

Challenges of Zakat Management in Yala Province, Southern Thailand: A Stakeholder's Perspective

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Abstract

Purpose - This study examines the challenges and opportunities in Zakat management in Yala Province, Southern Thailand, from the perspectives of key stakeholders including individuals and families.

Method - A qualitative approach was employed, using focus group interviews with 38 informants across three stakeholder groups: Zakat payers, religious leaders and governmental representatives, and Zakat operators. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key challenges and propose solutions.

Results - Three major challenges in Zakat management were identified: (1) limited institutional capacity, including inadequate resources, infrastructure, and expertise; (2) insufficient operational knowledge, particularly regarding calculations and eligibility criteria; and (3) a lack of transparency and accountability in Zakat collection and distribution. Proposed solutions include establishing an official Zakat organization, leveraging technology platforms, strengthening collaboration with religious leaders, implementing transparency mechanisms, and creating centralized databases for effective management.

Practical Implication – Religious leaders and governmental representatives have put their concern over Zakat management in Thailand and this research would offer them insights on major challenges in Zakat good governance.

Originality – This paper is expected to enrich the literature of Zakat management in Thailand and strategies on how to maximize Zakat's role as an effective instrument for poverty reduction and the promotion of social justice.

Keywords: Zakat Management, Southern Thailand, Challenges and Opportunities, Stakeholder Perspective, Transparency and Accountability

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1. Background of Study

Zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam, serves as an obligatory act of charity aimed at redistributing wealth to support those in need. Beyond alleviating poverty, Zakat promotes social justice and strengthens community bonds. Traditionally, Zakat is collected from eligible Muslims who meet specific wealth thresholds and distributed across eight recipient categories: the poor (*Fuqara*), the needy (*Masakin*), Zakat collectors (*Al-Aamileen*), those whose hearts are to be reconciled (*Mu'allafat al-Qulub*), those freeing slaves (*Fir-Riqab*), debtors (*Al-Gharimin*), those striving in the cause of Allah (*Fi Sabilillah*), and wayfarers (*Ibn Sabil*). Effective Zakat administration is crucial to ensuring these funds achieve their purpose of reducing economic inequality and uplifting disadvantaged communities.

In many Muslim-majority regions, Zakat plays a vital role in the socio-economic framework. However, the management of Zakat often encounters significant challenges, particularly in areas with underdeveloped infrastructure for collection and distribution. Common obstacles include weak organizational structures, lack of transparency, inadequate training of Zakat administrators, and limited public awareness regarding proper Zakat channels. Furthermore, traditional Zakat systems frequently struggle to integrate modern technological advancements that could enhance the efficiency and reach of Zakat management.

Thailand presents a unique context for Zakat practice, especially in its southern provinces, where a predominantly Buddhist nation encompasses a significant Muslim minority. Yala Province, located in Thailand's deep south near the Malaysian border, is one of three Muslim-majority provinces. Zakat plays a critical role in the religious and social lives of the Muslim community in Yala. However, the province faces numerous challenges in Zakat management, exacerbated by political instability, poverty, and social unrest. Decades of conflict have hindered development in Yala, leaving it as one of Thailand's most economically disadvantaged regions. High poverty levels, unemployment, and social marginalization further complicate the effective collection and distribution of Zakat funds.

Previous Zakat studies in Thailand have primarily focused on systems in other provinces, such as Pattani, Narathiwat, and Chiang Mai, where Zakat management is relatively more efficient. Limited research has been conducted on Zakat systems in Yala, and most studies in the southern provinces focus on the perspectives of the general public and Islamic religious leaders, neglecting other key stakeholders directly involved in Zakat systems. More importantly, Zakat operators in Yala differ from those in other southern provinces, as they are representatives of Muslim foundations and fund groups established by senior private-sector employees and retired government officials. These individuals appear to be dissatisfied with the religious organization-led Zakat management system, citing concerns about its efficiency and governance.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the challenges and opportunities in Zakat management in Yala Province. By analyzing the perspectives of three stakeholder groups—Zakat payers, religious leaders and government representatives, and Zakat operators—this research provides a comprehensive evaluation of the operational and institutional factors affecting Zakat distribution in the region. Ultimately, the study contributes to the discourse on enhancing Zakat governance and offers practical recommendations for improving Zakat management in Yala Province. These insights aim to ensure Zakat fulfills its potential as a tool for poverty alleviation and social justice.

The paper consists of five sections. Section Two provides literature review on zakat management while Section Three elaborates Research Methodology which is on focus group

interview. Section Four presents Analysis and Discussion and Section Five illustrates conclusion and recommendation for future research.

2. Literature Review

The management of Zakat remains a critical issue for Muslim communities worldwide. As one of the five pillars of Islam, Zakat is not only a religious obligation but also a significant instrument for fostering social justice and alleviating poverty. The principle of Zakat revolves around redistributing wealth within society to reduce inequality and support marginalized groups. However, the practical management of Zakat systems has proven to be challenging in various contexts, particularly in regions affected by socio-political and economic complexities. These challenges are compounded in areas where institutional frameworks are underdeveloped or where governance structures are weak. The existing literature highlights the obstacles faced by Zakat institutions and underscores the opportunities for reform and innovation to enhance its efficacy. This discussion holds particular relevance in Southeast Asia, where Zakat plays a vital role in addressing socio-economic disparities, and more specifically in southern Thailand, a region with a significant Muslim population that heavily relies on Zakat for social welfare.

One of the most pervasive challenges in Zakat management is the lack of institutional capacity and operational inefficiencies. Zakat is often managed by local religious institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or small community-based groups. These entities frequently lack the necessary resources, infrastructure, and professional expertise to effectively oversee the processes of Zakat collection, distribution, and monitoring. This inadequacy results in inefficiencies that hinder the proper utilization of Zakat funds, particularly in regions where administrative support is limited or the population is geographically dispersed.

The absence of centralized systems for Zakat management exacerbates these inefficiencies. As noted by Abdullah (1991) and Iqbal and Nor (2024), decentralized and fragmented Zakat systems in countries like Indonesia and Pakistan have led to significant logistical and operational challenges. These inefficiencies often result in missed opportunities to reach vulnerable populations, such as refugees or those residing in remote rural areas. In the context of southern Thailand, including provinces like Yala, similar administrative hurdles persist. Research by Cheumar et al. (2020) highlights that while Zakat is essential for addressing the socio-economic needs of the Muslim population in the four predominantly Muslim provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Satun, the institutions managing Zakat in these areas are often ill-equipped to handle large volumes of contributions. The absence of a centralized management system leads to fragmentation among Zakat agencies, complicating the processes of coordinating donations, tracking fund allocations, and ensuring equitable distribution.

Transparency and accountability are fundamental to the success of Zakat management systems. Clear governance structures, reporting mechanisms, and auditing practices are essential to ensure the proper use of Zakat funds and to maintain the trust of donors and recipients. However, the literature frequently points to a lack of transparency as a critical challenge facing Zakat institutions. Without robust mechanisms for reporting and accountability, there is a heightened risk of fund mismanagement, misuse, or even corruption, which can severely undermine the credibility and effectiveness of Zakat systems.

According to Mansor and Mustaffa (2020), many Zakat institutions in developing countries operate without adequate governance frameworks, leading to gaps in transparency and accountability. In the Thai context, Zakat organizations have been criticized for insufficient

transparency, raising concerns about the potential misuse of funds. Zainuddin (2017) notes that the lack of clear governance in Zakat administration has resulted in a trust deficit among community members, often leading to reduced contributions. This issue is particularly acute in Thailand, where Zakat institutions are frequently tied to local mosques or smaller religious organizations that may lack the capacity to implement standardized reporting and auditing procedures. The absence of these practices creates uncertainty within the Muslim community regarding the fairness and effectiveness of Zakat distribution.

The socio-political landscape in southern Thailand further complicates the effective management of Zakat. The region has experienced decades of conflict and unrest, primarily due to tensions between Muslim separatist groups and the Thai government. This ongoing conflict has created a complex environment that poses significant challenges to Zakat institutions. The political instability and security concerns in provinces like Yala have disrupted the logistical processes of Zakat collection and distribution. Additionally, restricted mobility, heightened insecurity, and difficulties in accessing remote or conflict-affected areas exacerbate these challenges.

Wahyuni (2022) underscores the impact of conflict on Zakat management, noting that humanitarian efforts, including Zakat distribution, are often hindered by the volatile security situation. In southern Thailand, Zakat organizations must navigate these obstacles with limited resources and under constant threat, further limiting their capacity to reach the most marginalized and vulnerable populations. This situation underscores the importance of developing innovative strategies to mitigate the impact of conflict on Zakat systems.

Despite the myriad challenges, the literature also highlights several opportunities to enhance the management of Zakat. Integrating technology into Zakat systems offers significant potential for improving efficiency, transparency, and accessibility. For instance, the adoption of digital payment platforms and centralized databases can streamline the processes of Zakat collection and distribution while ensuring better accountability. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives aimed at professionalizing Zakat institutions can enhance their operational capabilities. Training programs for Zakat administrators, coupled with investments in infrastructure and resources, can strengthen institutional frameworks.

Community engagement is another critical area for improvement. Raising public awareness about the importance of Zakat and promoting trust in Zakat institutions can increase contributions and foster greater participation in Zakat systems. Collaborative efforts between stakeholders, including religious leaders, government agencies, private sector entities, and international organizations, can also play a transformative role in addressing existing inefficiencies and enhancing Zakat governance.

In conclusion, while Zakat management faces substantial challenges—ranging from institutional inefficiencies and lack of transparency to socio-political and security concerns—there are equally significant opportunities to improve its effectiveness. By leveraging technological advancements, fostering community trust, professionalizing institutions, and encouraging multi-stakeholder collaboration, Zakat can fulfill its potential as a powerful tool for poverty alleviation and social justice. In regions like southern Thailand, where socio-economic disparities remain pronounced, such advancements could profoundly impact the well-being of the Muslim community and contribute to broader societal harmony.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the challenges and opportunities of Zakat management in Yala Province, Thailand. The qualitative design allows for an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, experiences, and insights of various stakeholders

involved in the Zakat process. Given the complexity of Zakat management and its social implications, a qualitative approach is well-suited for capturing the nuanced views of different groups involved in Zakat administration and distribution.

Data Collection Method

The primary data collection method for this study is focus group interviews. Focus groups are ideal for gathering collective insights from participants who share common experiences or roles, allowing for dynamic discussions and the generation of rich qualitative data. The focus group interviews were conducted simultaneously with three distinct groups of Zakat stakeholders, chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Zakat management system from multiple perspectives. The total number of key informants was 38 persons. The three stakeholder groups were:

- 1) Zakat Payers: This group consists of individuals or families who pay Zakat such as businessmen, government officials who are not directly related to Zakat management, and private sector employees. They are considered to be high income groups and often pay Zakat. Their perspectives are crucial for understanding the effectiveness of Zakat collection, distribution and overall Zakat management.
- 2) Religious Leaders and Governmental Agencies: Representatives from mosques, Yala provincial Islamic council, the Central Islamic Council of Thailand, and related governmental agencies such as provincial social security office that often care for disabilities and the poor. This group offers insights into the religious and community-based dimensions of Zakat management **and somewhat relates to rules and regulations of current practice of Zakat in Thailand.**
- 3) Zakat Operators: These include the representatives of Muslim charitable foundations and organizations, Islamic financial institutions, and Zakat fund administrators, who are directly involved in the operational aspects of Zakat collection and distribution. In Yala Province, they largely include high-rank private sector employees, and retired government officials who do not satisfy with the current status of Zakat management system in Yala Province. They have then formed their Zakat institutions, trying to efficiently and effectively manage the institutions. They provide valuable insights into the administrative challenges, procedural gaps, and opportunities for improvement within the Zakat management system.

Focus Group Procedure

Data collection took place through organized focus group discussions, with each group being facilitated separately. Three facilitators were assigned to each group to ensure smooth and efficient management of the discussions. The facilitators had prior training in moderating focus group sessions and were equipped with guidelines to ensure that each group discussion remained on track and that all participants were able to contribute their views.

The focus groups were conducted in the local community, ensuring that participants felt comfortable and were able to express their opinions freely. The session was designed to last approximately 3 hours, providing ample time for participants to discuss their experiences and share insights on the challenges and opportunities of Zakat management. The discussions were structured around 2 key themes, related to Zakat collection, distribution, governance, transparency, and community involvement, including issues of Zakat management and possible solutions of those issues.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim for further analysis. Transcription ensured that all participants' voices were captured accurately, allowing for a rich dataset for thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns,

themes, and categories within the data. This method involves a systematic process of coding the data, identifying recurring ideas or issues, and organizing the data into meaningful themes that reflect the participants' perspectives.

Through thematic analysis, the study aimed to uncover the key challenges faced by different stakeholders in Zakat management, as well as the solutions for improvement. The analysis also aimed to explore the dynamics of Zakat management. Key themes were organized according to the specific roles and perspectives of the three stakeholder groups, allowing for a comparative analysis of how each group perceives the Zakat system and its impact on their community.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Zakat, a fundamental pillar of Islam, obligates Muslims to allocate a portion of their wealth to those in need, aiming to promote social welfare and reduce poverty. Despite its significance, the effective management and distribution of Zakat remains a pressing challenge in many Muslim-majority regions, including Yala Province. Key issues include limited institutional capacity, insufficient operational knowledge, and a lack of transparency and accountability. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders—Zakat payers, religious leaders, and Zakat operators—to enhance Zakat's role as a tool for poverty alleviation and social justice. The following table summarizes the findings of this study.

Table 1: Issues in Zakat Management in Yala Province

Issues in Zakat Management	Zakat Payers	Religious Leaders	Zakat Operators
1. Lack of Institutional Capacity			
1.1 Lack of resources and Professional Management Expertise	✓	✓	✓
1.2 Lack of infrastructure	✓		✓
1.3 Lack of centralized institution	✓		✓
1.4 Inadequate publicity		✓	✓
1.5 Lack of coordination		✓	✓
1.6 Lack of centralized information on Zakat		✓	✓
2. Lack of Operational Zakat Knowledge			
2.1 Knowledge on mandatory Zakat payers	✓	✓	
2.2 Zakat calculation	✓	✓	
2.3 Muslims' attitude and consciousness	✓		
2.4 Other <i>Fiqh</i> issues	✓	✓	
3. Transparency and Accountability			
3.1 No receipts	✓		
3.2 No accounting records	✓		
3.3 Lack of credibility		✓	✓

Zakat payers have raised significant concerns regarding institutional capacity, operational knowledge, and issues of transparency and accountability within Zakat institutions. Interestingly, religious leaders shared similar views but focused specifically on institutional capacity and operational Zakat knowledge. When examining institutional capacity, Zakat

payers highlighted the lack of resources as a critical limitation, while religious leaders expanded the discussion to include issues such as poor publicity, weak coordination, insufficient centralized information, and a lack of professional management expertise. In the realm of operational knowledge, challenges surrounding mandatory Zakat payers, calculation processes, and *Fiqh*-related matters emerged as prominent concerns. A common thread between these groups is the shared perception that Zakat institutions lack credibility in their operations.

On the other hand, Zakat operators directed their attention primarily toward various dimensions of institutional capacity. They identified several key challenges, including limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, the absence of centralized institutions, minimal publicity efforts, poor coordination, and insufficient centralized information on Zakat. Moreover, they pointed out a lack of professional management expertise as a barrier to effective operations. Transparency and accountability were less frequently mentioned, with operators focusing mainly on the perceived credibility deficit within Zakat institutions.

Among the many challenges, the lack of institutional capacity stands out as the most pressing issue impacting Zakat management. Institutional capacity refers to the essential resources, infrastructure, and organizational frameworks required to efficiently collect and distribute Zakat. Research by Mollah and Rahman (2022) highlights that many Zakat institutions are constrained by limited financial and human resources, severely hindering their effectiveness. This problem is especially prevalent in countries where Zakat collection is decentralized, often managed by small or informal organizations that lack the capability to oversee processes effectively. Addressing these challenges is crucial to enhancing the overall efficiency and credibility of Zakat management systems.

The subsequent sections delve deeper into these challenges, providing detailed insights into the institutional and operational barriers hindering Zakat institutions from reaching their full potential.

Lack of Institutional Capacity

The issue of insufficient institutional capacity encompasses several interrelated challenges, including inadequate resources, poor infrastructure, lack of centralized organizations, minimal publicity efforts, weak coordination, limited centralized information on Zakat, and insufficient professional management expertise. Each of these challenges is elaborated below.

Lack of Resources and Professional Management Expertise

A critical challenge facing Zakat institutions is the scarcity of financial and human resources. According to insights from key informants across all stakeholder groups, most Zakat institutions—ranging from mosques to Muslim foundations and Zakat fund groups—struggle to recruit qualified personnel. Often, founders assume operational roles on a voluntary basis, which compromises the institutions' efficiency. These findings align with the study by Hassan and Ali (2019), which highlighted a shortage of Zakat operators with expertise in finance, administration, and Islamic law, essential for ensuring the proper collection and equitable distribution of Zakat funds. Additionally, limited budgets restrict Zakat organizations' ability to conduct awareness campaigns, perform audits, and ensure that funds reach the intended beneficiaries. The lack of professional management expertise further exacerbates inefficiencies in fund planning, allocation, and accountability, as noted by Kamal and Ahmed (2020).

Lack of Infrastructure

Inadequate physical and technological infrastructure poses significant obstacles to Zakat management. In Yala Province, for instance, only a few Zakat institutions have dedicated offices, with many relying on mosque compounds for their operations. None of these institutions employ online platforms for Zakat collection and distribution activities. This finding supports Zainuddin and Shafii (2021), who emphasized that the absence of centralized databases and digital platforms hinders efficient tracking and monitoring of Zakat funds. Outdated, paper-based record-keeping methods are prone to errors and inefficiencies, while the lack of robust IT systems limits outreach to donors and beneficiaries, thereby reducing the overall impact of Zakat on poverty alleviation.

Lack of Centralized Institutions

The absence of centralized institutions overseeing Zakat collection and distribution is a major concern. Stakeholders, including Zakat payers and operators, advocate for a centralized Zakat authority with branches across Thailand to streamline operations and enhance efficiency. Currently, Zakat management in Thailand is governed by regulations issued by the Central Islamic Council, with provincial councils such as the Islamic Council of Yala Province tasked with implementation. However, these councils lack enforcement power, leaving Zakat collection and distribution fragmented among mosques, foundations, and Islamic schools. These findings corroborate Mustafa and Ali (2021), who observed that fragmented Zakat administration leads to inefficiencies, duplication of efforts, and a lack of oversight, increasing the risk of mismanagement and fund misappropriation.

Inadequate Publicity

Public awareness campaigns are vital for educating Muslims about their Zakat obligations and the system's potential for addressing poverty and inequality. However, most Zakat institutions fail to adequately publicize their activities due to budget constraints and concerns over the permissibility of using Zakat funds for publicity. Religious leaders and operators in Yala Province noted that limited promotional efforts result in low public engagement. This aligns with Ibrahim (2018), who found that many Muslims remain unaware of how their contributions can make a systemic impact, ultimately reducing the efficacy of Zakat systems.

Lack of Coordination among Stakeholders

Coordination between Zakat payers, religious leaders, and operators is critical for an efficient Zakat management system. However, this study found significant gaps in collaboration among stakeholders. Zakat operators, particularly foundations and Zakat fund groups in Yala Province, often manage collection and distribution independently of guidelines set by the Central Islamic Council, leading to inefficiencies. These findings are consistent with Kamal and Ahmed (2020), who argued that poor coordination results in duplicated efforts and uneven resource allocation. For instance, some recipients may receive Zakat from multiple institutions while others are left without assistance. The lack of centralized communication platforms exacerbates these inefficiencies, hindering information sharing and collaborative efforts.

Lack of Centralized Information on Zakat

The absence of a centralized database for Zakat donations, recipients, and management practices represents another significant barrier. In Yala Province, no unified system exists to track Zakat recipients, and institutions rely on certificates issued by the Islamic Council to verify eligibility. However, these certificates do not provide comprehensive recipient information. One key informant noted an instance where a recipient misused Zakat funds to purchase a

brand-new car after collecting from multiple institutions. This finding aligns with Hassan and Ali (2019), who highlighted that the lack of centralized data prevents Zakat operators from assessing program effectiveness and ensuring optimal fund allocation.

Lack of Operational Zakat Knowledge

In addition to institutional capacity, operational knowledge about Zakat represents a critical barrier to the effective functioning of the Zakat system. Ensuring the proper collection and distribution of Zakat requires stakeholders, including Zakat payers, religious leaders, and operators, to possess a thorough understanding of its principles and procedures. However, widespread knowledge gaps hinder the system's efficiency.

Mandatory Zakat Payers

A fundamental challenge in operational knowledge relates to identifying mandatory Zakat payers. Many Muslims, particularly those in non-Muslim-majority regions, lack clarity about their Zakat obligations. While most Muslims in Yala Province recognize Zakat as obligatory, there remains significant uncertainty regarding the minimum amount of wealth (*nisab*) required to trigger this obligation. As highlighted by Khan and Shafiq (2021), confusion about who qualifies as a mandatory Zakat payer results in inconsistencies in the collection process. A lack of awareness or education further exacerbates this issue, leading to individuals unintentionally neglecting their Zakat responsibilities.

Zakat Calculation

The calculation of Zakat is another domain where operational knowledge deficits are evident. Determining the Zakatable amount involves complex rules governing various forms of wealth. Participants in this study confirmed widespread confusion about the correct calculation methods, compounded by inconsistencies across online resources. Religious leaders noted that many Muslims in Yala Province relied heavily on their guidance to determine Zakat obligations, and some opted to forgo payment entirely due to uncertainty. This aligns with findings by Khan et al. (2020), who reported that Muslims often struggle to calculate Zakat on savings, investments, and business assets accurately. Such complexities can lead to either underpayment or overpayment, ultimately undermining the integrity and impact of the Zakat system.

Muslims' Attitude and Consciousness

The attitudes and consciousness of Muslims towards Zakat significantly influence its effectiveness. Feedback from Zakat payers in Yala Province suggests that many individuals are reluctant to both pay Zakat and engage with its principles. This reluctance, as Siddiqui (2022) suggests, often stems from a lack of perceived personal benefit and limited understanding of Zakat's broader social and economic impacts. Many Muslims are unaware of how Zakat contributions can address systemic challenges such as poverty, inequality, and homelessness, resulting in diminished motivation to fulfill their obligations.

Fiqh-Related Issues

The diversity of Islamic legal interpretations (*Fiqh*) regarding Zakat obligations further complicates operational knowledge. Participants noted significant confusion arising from differing scholarly opinions, particularly regarding the percentage of Zakatable wealth and the types of assets subject to Zakat. Another issue was whether those stakeholders who are involved in Zakat collection and distribution can be paid for their services. Although the majority of Muslims in Yala Province follow the Shafi'i school of thought, there remains a lack of understanding about its specific principles on Zakat. These findings are consistent with Chowdhury and Rahman (2021), who highlighted those variations among Islamic schools of

thought create disagreements and inconsistencies in Zakat practices. For instance, divergent views on Zakat calculations can result in delays and hesitations in the payment process, undermining the system's efficiency.

Lack of Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability are fundamental to fostering trust and ensuring the effective management of Zakat funds. However, many Zakat institutions face significant challenges in implementing these principles, leading to doubts about the proper use of funds.

Absence of Receipts

The lack of receipts for Zakat donations is a critical issue that undermines transparency. Receipts serve as proof of payment and provide assurance to donors that their contributions have been recorded and utilized appropriately. However, most Zakat payers in Yala Province reported not receiving receipts for their donations. Despite this, many continued to pay Zakat due to its obligatory nature, trusting that institutions would fulfill their responsibilities. Retired government officers, in particular, noted their trust in Zakat organizations they had helped establish, considering receipts unnecessary. This finding aligns with Othman and Yunus (2018), who emphasized that issuing receipts for every Zakat contribution is essential for maintaining transparency and fostering donor confidence.

Lack of Accounting Records

Proper accounting practices are crucial for tracking and verifying the use of Zakat funds. Yet, many Zakat institutions in Yala Province lack adequate accounting systems to record and monitor financial transactions. According to Zakat payers, most organizations failed to produce financial statements or make them publicly available. This deficiency hampers the ability to assess the effectiveness of Zakat programs and ensure funds are allocated appropriately. Zainuddin and Shafii (2021) highlighted that the absence of accounting records limits the capacity to evaluate whether Zakat funds are being utilized efficiently, further eroding public trust.

Credibility Challenges

A broader lack of credibility within Zakat organizations exacerbates transparency and accountability issues. Religious leaders indicated that Zakat management at mosques is often overseen by individuals appointed by the provincial Islamic council, typically the Imam, Khatib, and Bilal. However, Zakat payers expressed reservations about whether these committees could reliably distribute funds to eligible recipients. Additionally, Zakat operators who established independent institutions reported challenges in gaining public trust. Their donor base often consisted of personal connections, resulting in minimal contributions. This finding is consistent with Al-Qaradawi (2020), who observed that skepticism regarding the legitimacy of Zakat institutions—often stemming from allegations of mismanagement or inefficiency—can discourage Muslims from fulfilling their Zakat obligations.

To address these challenges, Zakat institutions must prioritize transparency by issuing receipts, maintaining accurate accounting records, and ensuring public accountability. Efforts to enhance credibility, such as adopting robust governance frameworks and promoting ethical practices, are also crucial for rebuilding trust and maximizing the impact of Zakat contributions.

Proposed Solutions by Stakeholder Groups

Stakeholders involved in Zakat management in Yala Province proposed several solutions to address the existing challenges and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the system. Table 2 presents these solutions, as recommended by Zakat payers, religious leaders, and Zakat

operators. The proposed measures are categorized under three key themes, corresponding to the issues discussed in the previous section, offering a structured approach to improving Zakat management practices.

Table 2: Proposed Solutions to Zakat Issues in Yala Province

Proposed Solution	Zakat Payers	Religious Leaders	Zakat Operators
1. Increase Institutional Capacity			
1.1 Establishment of an Official Zakat Organization	✓	✓	
1.2 Development of Technology Platforms	✓	✓	✓
1.3 Registration of Religious Leaders and Institutions		✓	
1.4 Dissemination of Operational Information		✓	
2. Enhancement of Operational Zakat Knowledge			
2.1 Enhanced Collaboration with Religious Leaders			✓
2.2 Educational Campaigns on Zakat		✓	
3. Improvement of Transparency and Accountability			
3.1 Development of Centralized Databases			✓
3.2 Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms		✓	✓
3.3 Capacity-Building Programs			✓

From the above table, the results of this study clearly demonstrated that the Zakat payers focused on increasing institutional capacity of Zakat management system, in general, and Zakat institutions, in particular. They therefore proposed to have established of an official Zakat institution so that they may pay their Zakat with the expectation that Zakat funding will be managed efficiently and effectively, meaning reaching the eligible recipients. An online Zakat platform was also proposed by this group, increasing efficiency of the Zakat payment, collection, and distribution. The religious leaders and government agency representatives emphasized on increase of institutional capacity while giving some proposals on the enhancement of operational Zakat knowledge and improvement of transparency and accountability. The Zakat operators suggested on the improvement on transparency and accountability of Zakat institutions and people involved. The development of a centralized database was predominant due to the fact that it will help reducing duplication of Zakat receivers and expanding Zakat distribution areas. The proposed solutions are explained in brief below:

Increase Institutional Capacity

a. Establishment of an Official Zakat Organization

Zakat payers emphasize the need for structured organizations to collect and manage Zakat funds effectively. The Zakat payers and the Zakat operators in Yala Province suggested that a central Zakat organization with a legal framework and clear organizational structure. Without these, Zakat management system could not be efficient and effective. This organization should

establish branches across the country and can be either attached to provincial Islamic councils or a separate entity. This aligns with the practices observed in Malaysia, where centralized Zakat institutions significantly improve the efficiency of Zakat collection and disbursement (Rahman, 2020). Structured organizations ensure that Zakat payers have a clear and trustworthy platform to fulfill their obligations. The stakeholders also called for clear legal guidelines on Zakat eligibility and distribution to eliminate ambiguities. This resonates with findings from Sri Lanka and India, where a lack of legal clarity created confusion among contributors (Hassan & Noor, 2021). A formalized legal framework can ensure consistency and fairness in the Zakat process. This approach is aligned with Al-Qaradawi's (2013) advocacy for structured governance to enhance compliance.

b. Development of Technology Platforms

The implementation of modern technology, including online platforms, can improve Zakat payment convenience and transparency. Currently, there are a few nation-wide platforms available. Most platforms were established by organizations or individuals with low credibility. According to them, more Zakat platforms created by provincial Islamic council or other official religious organizations would improve transparency and convenience for the stakeholders involved. This aligns with studies in Malaysia and Indonesia have shown that technology-driven platforms increase compliance and participation (Yaacob, 2019).

c. Registration of Religious Leaders and Institutions

To formalize their roles, religious leaders recommend a registration system to ensure accountability and recognition. The religious leader group suggested that there must be a system where all Zakat related organizations should be registered to ensure their credibility. The religious leaders who play the role as Zakat collectors, distributors and other positions should be registered and trained. They would then play their role effectively. This is in line with the study by Ali & Haneef (2019) who found that formal registration systems, as seen in centralized models like Malaysia, have been effective in standardizing roles and operations.

d. Dissemination of Operational Information

The religious leaders suggest improving transparency by publicly sharing detailed information about Zakat collection, disbursement, and outcomes. This would increase capacity and operational efficiency of Zakat institutions. This aligns with practices in Indonesia, where regular reporting and publicity campaigns significantly enhance trust (Amilin, 2017).

e. Enhancement of Operational Zakat Knowledge

Enhanced Collaboration with Religious Leaders

Zakat operators stressed the importance of collaboration with religious leaders to streamline processes and ensure consistent messaging. Ibrahim (2020) highlights that effective collaboration between stakeholders enhances trust and compliance. Providing adequate compensation for religious leaders ensures their sustained involvement in Zakat management. Countries such as Indonesia recognize religious leaders' contributions through financial support, enhancing their capacity to advocate for Zakat effectively (Amilin, 2017).

Educational Campaigns on Zakat

The religious leaders propose systematic efforts to educate the Muslim community about Zakat obligations, benefits, and procedures. Zakat festivals, Zakat educational campaigns, and Friday sermons could increase awareness and intention to pay Zakat among Yala Muslims. Similar campaigns in Indonesia have resulted in increased Zakat compliance (Amilin, 2017).

f. Improvement of Transparency and Accountability

Development of Centralized Databases

Zakat operators advocated for centralized databases to track Zakat contributions and recipients. The databases should include information on individual and household information that help to identify whether he/she is an eligible recipient. No duplication on Zakat distribution of one individual because the Zakat operators use the information from the same databases. At the same time, it helps to forecast the number of Zakat payers and the amount of Zakat. This proposal aligns with Rahman's (2020) findings, which emphasize the importance of data-driven systems in improving Zakat accountability and efficiency. To prevent overlapping disbursements, Zakat operators propose structured guidelines and systems. Studies in India report similar challenges, where decentralized systems resulted in duplication and inefficiencies (Khan, 2018).

g. Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms

The religious leaders and Zakat operators suggested that there could be some efforts to improve transparency through public reporting and audits could enhance the credibility of Zakat operators. These activities should improve transparency, accountability and credibility of Zakat institutions. Countries like Malaysia and Indonesia implement robust financial reporting practices, which Thailand can adopt (Rahman, 2020). Implementing rigorous monitoring mechanisms can address transparency and trust issues. Studies by Rahman (2020) highlighted those centralized systems with strong monitoring frameworks reduce misuse of Zakat funds.

h. Capacity-Building Programs

Zakat operators recommended professional trainings to enhance management and financial expertise. The trainings should include Zakat principles, financial management, promotional and communicational strategies, etc. Malaysia's capacity-building initiatives for Zakat operators serve as a successful model (Yaacob, 2019). Improving operators' skills can ensure better governance and transparency.

Zakat plays a crucial role in promoting social welfare and poverty alleviation in Muslim communities. However, its effectiveness is hindered by issues related to institutional capacity, operational knowledge, and transparency. By addressing these challenges, through institutional reforms, education, and enhanced accountability, the Zakat system can better serve its intended purpose and contribute to the broader goal of social justice.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Research

The management of Zakat in Thailand presents a complex landscape, shaped by both significant challenges and promising opportunities. As explored in the earlier sections, several key challenges impede the full potential of Zakat in addressing social welfare and poverty alleviation. One of the most prominent challenges is the lack of a unified and structured framework for Zakat management. Currently, there is no central regulatory body or cohesive policy that integrates the efforts of various organizations involved in Zakat collection and distribution. This decentralization results in inconsistencies and inefficiencies, preventing Zakat from being utilized to its maximum capacity.

Additionally, the issue of public awareness is a major barrier. Despite being a central tenet of Islamic social responsibility, the true potential of Zakat remains underappreciated by both the donors and recipients in Thailand. Many Muslims are unaware of how their contributions can be managed more effectively or how they can benefit from a more organized system. Similarly, there is a lack of comprehensive data regarding the recipients of Zakat, which hampers the effectiveness of targeting those most in need. The absence of accurate needs

assessments and follow-up mechanisms also means that the impact of Zakat remains difficult to measure, leading to a loss of confidence among potential donors.

However, these challenges also present significant opportunities for reform and growth in the Zakat management system in Thailand. One major opportunity lies in the adoption of modern technology to streamline and modernize the process. The implementation of digital platforms for Zakat collection, along with advanced tracking and reporting tools, could enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency. Such innovations could allow donors to see exactly how their contributions are being used, fostering greater trust and participation. Moreover, integrating mobile payment solutions and other technological tools could ease the process of giving, encouraging more people to contribute.

Another opportunity for improvement is the potential for collaboration and coordination between different stakeholders. By establishing a more cohesive relationship between religious institutions, government bodies, and the private sector, Thailand can create a more unified approach to Zakat management. A collaborative model would help reduce duplication of efforts and create a more effective allocation of resources. Furthermore, greater cooperation would ensure that Zakat is used in a way that aligns with both Islamic principles and national development goals, contributing to sustainable poverty alleviation.

Raising awareness among the Muslim population about the importance and benefits of Zakat is another key opportunity. Educational campaigns that highlight the social, economic, and spiritual benefits of Zakat could increase participation and promote a deeper understanding of its impact. Additionally, these campaigns should target both donors and recipients, ensuring that those in need understand their rights to Zakat and how they can access these resources. By fostering a culture of giving and ensuring that Zakat funds are distributed equitably, the system could significantly enhance its effectiveness.

Moreover, there is a growing need to reframe the perception of Zakat from being just an obligatory act of charity to a tool for social development and empowerment. By expanding its scope beyond direct charitable donations to encompass investment in long-term social projects such as education, healthcare, and economic empowerment, Zakat can play a critical role in reducing inequality and promoting inclusive growth. This holistic approach would ensure that Zakat is not only addressing immediate needs but also contributing to the sustainable development of disadvantaged communities.

In conclusion, while the challenges facing Zakat management in Thailand are significant, they are not insurmountable. By addressing these challenges through modern technological innovations, improving public awareness, fostering greater institutional collaboration, and adopting a broader perspective on Zakat's role in social development, Thailand can unlock the full potential of this Islamic institution. Through these efforts, Zakat can become a transformative force for social change, helping to address poverty, inequality, and social exclusion in ways that align with both Islamic values and national development priorities.

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