Islamic ethics and social consciousness.

c. Economic Da'wah

- ✓ 34 studies (50%) recognize ISEs as instruments of economic da'wah, showcasing Islam as a comprehensive solution for social welfare and economic development.

Environmental Impact

a. Ecological Sustainability

- ✓ 23 studies (33.8%) emphasize the importance of eco-friendly business practices and sustainable resource management, guided by the Islamic principle of mizan (balance).

b. Green Islamic Social Enterprise

- ✓ Several studies highlight initiatives such as organic farming, community-based waste management, and renewable energy projects, illustrating how ISEs integrate environmental sustainability with social and economic objectives.

Challenges and Barriers of Islamic Social Enterprise

The development and operation of Islamic Social Enterprises (ISEs) face several interrelated challenges spanning financial, institutional, regulatory, and operational dimensions.

1. Financial Challenges

- a. Dependence on Donations: Reported in 62 studies (91.2%), reliance on donations remains a major issue. This dependence makes financial sustainability fragile when donor contributions decline.
- b. Difficulty Achieving Financial Sustainability: Identified in 58 studies (85.3%), many ISEs struggle to balance their social missions with long-term financial stability, often lacking self-sustaining revenue streams.
- c. Limited Access to Formal Financing: Found in 54 studies (79.4%), limited access to formal financing institutions restricts business expansion, innovation, and investment opportunities.
- d. High Operational Costs: Elevated administrative and management expenses reduce efficiency and limit the effective use of available resources.

2. Institutional Challenges

- a. Limited Managerial Capacity: Reported in 51 studies (75.0%), many ISE managers lack adequate professional skills in business management, strategic planning, and organizational leadership.

- b. **Weak Governance:** Identified in 43 studies (63.2%), weaknesses in implementing transparent and accountable governance systems hinder institutional credibility and stakeholder trust.
 - c. **Inadequate Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:** Found in 48 studies (70.6%), many organizations lack proper mechanisms to assess outcomes and drive continuous improvement.
 - d. **Lack of Professionalism in HR and Operations:** The absence of structured human resource management and standardized operational procedures further constrains institutional performance.
3. **Regulatory Challenges**
- a. **Unclear Legal Frameworks:** Highlighted in 38 studies (55.9%), ambiguity in sharia and business regulations creates uncertainty and complicates ISE operations and growth.
 - b. **Regulatory Inconsistency Across Regions:** Differences in local policies result in inconsistent implementation, obstructing national and international expansion.
 - c. **Limited Government Policy Support:** A lack of governmental incentives, policy frameworks, and institutional support limits ISE development and recognition.
 - d. **Complex Sharia Compliance Requirements:** The need for strict adherence to sharia principles adds regulatory and operational burdens, particularly for organizations lacking access to qualified sharia advisors.
4. **Operational Challenges**
- a. **Limited Scalability:** Reported in 45 studies (66.2%), many ISEs struggle to scale their operations while maintaining social focus and service quality.
 - b. **Difficulty Measuring Social Impact:** Identified in 52 studies (76.5%), comprehensive social impact measurement remains complex and resource-intensive, limiting the ability to demonstrate tangible outcomes.
 - c. **Balancing Mission and Sustainability:** One of the most critical dilemmas—reported in 61 studies (89.7%)—is maintaining equilibrium between social objectives and financial viability.
 - d. **Competition with Conventional Institutions:** Intense competition with mainstream commercial and social organizations, particularly in market access and resource acquisition, poses ongoing challenges for ISEs.

Discussion

Distinctive Features of Islamic Social Enterprise (ISE)

1. Theological and Philosophical Foundations

Islamic Social Enterprise (ISE) is built upon a strong theological foundation rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith. Rather than being a mere adaptation of the conventional social enterprise model, ISE embodies fundamental Islamic values such as social justice (*'adālah ijtīmā'īyyah*), solidarity (*takaful*), and collective responsibility (*farḍ kifāyah*). Unlike conventional social enterprises, which are typically grounded in neoclassical economics or stakeholder theory, ISE integrates *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as its evaluative framework for success.

The *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*—the preservation of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and wealth (*ḥifẓ al-māl*)—serve as guiding principles in designing business models and assessing outcomes. This study confirms the literature's assertion that ISE seeks not only to create economic and social value but also to generate spiritual value as an integral dimension of its mission.

2. Islamic Financial Instruments as Competitive Advantages

ISE possesses access to distinctive Islamic financial instruments unavailable to conventional counterparts. Zakat, as a religious obligation generating trillions of dollars globally, provides a stable and sustainable source of funds. In countries with large Muslim populations such as Indonesia, zakat potential is estimated at 3.4% of GDP, though only about 1% is currently realized.

Productive waqf introduces an enduring asset model capable of generating perpetual income without capital depletion. Unlike conventional endowments, waqf carries a spiritual dimension that encourages widespread participation. Innovations such as cash waqf and share waqf further democratize access to philanthropic instruments previously reserved for the wealthy. Similarly, qard ḥasan (interest-free loans) offer non-burdensome financing alternatives, enhancing the viability of microenterprises. Profit-and-loss-sharing schemes such as muḍārabah and mushārahah create equitable partnerships between capital providers and entrepreneurs, mitigating the moral hazard often found in interest-based systems.

Business Models and Strategic Innovation

1. Hybrid and Complex Structures

Findings indicate that ISEs often adopt complex hybrid models integrating multiple funding streams and diverse activities. This hybridization reflects the pursuit of balancing financial sustainability with an ambitious social mission but also introduces managerial and governance challenges. Existing literature highlights that hybrid organizations face institutional complexity and the risk of mission drift. Within the ISE context, pressures to achieve financial viability may inadvertently compromise sharī‘ah principles or social missions. Thus, robust governance structures and strong sharī‘ah compliance systems are crucial to safeguard organizational integrity.

2. Digital Innovation

The study identifies a strong trend toward digitalization in ISEs, particularly accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The rise of sharia fintech platforms, zakat-based crowdfunding, and blockchain-enabled waqf transparency exemplifies transformative innovations. Digital technologies enhance operational efficiency, expand outreach, and build trust through transparency. However, the digital divide remains a pressing concern. Beneficiaries in rural areas or older demographics often struggle to access digital services. Therefore, ISEs must develop omnichannel strategies that integrate both digital and physical engagement points to ensure inclusivity and equitable participation.

3. Scalability and Replication

Many ISEs struggle to scale their impact due to dependence on local contexts, variations in sharī‘ah interpretation across regions, and limited managerial capacity. Successful models in one location are not easily replicable elsewhere without substantial adaptation. Research on social enterprise scaling emphasizes the need for process standardization and knowledge codification. In ISE, the tension between standardization (for efficiency) and contextualization (for local relevance) must be strategically managed. Franchise-based or networked models may offer solutions—maintaining quality standards while allowing flexibility for local adaptation.

Multi-Dimensional Impact and Its Measurement

1. Beyond Economic Metrics

ISE generates impact beyond economic outcomes. Spiritual and moral transformation among beneficiaries emerges as a key yet underappreciated dimension. The transition from mustahik (recipient) to muzakki (giver) is not merely an economic indicator but a profound transformation of social identity and moral agency. While existing impact measurement frameworks such as Social Return on Investment

(SROI) or Impact Reporting and Investment Standards (IRIS) focus on economic and social dimensions, they fail to fully capture spiritual outcomes. Thus, ISEs require an evaluative framework that integrates maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah as ultimate indicators of holistic impact.

2. Complexity of Attribution and Causality

Most reviewed studies face challenges in establishing causal links between ISE interventions and observed outcomes. Qualitative methods provide deep insights but are limited in demonstrating causality due to uncontrolled external factors such as macroeconomic conditions, government policies, and community dynamics. Future research should employ mixed-methods approaches combining qualitative richness with quantitative rigor. Quasi-experimental designs (e.g., difference-in-differences, propensity score matching) and longitudinal studies could better reveal causal effects and the sustainability of long-term impact.

3. Unintended Consequences

Several unintended effects are reported in the literature. Dependency syndrome, where beneficiaries become reliant on external aid, and elite capture, where benefits are monopolized by local elites, are recurring issues. Gender-related unintended effects also arise. Although many ISEs promote women’s empowerment, some initiatives inadvertently increase women’s workloads without significantly altering household power dynamics. These findings underscore the necessity of contextual sensitivity and continuous monitoring to prevent interventions from reinforcing existing inequalities.

Sustainability Challenges

1. The Financial Sustainability Paradox

ISEs face a fundamental paradox: those prioritizing financial sustainability risk mission drift, while those prioritizing social missions face financial fragility. This tension is further exacerbated by stakeholders’ unrealistic expectations for simultaneous maximization of social impact and financial independence. There is no universal solution to this paradox. Each ISE must identify an optimal balance tailored to its mission, context, and stage of development. The Islamic principle of wasatiyyah (moderation) offers valuable philosophical guidance for navigating this equilibrium.

2. Human Capital Deficit

A shortage of qualified human capital represents a major bottleneck. ISEs require individuals with a rare combination of sharī‘ah knowledge, business acumen, and social commitment—skills seldom found in a single person. Investments in capacity building and leadership development are therefore essential. Partnerships with Islamic higher education institutions to design curricula in Islamic social entrepreneurship can help build a sustainable talent pipeline. However, non-competitive compensation relative to the corporate sector remains a key challenge in attracting and retaining top talent.

3. Regulatory Ambiguity

Regulatory ambiguity continues to impede ISE growth. Many countries lack legal frameworks specifically tailored to social enterprises, let alone Islamic ones. As a result, organizations operate under NGO, foundation, or commercial classifications—each with constraints that fail to fully capture ISE’s hybrid nature. Regulatory clarity is critical for legal certainty, tax incentives, and access to government support. Countries such as Malaysia and the UK provide valuable policy models, but any policy transfer must consider contextual and theological distinctions inherent to ISE.

Ecosystem and Collaboration

1. Supportive Ecosystem

ISE success is not solely determined by organizational capacity but also by the surrounding ecosystem. This ecosystem includes Islamic financial institutions providing patient capital, academic institutions generating research and talent, government agencies creating an enabling regulatory environment, and intermediaries facilitating capacity building and networking. Consistent with entrepreneurial ecosystem theory, ecosystem development is a co-evolutionary process requiring multi-stakeholder coordination. Umbrella organizations such as an Islamic Social Enterprise Network could play a catalytic role in consolidating dispersed actors and promoting collective action.

2. Strategic Partnerships

The study identifies diverse partnership models contributing to ISE effectiveness. Collaborations with corporations through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or Creating Shared Value (CSV) initiatives provide access to resources and expertise. Partnerships with Islamic philanthropic bodies such as BAZNAS expand funding bases, while alliances with universities strengthen research capacity and credibility. However, partnerships also entail challenges—power asymmetries, interest misalignments, and coordination costs may hinder effectiveness. Successful partnerships are typically characterized by shared values, clear governance mechanisms, and mutual accountability.

Theoretical Implications

1. Contribution to Social Enterprise Theory

This study contributes to the theoretical development of social enterprise by demonstrating how religious and cultural contexts shape the manifestation and dynamics of social enterprise models. Islamic Social Enterprise (ISE) challenges the universalist assumptions embedded in mainstream social enterprise theory, which has largely evolved within secular Western contexts. Findings reveal that motivation, governance, and impact measurement within ISE exhibit distinctive characteristics not fully captured by existing theoretical frameworks. This underscores the need to develop context-sensitive or middle-range theories that better reflect non-Western paradigms and enrich the global understanding of social enterprise phenomena.

2. Integrating Islamic Perspectives into the Social Economy Discourse

ISE represents a concrete operationalization of Islamic economic principles. This study demonstrates that Islamic economics is not merely a theoretical abstraction but a viable framework that can be embodied in impactful organizational models. Hence, it opens intellectual dialogue between Islamic economics scholarship and the broader social economy discourse. Core Islamic values such as *takaful* (mutual solidarity), *ihsan* (excellence and benevolence), and *'adālah* (justice) find tangible application in the design and practice of ISEs. Future research may explore how these principles are translated into organizational practices and how they influence performance and social outcomes across diverse institutional contexts.

Practical Implications

1. For Practitioners and Social Entrepreneurs

This study offers several practical insights for individuals and organizations seeking to establish or strengthen ISEs:

- a. First, clarity of mission and alignment with shari‘ah principles from the inception phase are crucial. Preventing mission drift requires strong founding values supported by governance mechanisms that ensure accountability to the mission.
- b. Second, diversification of funding sources is essential for sustainability. Overreliance on a single source creates financial vulnerability. A balanced mix of earned income, philanthropic capital, and impact investment can build a more resilient financial model.
- c. Third, investment in measurement and evaluation systems is vital for demonstrating impact and attracting stakeholder support. The adoption or adaptation of frameworks such as Social Value UK—or the development of ISE-specific metrics—can enhance credibility and transparency in reporting social value creation.

2. For Policymakers

The findings offer several recommendations for policymakers:

- a. First, there is a need to develop a dedicated legal framework for social enterprises that accommodates their hybrid nature and recognizes the distinctive features of ISEs. Such a framework should provide legal clarity, tax incentives, and access to government support mechanisms.
- b. Second, strengthening regulatory infrastructure for zakat, waqf, and other Islamic philanthropic instruments is imperative. Professional oversight, standardization, and transparency can enhance public trust and donor confidence.
- c. Third, integrating ISE within national development strategies—particularly in poverty alleviation, employment creation, and financial inclusion—can amplify socio-economic impact. Governments can play an enabling role by providing infrastructure, capacity-building programs, and market facilitation initiatives.

3. For Islamic Financial Institutions

- a. Islamic financial institutions (IFIs) play a strategic role in supporting the ISE ecosystem:
 - ✓ First, developing specialized financial products tailored to social enterprise needs—such as patient capital, quasi-equity, and hybrid financing instruments—can balance financial returns with social impact objectives.
 - ✓ Second, establishing dedicated units or subsidiaries focused on social finance and impact investment can help mainstream social investment within the Islamic finance industry while creating a sustainable funding pipeline for ISEs.
 - ✓ Third, adopting impact measurement frameworks in investment decisions can ensure alignment between financial performance and maqāṣid al-shari‘ah-driven outcomes. Integrating financial, social, and environmental indicators can promote a holistic value creation model within Islamic finance.

Future Research Agenda

Building on identified gaps and limitations in the existing literature, several future research directions are proposed:

1. Methodology and Measurement

Future studies should develop rigorous methodologies to measure the multidimensional impact of ISEs, including spiritual and moral transformation. Developing standardized metrics grounded in maqāṣid al-shari‘ah would facilitate cross-organizational comparison and evidence-based policymaking.

Longitudinal research is also essential to understand the sustainability of impact and the trajectory of beneficiary transformation. Quasi-experimental and experimental designs can help establish causal relationships and identify the most effective interventions across varying contexts.

2. Comparative Studies

Comparative research across countries and regions can illuminate the contextual factors influencing ISE success. Understanding how regulatory environments, cultural norms, and economic conditions shape performance will inform more effective policy and management strategies. Additionally, comparative analyses between Islamic and conventional social enterprises are valuable for identifying distinctive features and assessing the relative effectiveness of different approaches in achieving social objectives.

3. Sector-Specific Research

Existing studies tend to be generic or concentrated in sectors such as microfinance. Future research could extend to sectors like healthcare, education, environmental conservation, and technology. Each sector presents unique challenges and opportunities that must be understood to design effective and context-specific ISE strategies.

4. Critical Perspectives

Future research should adopt more critical perspectives by examining not only success stories but also failures, unintended consequences, and power dynamics. Such inquiry can reveal potential issues such as exploitation of religious sentiments, greenwashing or Islam-washing, and elite capture that may inadvertently perpetuate inequality. Engaging critically with these dimensions will strengthen the integrity, accountability, and transformative potential of ISE as a tool for sustainable development.

CONCLUSIONS

This systematic literature review reveals that Islamic Social Enterprise represents an innovative model that integrates Islamic economic principles with social entrepreneurship to address persistent social and economic challenges. Its distinctive characteristics lie in its theological foundation, access to Islamic philanthropic instruments, and its orientation toward spiritual transformation alongside economic and social improvement. The findings indicate that Islamic Social Enterprise has made significant positive contributions in areas such as poverty alleviation, financial inclusion, women's empowerment, and community development. However, challenges related to sustainability, capacity limitations, and regulatory ambiguity remain obstacles that must be addressed through strengthening the supporting ecosystem, implementing policy reforms, and enhancing organizational capacity. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of social enterprise by demonstrating how religious and cultural contexts shape organizational forms, strategies, and outcomes. Islamic Social Enterprise is not merely a variant of the mainstream social enterprise but rather represents an alternative paradigm grounded in a distinct worldview—one that pursues a unique conception of prosperity and well-being encompassing material, social, and spiritual dimensions.

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