

# The Impact of Zakat Funds on Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SARS) in Kedah: Examining Infrastructure Development and Teacher Retention

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## Abstract

This study explores the role of zakat funding in enhancing the educational landscape of Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SARs) in Kedah, Malaysia. The research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, officials from Lembaga Zakat Negeri Kedah (LZKN) and students/parents from *asnaf* backgrounds. The study examines how zakat contributions are allocated to improve school infrastructure and support teacher retention, ultimately assessing their impact on student outcomes. Findings indicate that zakat funding significantly contributes to upgrading physical school facilities, fostering a more conducive learning environment and enhancing teacher satisfaction and retention. This research provides valuable insights into how zakat can be a strategic tool for long-term educational development and offers recommendations for more effective management and allocation of zakat resources. By bridging the gap between Islamic finance and education, the study highlights the transformative potential of zakat in supporting the sustainability and growth of SARs.

**Keywords:** Zakat Funding, Sekolah Agama Rakyat



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## Introduction

Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SARs) have long played a significant role in Malaysia's educational landscape, especially within the realm of Islamic education. These schools, often established and maintained by communities, offer students not only religious instruction but also moral guidance rooted in Islamic teachings. For many Muslim families particularly those in rural or economically disadvantaged areas, SARs represent an accessible and culturally relevant

educational option. They fill critical gaps left by the mainstream education system, ensuring that religious learning continues alongside secular knowledge.

Despite their historical and cultural importance, SARs often operate under challenging conditions. Many struggles with inadequate funding, outdated facilities and a shortage of qualified teachers. Without consistent financial support from the government, SARs rely heavily on voluntary contributions from the public and occasional assistance from religious bodies. This financial instability has a direct impact on the quality of education provided, with issues such as overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching materials and deteriorating school buildings becoming all too common (Heyneman, 1990; Ojiambo, 2013).

To address these challenges, zakat institutions such as Lembaga Zakat Negeri Kedah (LZKN) have stepped in to provide support. Recognizing that education is a powerful tool for empowerment and social mobility, LZKN has allocated portions of zakat collections to help sustain and improve SARs (“Pelbagai Inisiatif Dilaksanakan”, 2024). These allocations typically focus on two core areas which are infrastructure development and operational costs, particularly salaries for teaching staff. This initiative reflects the broader Islamic principle that zakat should be used to uplift the socio-economic conditions of the ummah, especially the *asnaf* or eligible zakat recipients.

Figure 1 illustrates zakat-funded infrastructure development which has potential to transform SARs from basic, under-resourced schools into safe and conducive learning environments. Improved school buildings, upgraded classrooms, access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities not only benefit students’ health and well-being but also foster a more engaging and productive learning atmosphere (Manca et al., 2020; Nainggolan, 2024; Wen et al., 2024). A well-maintained physical environment communicates value and dignity to students and teachers alike, boosting morale and encouraging consistent school attendance.



Figure 1: Transforming Schools with Zakat

Similarly, Figure 2 illustrates funding teacher salaries through zakat is a strategic investment in human capital. Teachers are the backbone of any educational institution and SARs are no exception. When teachers receive stable and fair compensation, they are more likely to remain committed to their schools (Dee & Wyckoff, 2015; Atteberry & LaCour, 2020). Retaining experienced educators also contributes to continuity in the teaching and learning process. More importantly, satisfied and well-supported teachers tend to perform better in the classroom, resulting in improved student engagement and learning outcomes (Wartenberg et al., 2023).

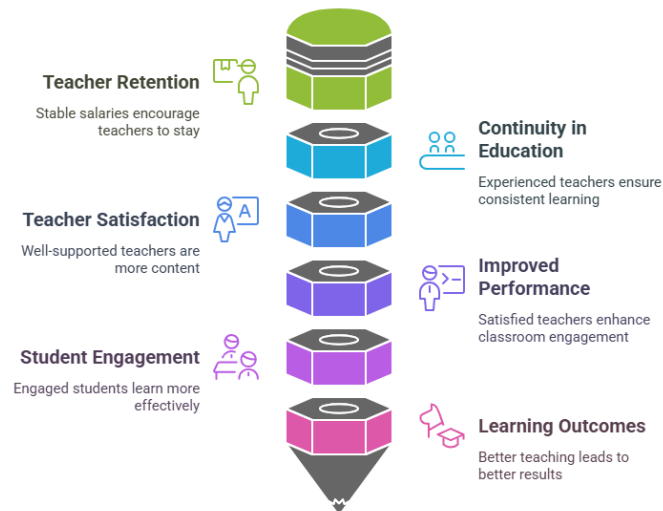


Figure 2: The Impact of Zakat on Education

Despite these promising developments, the actual impact of zakat funding on student performance and school improvement remains underexplored in academic literature. There is a need to move beyond assumptions and anecdotal evidence to critically assess how such financial support translates into measurable benefits for students. Understanding the relationship between improved infrastructure, teacher satisfaction and student achievement is essential for refining and strengthening zakat distribution strategies in the future (Haron et al., 2020; Taufan, 2022; Ani et al., 2024; Qadeer et al., 2024).

Therefore, this study aims to bridge this knowledge gap by examining two specific areas which are how infrastructure improvements funded by zakat influence students' learning environment and academic performance and how teacher retention and job satisfaction, supported by zakat-based operational funding, affect student outcomes. These two elements are interdependent and essential to the overall functioning of a school. Exploring their linkages can provide deeper insight into how to optimize zakat allocations for long-term educational impact.

In addition to its academic significance, this research holds practical value for policymakers, zakat administrators and school leaders. By identifying the factors that contribute most significantly to student success, stakeholders can make more informed decisions about resource allocation. For instance, if findings suggest that investments in infrastructure directly correlate with increased student motivation or reduced absenteeism, this could justify larger budget allocations for school facilities in future zakat planning.

Moreover, this study can help highlight the voices and experiences of those directly involved such as principals, teachers, students and parents. Their lived experiences can reveal nuanced challenges and successes that are often overlooked in broader policy discussions. Capturing these perspectives is vital for a comprehensive understanding of how zakat contributes to educational development, especially in the context of SARs, where emotional and spiritual factors are just as important as material ones.

In conclusion, while zakat institutions like LZNK have made commendable strides in supporting SARs, the full scope of their contributions particularly in shaping the academic and developmental outcomes of students deserves closer attention. By exploring the impacts of zakat-funded infrastructure and teacher support, this study hopes to offer meaningful insights

that not only validate current practices but also inspire more strategic and impactful zakat distributions in the future. Ultimately, strengthening SARs through thoughtful financial management aligns with the broader Islamic vision of justice, compassion and community upliftment.

## Problem Statement

Although Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SARs) have long been a pillar of religious education in Malaysia, particularly for Muslim communities in rural areas, they continue to grapple with serious financial limitations. These schools, often initiated by local communities, were established with noble intentions which is to provide access to Islamic education where public education was limited or culturally insufficient (Huzairah et al., 2019). However, as the educational landscape has evolved, many SARs find themselves struggling to keep pace due to a lack of consistent funding and institutional support.

These financial constraints frequently surface in the form of deteriorating infrastructure and outdated facilities. Many SARs operate in aging buildings that are not conducive to effective learning (Osman et al., 2015). Classrooms may lack proper lighting, ventilation or even sufficient seating, which directly impacts students' ability to focus and learn. Additionally, libraries, science labs or digital learning tools are often absent or underdeveloped, putting SAR students at a significant disadvantage compared to their better-funded schools.

Another major challenge is the retention of qualified and passionate teachers. While many educators at SARs are deeply committed to their mission, the reality of inadequate salaries and poor job security can take a toll over time (Srivastava & Singh, 2024). Talented teachers may be forced to seek better opportunities elsewhere, leaving SARs with high turnover rates and limited instructional consistency. This instability in teaching staff not only affects the quality of instruction but also disrupts the student-teacher relationship (Jabbar & Holme, 2025) which is vital for effective learning, especially in smaller community-based schools.

In this context, zakat funds emerge as a potentially transformative resource. As one of the core pillars of Islam, zakat is meant to support those in need, including education initiatives that uplift marginalized communities. According to Bernama (2025), the target for zakat fitrah collection in 2025 is RM14.5 million in which there is an increase from the RM13.31 million collected in 2024. Hence, institutions like Lembaga Zakat Negeri Kedah (LZNK) have begun allocating zakat resources to SARs, with a focus on improving infrastructure and funding operational costs, including teacher salaries. These initiatives not only offer financial relief but also provide a foundation for long-term improvement.

However, the full potential of zakat support has yet to be fully realized. While there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that improved infrastructure and stable teaching staff lead to better academic outcomes (Yangambi, 2023; Padilla et al., 2024), there is still a lack of systematic evaluation. How much of a difference does a renovated classroom or an increment in teacher salary make in the daily learning experiences of SAR students (Hyman, 2017; Loeb & Page, 2000) and do these improvements translate into better academic results, improved attendance or enhanced student morale?

Without concrete data or comprehensive studies, much of the decision-making around zakat distribution remains speculative. Stakeholders may recognize that infrastructure and teacher support are essential, but they need clearer insights into which interventions have the greatest impact. This calls for deeper, context-specific research that looks beyond budget sheets and into the lived realities of SAR students and teachers. Understanding the tangible and intangible outcomes of zakat investments is crucial for building more effective strategies.

Evaluating the influence of zakat on infrastructure involves examining how improved facilities shape the learning environment. For example, schools with adequate classrooms, clean restrooms and safe surroundings create a sense of dignity and security for students. This in turn affects attendance, discipline and classroom engagement. This is not merely about bricks, but this is about fostering an environment where students feel valued and motivated to learn.

On the other hand, teacher retention and satisfaction funded through zakat are equally important. When educators receive fair compensation and professional recognition, they are more likely to remain dedicated to their schools (Gorard et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2020). Stability in teaching staff leads to consistency in pedagogy, better student-teacher rapport and a more cohesive school culture. Moreover, job satisfaction is often linked with improved teaching quality which can directly influence student achievement and overall school performance.

Considering these connections, this concept paper advocates for a focused study on the outcomes of zakat allocations in SARs across Kedah. The research aims to explore two key areas which are first, how infrastructure development improves the learning environment and student outcomes and second, how teacher support through zakat influences student achievement. These insights will not only help optimize zakat usage but also guide broader educational reforms that support underserved communities.

Ultimately, this inquiry goes beyond assessing financial, but it touches on the moral responsibility of zakat institutions to ensure that their contributions lead to meaningful change. By critically analysing how zakat impacts the educational journey of SAR students, stakeholders can make informed decisions that uphold both the spiritual and social objectives of zakat. With the right support, SARs can continue to serve as a vital force for community development, religious education and social mobility.

## Research Objectives

This study is driven by a desire to better understand how zakat, as a financial and spiritual tool that can bring meaningful improvements to Islamic educational institutions such as Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SARs). These schools have long served as key spaces for nurturing religious identity, moral values and foundational knowledge within Malaysia's Muslim communities. However, despite their importance, many SARs face chronic resource limitations, especially when it comes to infrastructure and staffing. By focusing on specific areas where zakat funding is allocated namely infrastructure and operational costs like teacher salaries, this research seeks to uncover how such financial support translates into real-world educational outcomes.

The first objective of this study is to explore how infrastructure development, made possible through zakat contributions, influences the overall learning environment and academic

performance of students in SARs. It is widely understood that physical space and facilities have a direct impact on the way students engage with learning. Classrooms that are well-ventilated, safe and adequately equipped foster a sense of security and motivation among students. On the other hand, dilapidated buildings, lack of furniture and overcrowded spaces often discourage attendance and reduce attention spans. By investigating these elements, the study hopes to show how zakat-funded improvements in school infrastructure can create a more conducive environment for teaching and learning.

This exploration will not just rely on observational data, but also personal experiences and reflections from school administrators, teachers, and students themselves. Their voices will help provide a deeper understanding of how physical improvements such as new classrooms, better sanitation facilities or upgraded learning materials will affect daily academic life. The goal is to move beyond abstract notions of "development" and instead provide concrete insights into how infrastructure influences student behaviour, attendance and achievement.

The second research objective turns attention to the human element of SARs which are the teachers. Specifically, this study aims to examine how zakat-funded support for teacher retention and job satisfaction influences student outcomes. Teachers are the backbone of any education system (Garg & Singh, 2025) and SARs are no exception. Unfortunately, limited financial resources often mean that SARs struggle to offer competitive salaries or stable employment conditions, leading to high turnover rates. This instability disrupts student learning and undermines long-term academic progress.

By examining cases where zakat funds have been used to support teacher salaries and benefits, the study will investigate whether these interventions have led to greater job satisfaction and reduced attrition among teachers. Teachers who feel secure, appreciated and motivated are more likely to invest in their students, innovate in their teaching methods and contribute positively to school culture (Syafrizal, 2024). Through interviews and document analysis, the study will explore how teacher experiences have changed because of zakat support, and how those changes, in turn, influence students' academic engagement and performance.

An important dimension of this objective is to capture the emotional and psychological aspects of teaching. Teachers who feel underpaid or overworked may suffer from burnout, which inevitably affects classroom delivery. Zakat funding can potentially alleviate this stress, allowing educators to focus more on pedagogy and less on personal financial survival. Understanding these dynamics is critical for both zakat institutions and school administrators who wish to build more sustainable and impactful education systems.

In both research objectives, the focus is not only on quantitative measures of success, such as grades or attendance rates, but also on qualitative improvements on how students feel about school, how safe and inspired they are in their learning environment and how consistent and supportive their relationships with teachers are. These intangible elements are just as crucial in shaping educational outcomes and are often overlooked in policy conversations.

This study will also serve as a reflection point for policymakers, zakat administrators and educational planners. By aligning funding decisions with real on-the-ground needs and experiences, zakat institutions like Lembaga Zakat Negeri Kedah (LZNK) can make more informed and impactful decisions. These insights may help refine funding criteria, encourage accountability and inspire collaborative efforts to uplift SARs in a sustainable manner.

Finally, this research aspires to contribute to a broader understanding of how Islamic financial principles can be harmonized with modern educational goals. Zakat is often seen as a tool for poverty alleviation, but its potential in shaping future generations through education is immense and underutilized. Through these two focused objectives, the study seeks to make a meaningful contribution to both Islamic finance and educational development in Malaysia.

## Research Significance

This study is poised to make a meaningful contribution to the broader academic conversation surrounding zakat management and its practical role in advancing educational development in Malaysia. Although zakat is traditionally viewed through the lens of religious obligation and social welfare, its potential as a sustainable source of educational support has yet to be fully explored. By focusing on how zakat funds are being utilized to support Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SARs), particularly in the state of Kedah, this research bridges the gap between faith-based financial mechanisms and measurable outcomes in the education sector.

For policymakers and zakat administrators, the findings of this study could serve as a valuable resource for decision-making. These stakeholders are often tasked with distributing limited funds across a variety of eligible causes and having empirical evidence about which areas yield the highest impact can guide more strategic resource allocation. If the study reveals that investments in school infrastructure and teacher salaries produce significant improvements in student performance, for example, future zakat distributions can be calibrated to prioritize these areas. In this way, zakat institutions can ensure that their charitable giving is not only spiritually fulfilling but also socially effective.

This kind of insight is especially relevant in today's context, where the demand for transparency and accountability in public and religious institutions continues to grow. Administrators of zakat funds are increasingly required to show that the funds they manage are making a tangible difference. This study responds to that demand by offering grounded, context-specific findings that could inform best practices in zakat governance, especially in relation to education.

Meanwhile, for SAR administrators and educators, the research could provide much-needed clarity on the specific factors that influence teaching effectiveness and student achievement. Teachers and school leaders are often at the front lines of education but may lack access to data that explains why certain interventions succeed while others fall short. By identifying the elements that matter most whether it be the stability of teaching staff, the condition of classrooms or the availability of learning materials, SARs can focus their limited resources on strategies that are proven to work.

This is particularly important for schools that operate in challenging environments, where every ringgit counts. If the findings highlight the importance of teacher retention, for instance, SAR leaders might advocate more strongly for fair and consistent salaries. Likewise, if infrastructure quality emerges as a key driver of academic performance, future development plans can focus on repairing and upgrading physical facilities.

For the academic community, this study fills an important gap by offering a rare intersection between Islamic finance and education. While there has been substantial work done

on zakat in terms of its theological significance or economic implications, much less has been written about how zakat impacts real-world educational outcomes. This research addresses that gap directly, providing scholars with new data and insights that can support future studies, both in Malaysia and beyond.

Moreover, the study adds a layer of nuance to the broader literature on faith-based education systems. SARs are unique institutions that blend religious teachings with mainstream education and understanding how they function financially offers a window into the sustainability of such hybrid models. The findings could even serve as a reference point for other countries or regions that are exploring similar models of community-driven and religiously supported education.

Ultimately, the study offers a multi-dimensional contribution. It serves practical needs by helping zakat administrators and school leaders make more informed decisions. It satisfies academic curiosity by addressing a poorly understood phenomenon. And it upholds a deeper ethical and societal aim by ensuring that the practice of zakat is aligned not only with spiritual intent but also with tangible, measurable outcomes that uplift communities.

In a time when educational inequality continues to be a pressing issue, particularly in rural and underserved areas, the relevance of this research becomes even more pronounced. SARs are often the only accessible option for religious and basic education in these communities and strengthening them through strategic zakat investment is both a moral and practical imperative.

Through this study, it is hoped that zakat can be reimagined not just as a form of relief, but as a catalyst for sustainable development, especially in the field of education. With data-driven insights, all stakeholders from religious authorities to schoolteachers can work in synergy to ensure that every ringgit of zakat not only fulfils a spiritual duty but also builds a brighter, more educated future for the next generation.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study draws from two interconnected bodies of knowledge which are the quality of educational inputs and the evaluation of their impact. Both perspectives are essential in understanding how zakat, a form of Islamic charitable giving, can directly and indirectly support educational institutions like Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SARs) in Kedah. Rather than viewing zakat simply as a financial transaction, this study seeks to examine its practical role as an enabler of educational development particularly in schools that have historically operated on limited resources.

Figure 3 illustrates the domain is inspired by UNESCO's definition of quality education, which emphasizes the importance of several core elements such as safe and inclusive infrastructure, well-trained and motivated teachers and sufficient learning materials (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2003). These are not luxuries but necessities, especially in schools serving rural and underserved communities. In the context of SARs, these inputs often fall short due to chronic underfunding. By positioning zakat funds as a potential enabler of these inputs, this study aims to explore whether and how zakat can fill critical gaps in school resources and create a more conducive learning environment for students.



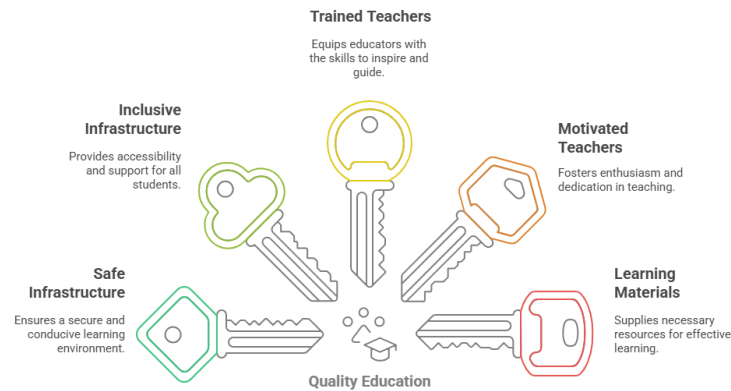


Figure 3: Essential Elements of Quality Education

Figure 4 illustrates the elements needed in building a productive educational environment. The elements of safe and functional infrastructure, for instance, plays a significant role in shaping the daily experiences of students. When classrooms are clean, ventilated and structurally sound, students are more likely to feel safe and engaged. Similarly, when teachers are adequately supported through fair wages, proper facilities and ongoing professional development their morale improves, and this often translates into better teaching and more meaningful student-teacher interactions. These conditions are at the heart of a productive educational environment and zakat funding if effectively managed has the potential to support these foundational needs.

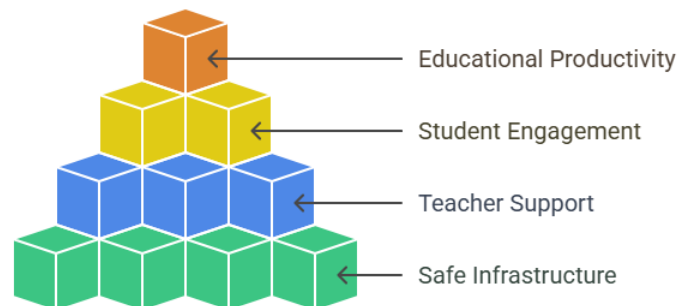


Figure 4: Building a Productive Educational Environment

The second part of the framework involves an impact evaluation perspective. It is not enough to know that zakat funds are being disbursed but there is a need to understand what those funds are achieving. To that end, this framework draws on a classic model of input-output-outcome analysis. Inputs refer to the resources provided which is in this case, zakat funds. Outputs are the immediate, tangible changes that result from those resources, such as improved school buildings, purchased teaching materials or the ability to pay teachers on time. Outcomes, on the other hand, relate to the broader goals in which it is hoped to achieve higher student achievement, improved attendance, better retention rates and an overall rise in educational standards.

This input-output-outcome chain is particularly valuable for assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of zakat-funded interventions. It provides a structure for analysing how well zakat allocations are aligned with educational needs and whether the funds are being used in

ways that lead to lasting improvements. Importantly, this framework also allows room to examine unintended effects or limitations such as situations where funds are allocated, but the lack of capacity or expertise at the school level hinders effective implementation.

By integrating these two domains, the framework gives this study both direction and depth. It ensures that the research stays focused on measurable, educationally relevant indicators, while also remaining sensitive to the lived experiences of the people involved such as teachers, administrators, students and zakat officers. Hence, this dual perspective is crucial, because the success of any intervention is not only about metrics, but also about whether the people it is meant to serve the impact.

Additionally, this approach aligns with the broader goals of sustainable development, particularly those relating to quality education and reduced inequalities. While zakat has traditionally been viewed through a religious and welfare lens reinterpreting it within the context of education quality and impact can help stakeholders including policymakers and religious authorities, to better appreciate its potential in addressing structural educational inequities.

In practice, the framework will guide both data collection and analysis. Interviews will explore stakeholder perceptions of how zakat has influenced various aspects of school quality. Document analysis will trace how funds have been allocated and what changes have resulted. Together, these sources of information will be mapped onto the framework to provide a holistic picture of cause and effect, strengths and gaps.

Ultimately, this conceptual framework reflects a commitment not only to academic rigor but also to social relevance. It recognizes that funding alone is not a silver bullet, but when tied to thoughtful planning, transparent implementation, and continuous evaluation, it can become a powerful tool for educational transformation particularly in institutions like SARs that carry both a religious and community-centered mission.

## **Methodology**

This study embraces a qualitative research approach to deeply explore how zakat funding influences the educational landscape of Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SARs) in Kedah. Given the complexity and contextual nature of the issues surrounding educational funding and its real-life impact, a qualitative design is particularly suitable. It allows the researcher to go beyond numbers and statistics to capture the lived experiences, insights, and emotions of the people directly involved in or affected by zakat-supported initiatives.

The research will primarily rely on semi-structured interviews, which provide the flexibility to probe deeper into emerging topics while maintaining a clear focus on the research objectives. This method offers participants the space to share their experiences and perspectives in their own words, thus providing a more nuanced understanding of how zakat funds are influencing the educational environment and student outcomes.

The study will involve several key groups of participants. First, school administrators and financial officers from selected SARs will be interviewed to gain insights into how zakat funds are received, managed, and utilized. These individuals are instrumental in overseeing the day-to-day operations and will provide valuable information on the practicalities and challenges

of financial management within SARs. Second, teachers who benefit from zakat-funded salaries will be included in the study. Their perspectives are crucial because teacher morale, job satisfaction, and retention are all closely linked to how they are supported financially. By understanding their experiences, the study can better assess whether zakat funding is helping to create a stable and motivated teaching workforce. Third, officials from Lembaga Zakat Negeri Kedah (LZNK) who are directly involved in zakat allocation decisions will be interviewed. Their input will help contextualize the strategies, priorities, and constraints involved in the disbursement of zakat funds. It is important to capture how decisions are made at the policy level and how those decisions align with the needs on the ground.

In addition to institutional actors, the study will also speak with the students or parents from *asnaf* backgrounds who are the recipients of educational support through zakat. These voices are often overlooked, yet they are at the heart of this research. Their reflections on how zakat assistance has impacted access to education, school attendance or academic performance will offer critical insight into the effectiveness of these interventions.

Apart from interviews, document analysis will also be conducted to complement and triangulate the data. Relevant documents may include zakat allocation reports, financial records from SARs, policy documents and any internal assessments or reports related to school development. This additional data source helps to verify and strengthen the findings derived from interviews. To make sense of the qualitative data, the study will employ thematic analysis. This involves systematically coding the data, identifying patterns and grouping them into themes that reflect key issues and relationships. For example, recurring discussions around improved classroom facilities or increased teacher stability may form central themes, helping to illuminate how specific uses of zakat funds are affecting learning outcomes.

Thematic analysis also provides the flexibility to capture unexpected findings or themes that may emerge during interviews and issues that may not have been anticipated but are nonetheless important to understanding the broader picture. This makes it an ideal method for a study that aims to uncover depth and complexity.

Ultimately, the qualitative nature of this research allows for a rich, empathetic exploration of how financial support when channelled through zakat can influence real lives in the realm of education. It will provide grounded, people-centered evidence that can inform future policies and funding decisions not just for SARs in Kedah, but potentially for similar institutions across Malaysia and beyond.

## Expected Outcomes

This research aims to offer valuable insights into how zakat funding is making a tangible difference in the lives of students and educators within SARs in Kedah. One of the key areas of focus is the impact of improved physical infrastructure on students' motivation, attendance and overall academic engagement. When schools have functional classrooms, adequate lighting, proper sanitation and learning spaces that are conducive to study, students are more likely to feel comfortable, safe and encouraged to participate. This study will explore how such improvements made possible through zakat funds can transform the daily experience of students and potentially influence their academic performance.

The learning environment plays a crucial role in shaping student outcomes. A well-maintained and resource-rich school environment sends a strong signal that education is valued. Students who attend schools with decent facilities may develop a stronger sense of pride in their learning and are more likely to stay engaged throughout the school year. through interviews with students, teachers, Principal and SAR Finance Officer, the study will seek to understand these experiences and assess whether zakat-funded upgrades to infrastructure are meeting these needs effectively.

Beyond the physical setting, the research will also examine how zakat contributions toward teacher salaries impact teacher satisfaction and retention. Teachers are at the heart of any educational system, and their well-being directly affects the consistency and quality of instruction that students receive. When teachers are compensated and feel secure in their positions, they are more likely to remain committed to their schools and motivated in their roles. This study will explore whether zakat has played a part in reducing turnover and enhancing the stability of teaching teams at SARs.

Teacher retention is particularly important in religious schools like SARs, where educators often carry both academic and moral responsibilities. A revolving door of teaching staff can disrupt students' learning continuity and weaken trust within the school community. By speaking directly with teachers who are beneficiaries of zakat-supported salaries, the research will provide insights into whether these financial supports are translating into improved job satisfaction and stronger teacher-student relationships.

The consistency of instruction is another important element that this study seeks to explore. If zakat funding allows SARs to retain experienced teachers over time, students are more likely to benefit from structured, coherent lesson plans and mentorship. Teachers who remain in their roles for longer periods tend to know their students better and can adapt their teaching approaches to meet individual learning needs. This type of supportive environment could ultimately boost student performance.

In addition to exploring impacts, the research also seeks to generate practical recommendations for policymakers, zakat administrators and school leaders. By grounding the findings in the lived experiences of those closest to the issue, the study will be in a strong position to suggest realistic and actionable strategies. These could include refining how funds are distributed, improving accountability and monitoring mechanisms or setting clearer priorities for educational investment.

For zakat institutions like Lembaga Zakat Negeri Kedah (LZKN), the findings may offer new perspectives on how their support translates into real-world outcomes. The study hopes to show that zakat, beyond being a religious obligation can serve as a sustainable investment in the social and intellectual development of the Muslim community. By strengthening SARs, zakat institutions are not only supporting access to Islamic education but also contributing to long-term human capital development.

For SARs administrators, the research will provide insights into what areas require more attention and how existing resources can be better utilized. Whether it is advocating for more funding for infrastructure or investing in teacher training and support besides school leaders can use the findings to make informed decisions that align with the needs of their students and staff.

From an academic perspective, this study also contributes to a relatively under-researched area at the intersection of Islamic finance and education. While zakat is widely discussed in religious and financial literature, its role in shaping educational outcomes, especially in community-based Islamic schools which has not been extensively documented. Hence, this research aims to bridge that gap.

Ultimately, the study hopes to inspire a more strategic and accountable approach to zakat distribution which is one that looks beyond short-term relief and towards long-term and at the same time measurable outcomes. By connecting resource inputs to actual improvements in educational delivery, this research may pave the way for more effective policies and practices in both the zakat and education sectors.

## Conclusion

Zakat, a cornerstone of Islamic practice, is more than just a form of charity but it is a vital mechanism for fostering social justice, reducing inequality and uplifting the well-being of the less fortunate. When applied strategically, zakat has the potential to support not only basic needs but also long-term community development, including access to quality education. In the Malaysian context, where Islamic education continues to play a central role in nurturing values and identity, zakat can be a powerful enabler of positive change. This study explores how zakat contributions are used to support Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SARs), particularly in improving infrastructure and retaining qualified educators.

For many SARs, especially those in rural and underserved areas consistent funding remains a major challenge. Despite their deep-rooted role in delivering Islamic education, these schools often operate under financial strain, affecting their ability to provide a conducive learning environment. Poor classroom conditions, outdated facilities and a lack of basic amenities can hinder the teaching and learning process. Zakat, when allocated effectively, can help bridge these gaps by enabling much-needed renovations, expansions and the provision of teaching resources.

Infrastructure improvements do more than upgrade buildings which is they influence how students engage with their studies. A safe, clean and well-equipped school environment promotes not only academic focus but also emotional well-being. Students are more likely to attend regularly, participate actively and perform better when they feel supported by their surroundings. Through this research, the experiences of SAR students and teachers will be brought to the forefront to illustrate how zakat-funded upgrades are making a real difference on the ground.

In addition to physical improvements, the study also delves into how zakat supports teacher retention which is a key factor in maintaining educational quality. Teaching in SARs can be challenging, especially when salaries are low or delayed. These issues often lead to high turnover rates, affecting students' ability to build stable relationships with their teachers and undermining learning continuity. Zakat allocations used to cover operational costs such as teacher salaries can play a crucial role in reducing these issues, ensuring that skilled educators remain committed to their roles.

When teachers feel financially secure and professionally valued, their motivation and job satisfaction tend to increase. This, in turn, contributes to a more positive and consistent

classroom experience for students. The study will explore whether teachers who receive zakat-funded support are more likely to stay in their positions, and how this stability affects the academic journey of their students. First-hand accounts from both teachers and students will offer rich insights into these dynamics.

At a broader level, the study aims to demonstrate how the strategic use of zakat can support national goals in education and social development. It is not merely about funding schools but about investing in human potential. Islamic education plays a vital role in shaping the ethical and spiritual foundation of young Malaysians and ensuring that SARs can deliver this education effectively is a matter of public interest.

This research also hopes to encourage more deliberate and evidence-based zakat management practices. By connecting financial inputs to clear educational outcomes, it offers a roadmap for zakat institutions especially Lembaga Zakat Negeri Kedah (LZNK) to improve their resource allocation strategies. When funding decisions are informed by real needs and measurable impact, the benefits of zakat can reach further and last longer.

For stakeholders involved in Islamic education starts from policy makers to school administrators, the findings of this study will highlight practical areas for improvement. Whether there are some guidelines for infrastructure investment, creating incentives for teacher development or strengthening accountability mechanisms, the research will provide actionable recommendations grounded in lived experiences.

Importantly, the study also contributes to the academic discourse on Islamic finance and education. While the concept of zakat is widely discussed in religious and legal contexts, its role in achieving educational equity and quality remains underexplored. By focusing on SARs, the study brings attention to how faith-based funding models can support broader development goals.

Ultimately, this research is driven by a belief in the transformative power of education and the moral responsibility to use religious resources wisely. By examining how zakat can strengthen the foundations of SARs through improved infrastructure and teacher support, the study hopes to inspire more impactful, sustainable practices that benefit students, educators and the wider Muslim community.

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