

Sustainable Issues in Building Operations and Maintenance of Religious Schools in Malaysia



Huraizah binti Arshad, Izran Sarrazin bin Mohammed, Nor Nazihah binti Chuweni

Abstract: In Malaysia, Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) (Community Religious Schools), Sekolah Agama Negeri (SAN) (State Religious Schools), Madrasahs and Pondok are the Islamic Education Institutions that were established since the arrival of Islam in Tanah Melayu. Normally, these schools are built on lands donated in a perpetual manner for charitable purposes under the administration of State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRC). The establishment of these institutions has played significant roles in the socio-economic development of the Muslim community in Malaysia. Unfortunately, numerous studies have highlighted various issues including on the maintenance management practices towards the sustainable aspects of these school buildings. Large numbers of school buildings are ill-managed and are deprived of basic repairs or maintenance. This research first identified the related factors through a review of current literature in established journals, articles and books in order to interpret the sustainable issues from a global perspective. The literature identifies five issues that impede the effective and efficient maintenance management of religious schools towards sustainable practices including the aspects of financial, information management, specialists, administration and marketing. Questionnaire surveys were distributed to relevant respondents involved in the administration and management of religious school buildings in Malaysia. Frequency and criticality index calculations were carried out to rank the factors according to levels of criticality. The findings indicate that managerial problems, especially on knowledge and expertise among school administrators, are the main barriers hindering effective and efficient management of these religious schools. The authorities ought to prioritize these issues to ensure the sustainability of the delivery of the waqf educational system. Success in overcoming this problem is crucial in supporting the Transformation Plan for Waqf Property Development set out by the government.

Keywords: Waqf Property; Maintenance Management; Sustainable; School Administrators; Religious Schools

I. INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint set

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up to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all levels of life. This initiative addressed all issues, including those related to climate, environment degradation, prosperity, poverty, and inequality of life [1], and translate the agenda into a strategic resolution, including the aspect of education. Obtaining a quality education is the foundation for creating sustainable development. In addition to improving the quality of life, access to inclusive education can help every human being to acquire knowledge, skills, attitude, and values necessary to develop innovative solutions for sustainable future [1]; [2]; [3]. The condition of school building and facilities are the main element to be maintained and managed in order to ensure the achievement of sustainable in education. It is important in promoting a participatory learning environment [2]. Researchers have found that school facilities can have a profound impact on student's achievement [4]–[6]. School facilities affect health, behavior, engagement, learning and growth of knowledge of the student [7] to be excellent duniawi and ukhrawi [8].

In Malaysia, there are five (5) types of Religious Schools. Religious Schools is essentially a place of teaching and learning of Islamic Religion [9], [10]. The existence of these schools has contributed to the socio-economic development of the Muslim community as well as to encourage the spirit of waqf; where most of the Religious Schools are built on the waqf land. Theoretically, the main purpose of waqf is to get Allah's blessing and give benefits to the ummah [11]. However, there are evidence-based research raising issues about the current situation of waqf-based religious school buildings in Malaysia. Despite of the contributions to the community, there are issues of administration and management [12]– [14] of these schools that left it unsustainable and indirectly could defeat its main functions and objectives. Among the complaints are that the condition of the facilities is not conducive to support the process of delivery of knowledge. The classrooms, corridors and other building services need remedial upkeep, replacements or restoration to ensure their effectiveness in supporting the teaching and learning process [14]. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the issues that impede the sustainable maintenance management of waqf-based religious school buildings in Malaysia. The existence of these issues become a barrier hindering the effective and efficient in waqf-based educational systems in Malaysia. The implementation of good and sustainable maintenance management should be in place as it helps ensure the safety of the student, efficiency in knowledge delivery system [15] and could also increase organisational productivity and service quality [16], [17].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Classification of Waqf-based Religious Schools

The Ministry of Education of Malaysia has classified the Islamic Religious Schools into five (5) categories; which are Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) (Community Religious Schools), Sekolah Agama Negeri (SAN) (State Religious Schools), Sekolah Agama Kementerian and Private Islamic Religious Schools [18], [19]. These Islamic Education Institutions and the practice of waqf in education in Malaysia has started since the arrival of Islam in Tanah Melayu [20], [21]. Pondok institutions are one of the earliest waqf-based education properties donated for religious study at the end 19th and 20th centuries [22]–[24]. Pondok Institutions popular among Muslim in Pattani, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu dan Seberang Perai [22]. Later in the early 20th century, the concept of Madrasah or Arabic School was initiated to develop a more systematic knowledge delivery system in religious studies. The Madrasah offers religious education with a systematic form of education facilitates to the graduates to pursue their studies to the higher level especially in al-Azhar University, Egypt [23]. Basically, the establishment of these schools has significantly contributed to the development of Muslim society as the graduates are normally academically, religiously, and ethically excellent. These graduates will normally give back to society by involving themselves in educating people about religious awareness to the public [19], [23], [25], [26]. In Johor, Islamic Religious School practice starting in 1918 with the name of the Quranic School, solely for the study of the Al-Quran. Subsequently, in 1923 religious education was further expanded by establishing Special Classes as the only extension of the Religious Evening School (Sekolah Agama Petang). In 1960 Maahad Johor was established as the center to further strengthened the level of knowledge in Islam. In 1988, Johor Religious Secondary School, Kluang (SMKJ) was established with introducing full boarding school [27].

In Malaysia, most of the religious schools are built on waqf lands. Waqf is an Arabic word derived from the root word waqafa, which, from a linguistic point of view means forbidding movement, transport or exchange of something. From the Shariah point of view, as defined by Khaf [12], waqf is holding a maal (an asset) and preventing its consumption only for the purpose of continuous righteousness and philanthropy. Therefore, waqf is continuously usufruct-giving assets as long as its principal is preserved [28]. Waqf practice became a pillar in the religious, social, cultural, economic and political life of Islamic society. There was waqf for schools, universities, mosques, hospitals, orphanages, houses and food for the needy, libraries, books, cemeteries, salaries and pensions [28]. The world-famous Al-Azhar University is proof of a successful application of waqf in education, which started centuries ago and still sustains its functions until today. The operational model of Al-Azhar is a combination of management and maintenance of facilities to ensure the services are more accessible and sustainable to benefit the whole Islamic world [29].

B. Management and Maintenance of Waqf-based Religious Schools in Malaysia

Maintenance is needed by all types of buildings. It can be described as an activity aiming to upkeep and maintain the performance of the building and facilities to meet its intended

purpose. To meet the main purpose of waqf, efficient and effective practice of building maintenance is needed [29]. It is in line with the definition of waqf which is to hold a specific property and preserving it for the benefit of the ummah. Any use or disposition other than for specific objectives by waqif is prohibited [30]. Theoretically, the practice of maintenance management is crucial to ensure the building and facilities continue to perform their intended functions [31]–[33]. In the context of schools, an efficient and effective building maintenance management becomes necessary to prevent the poor condition of school environment which will contribute to health problems, increased hazards or hidden risk in the school area [34]–[36].

Religious schools are built on the waqf land which donated for the purpose of Islamic Religious education. Hence, the implementation of sustainable maintenance management practices which is important in any organisation, especially waqf-based religious schools is essential to fulfil the main objectives of waqf to benefits the Ummah Muslim. Sustainable maintenance involves the process of strategic planning of maintenance activities [37] in order to make sure the maintenance practice is in line with organisational objective and at the same time using a minimal resource. School buildings and facilities as an assets and property to waqf institution should be used, utilized, maintained and managed in a good condition to support this operational requirement.

This is because there is a need for educational institutions to be properly managed and maintained in order to meet the objectives of waqf delivery system set out by Islamic Law or Shariah [38]. Subsequently, the expectations of society in terms of conducive and comfortable teaching and learning environments can be fulfilled. In Malaysia, waqf education management systems vary in every state. For example, in Johor, the Islamic Religious Department (Religious School Unit/Bahagian Sekolah Agama) is responsible for the administration, maintenance, and management of the schools [9], [22]. According to Enakmen Pengawalan Sekolah Agama (Religious School Monitoring Enactment), all types of religious school should be registered with State Islamic Religious Department to ease the process of monitoring the education delivery process, operation management including the teacher's appointment and maintenance management of school building and facilities. State Islamic Religious Department also responsible in channelling all the operation funds from Federal Government and State Islamic Religious Council [9], [26], [39].

C. Waqf-based Religious School Buildings Operations and Maintenance Management Issues

There are various research and studies about building maintenance management during the operations and management stage. Some of these studies highlight issues related to the maintenance of funds [35], [40], [41]. Some others touched on the competency of building maintenance manager [42]; design-related factors [43]; while a few reported on the maintenance management issues such as lack of maintenance management systems [44], [45]. There are also papers being written on the lack of maintenance policy and guidelines [46], [47].

Saghatforous [48] and [49] highlighted issues on operation and maintenance of the buildings including the issue of technical, managerial, political and legal, social and cultural and environmental and biological issues.

Similarly, waqf-based religious school buildings in Malaysia also experience the same problems. There are five (5) barriers hindering the effective and efficient maintenance management of waqf-based buildings in Malaysia [22]. These barriers are finance, information, specialist, administration, and marketing. Meanwhile, [23] Azha. L. later concluded that there are three (3) main factors that strongly influence the management aspects of waqf educational property management in Malaysia; namely specialist, administration and marketing. [14] reveals the issues of maintenance management of religious schools in Johor and Perak. The report highlighted the issues of inefficient and effective of the current practice of maintenance management at the schools including the lack of competent technical person, lack of maintenance planning which led to improper maintenance activities and lack of allocation of maintenance fund.

1) Specialist in Maintenance Management

Specialization in administration and management is a strategic issue. For the waqf properties to continuously provide benefits or usufruct to the beneficiaries, the managers of the waqf properties should set a productive strategy to overcome all the barriers and fully utilize the potential of waqf properties. It is also relating with the recruitment planning and staff selection process [50]. In Malaysia, waqf properties are managed under the responsibility of the State Islamic Religious Council (SIRC). SIRC acts as a sole trustee at the state level with the absolute power to determine how waqf properties are to be developed and managed [51]. In this case, SIRC also acts as an institutional mutawalli for the management of waqf property [52]. SIRC also have the authority to appoint another institution to be responsible as a mutawalli or nazir in managing the waqf properties, collecting cash waqf, or other related sources such as waqf share [53]. Since the meaning of waqf is for charitable purposes which gives it life-long assets, it could be utilized and use last forever [54], the main role of Mutawalli or Nazir is to make sure the sustainability of the waqf property to operate for the intended purpose. For waqf-based education buildings, SIRC will normally integrate their roles and function with the State Islamic Religious Department for the development, administration and maintenance management of the school buildings. However, there is a study done by several authors discussed the competency of Mutawalli in managing waqf property [55]. According to the [14], there is no technical person with adequate training and experience in the maintenance of the school facilities allocate at the school. Most of the responsibilities are fallen under the teacher's shoulder. Other than that, the report also reveals the current practice of maintenance management of school buildings is based on a corrective approach with no preventive maintenance plan provided prior maintenance works due to the incompetence of the manager.

2) Finance

There are two (2) types of waqf property which are income-generating and non-income generating waqf property. Waqf-based educational buildings are categorized as non-income generating properties. Without the regular income generated, one of the major problems faced by waqf property is the lack of funds for maintaining and managing

waqf properties including the operational costs [56], [57]. This situation will lead the waqf property to suffer from financial shortage [58]. This situation would also hinder the effective use of waqf property and waqf land could not be managed and developed efficiently towards sustainable due to insufficient funds [59]. Thus, this practice highly needs a competent school building manager to ensure the objective of organization could be achieved.

3) Administration

The management and administration aspects play critical roles in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the waqf delivery system. It comprises administrative of all resources required to perform the organisation's objectives. Unfortunately, numerous researchers have found that many waqf buildings are under-performing especially in administration aspects [13], [60]. This happens when some of the staff at waqf management bodies have lack of training and skills in handling various cases involving the management of the waqf [13], [61], [62] bureaucracy issue has also become the constraint towards waqf educational expansion. It has many levels of management and every business needs to undergo every level of management. It costs a long period of time to settle one matter/business [23]. Other issues include the legal aspect where all the state has different Act and Enactment [63], [64].

4) Information Technology

To ensure a more effective and efficient of waqf administration and management, ICT facility with a more systematic system and software should be used by all administrators in the whole country. This also can facilitate all facilitators to administer waqf to identify the latest information about the status of waqf property such as land total, space, land that has proceeds, land status, the purpose of waqf and many more [61]. However, there are cases related to registration of waqf properties; there are a lot of waqf land which is still registered under individuals, mosque committee or qariah or even the endowers themselves, delay in registration process and donor's heir refuses to acknowledge the waqf and decides to distribute the property according to estate distribution [65], [66].

5) Marketing

Lack of awareness about the waqf concept is another factor that affects the effectiveness of the waqf delivery system. Most of Muslims think that waqf is only for worshipping objectives [12]. The people are not aware that the waqf possesses big potentials in socio-economic, agricultural and other developments. To date, the waqf has only been seen for the interest of mosque and cemetery, whereas the waqf concept is very wide and can be applied in various sectors [23]. The updated and continuous information about the benefits of waqf needs to be disseminated to the public. Hence, it needs intellectuals' groups and commitment from SIRC to change the mentality of people regarding the traditional way of waqf. For the Muslims, religious awareness and its importance to gain rewards after world through waqf practices need to be adapted and improved [23], [53] also suggested that the institution needs to educate the Muslim community in order to make them conscious of the waqf importance.

III. METHODOLOGY

A preliminary survey was conducted to dig deeper into the issues of inefficient and ineffective building maintenance management of waqf-based religious schools in Malaysia. A questionnaire was designed based on the theoretical factors discovered in the literature. From the literature, there are five (5) sustainable issues that impede the effectiveness and efficiency of maintenance management of religious schools including the aspects of financial, information management, specialists, administration and marketing.

The Likert Scale was used to represent the criticality level of the factors [67,68,69]. The questionnaires were then distributed to relevant respondents involved in the administration and management of religious schools in Malaysia. 45 questionnaires were successfully returned. Frequency and criticality index calculations were carried out to rank the factors according to the level of criticality. The formula used for the calculation of the criticality index is as follows:

$$\text{Criticality Index} = \frac{5n_1 + 4n_2 + 3n_3 + 2n_4 + n_5}{5(n_1 + n_2 + n_3 + n_4 + n_5)}$$

Where,

- n_1 = number of respondents who answered 'strongly agree'
- n_2 = number of respondents who answered 'agree'
- n_3 = number of respondents who answered 'neutral'
- n_4 = number of respondents who answered 'disagree'
- n_5 = number of respondents who answered 'strongly disagree'

IV. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The list of barriers that impede the inefficient and effective school building maintenance has clearly been identified in this study. Competency among school administrator with regards to maintenance management practices were identified. This is due to the teachers' and administrators' lack of background in property and facility management. It also relates to the corrective approach of the current practice of building maintenance due to the lack of knowledge and skills in building maintenance management. As a result, the responsible parties should take proactive initiatives and approaches to mitigate the issues.

Figure 1 indicate that competency and specialist issues among school administrators are the main barriers. This is followed by the financial factor, administration, information and marketing factors that directly affect the implementation of building maintenance management of waqf-based religious school buildings in Malaysia.

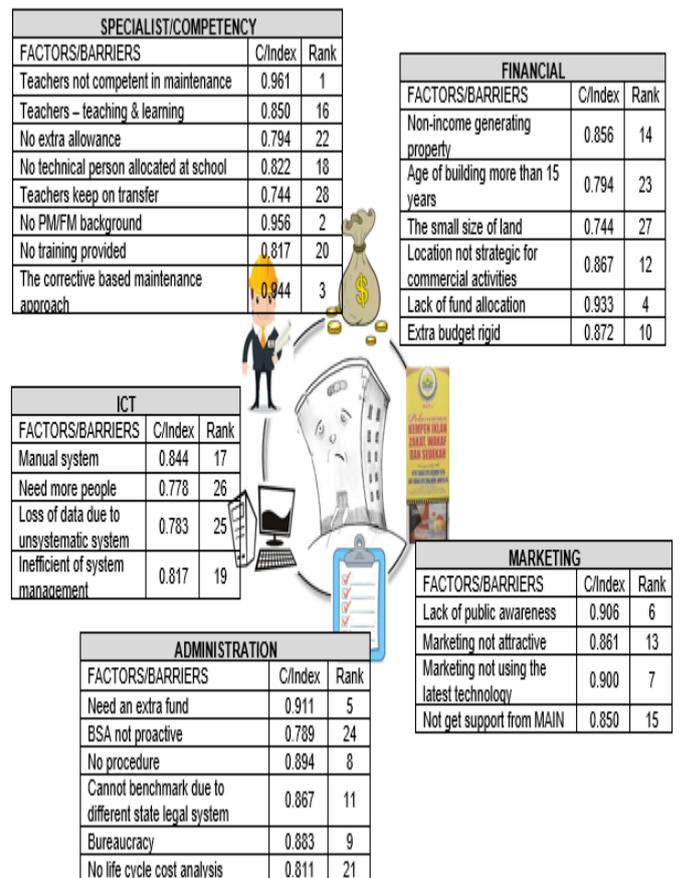


Figure 1: Summary of findings on sustainable issues in building maintenance management of waqf-based religious schools in Malaysia

V. CONCLUSION

This study presents the barriers and issues of maintenance and management and of waqf-based educational buildings that should be addressed especially by the waqf administrators. The authorities ought to prioritize these issues to ensure the sustainability of the delivery of the waqf educational system. SIRC as sole trustee and other waqf administrators should play a greater role as an efficient, skilful and professional administrator in managing, maintaining and preserving the perpetual concept of waqf properties. Success in overcoming this problem is crucial in supporting the Transformation Plan for Waqf Property Development set out by the government.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

This study has the potential for further study in the future. Appropriate improvements can be made in building maintenance management practices for waqf-based educational building, especially in schools. In addition, other developing and Muslim countries may refer to the findings of the study to apply in the management of school building management to better improve their efficiency and effectiveness, and ultimately become sustainable.

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