WAQF FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: MAPPING THE INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE OF ISLAMIC SOCIAL FINANCE SCHOLARSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Waqf has re-emerged in the scholarly literature as an instrument for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), yet the intellectual architecture of this growing body of research remains only partially mapped. This study aims to identify the intellectual structure of waqf-related sustainable development scholarship by synthesizing peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus. Following a systematic literature review protocol, a search string combining waqf-related terms (waqf, awqaf, wakaf, cash waqf, corporate waqf) with sustainability-related terms (sustainable development, SDGs, poverty alleviation, social welfare, sustainability) was applied to the Scopus database, restricted to journal articles in English, yielding 255 records; after removing one duplicate, 254 unique articles published between 1999 and 2026 were retained. An intra-corpus co-citation network was constructed in Python (NetworkX) to trace citation linkages among the retrieved documents, and community detection (greedy modularity) was applied to identify thematic clusters. The analysis reveals six interconnected clusters, the largest centering on waqf-based poverty alleviation grounded in maqasid al-shariah, followed by clusters on innovative sector-specific financing models, institutional sustainability and legal-regulatory frameworks, cross-country cash waqf practice, and the comparatively emerging themes of integrated Islamic social finance ecosystems and waqf governance. The findings suggest that waqf scholarship on sustainable development has evolved from classical, poverty-focused conceptualizations toward increasingly diversified, sector-specific, and cross-jurisdictional inquiry, while institutional governance and ecosystem-level integration remain comparatively underexplored. These insights may inform future research agendas and policy discussions on strengthening waqf's contribution to sustainable development.

Key words: waqf; sustainable development; Islamic social finance; co-citation analysis; systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

Waqf, the Islamic institution of perpetual endowment, has historically financed education, healthcare, and public infrastructure across Muslim societies, and has attracted renewed scholarly and policy attention as a potential vehicle for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). International bodies and Islamic finance regulators alike have promoted cash waqf, corporate waqf, and waqf-linked instruments as mechanisms for poverty alleviation, financial inclusion, and social welfare provision in ways that parallel conventional development finance.

Scholarly output on waqf and sustainable development has grown substantially over the past decade, generating a fragmented and thematically diverse literature spanning law, economics, finance, and public policy. While several prior reviews have examined publication trends or descriptive performance metrics in Islamic social finance research, comparatively less attention has been paid to mapping the underlying intellectual structure of this literature, that is, how strands of research relate to, build upon, and cluster around one another. Without such mapping, it remains difficult to identify which theoretical and empirical traditions anchor the field, and where thematic gaps persist.

This article addresses this gap by synthesizing 254 peer-reviewed articles retrieved from Scopus and identifying the intellectual structure of waqf-related sustainable development scholarship through co-citation network analysis. Specifically, the study aims to (1) trace the citation linkages that connect articles within this corpus, and (2) identify and characterize the thematic clusters that constitute the field's intellectual core. The remainder of this article proceeds as follows: the Method section describes the data source, search protocol, and analytical approach; the Results and Discussion section presents the intellectual structure and interprets its thematic clusters; and the Conclusion summarizes the study's contribution and outlines directions for future research.

METHOD

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) design combined with science-mapping analysis to characterize the intellectual structure of waqf-related sustainable development research. Data were retrieved from the Scopus database on 26 July 2026 using the following search string applied to the title, abstract, and keyword fields: TITLE-ABS-KEY(("waqf" OR "awqaf" OR "wakaf" OR "cash waqf" OR "corporate waqf") AND ("sustainable development" OR "SDGs" OR "sustainable development goal*" OR "poverty alleviation" OR "social welfare" OR "sustainability")), restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English. The search yielded 255 records. One duplicate record (the same study indexed under two separate Scopus entries) was removed, leaving 254 unique articles retained for analysis (Figure 1); as all remaining records matched the pre-specified database-level criteria, no further manual exclusion was applied.

The intellectual structure was mapped through co-citation network analysis (Zupic & Čater, 2015), following established bibliometric procedures (Donthu et al., 2021) and reporting conventions consistent with the PRISMA guideline (Page et al., 2021). Reference lists of the 254 corpus articles were parsed programmatically in Python; two articles were treated as co-cited when both appeared in the reference list of the same third article within the corpus. This intra-corpus approach, restricting the network to citation linkages among the retrieved documents themselves, was adopted because complete bibliographic metadata (including DOI) could be verified with certainty only for documents within the corpus; this represents a scope limitation relative to a full external co-citation analysis and is addressed further in the Discussion. The resulting network (NetworkX, Python) was restricted to documents cited by at least three corpus articles and co-cited with at least one other document at least twice, producing a core network of 82 documents. Thematic clusters were identified using greedy modularity community detection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The retained corpus comprises 254 peer-reviewed articles published between 1999 and 2026, reflecting a field that has expanded markedly in recent years. Rather than reporting descriptive publication metrics, this section focuses on the intellectual structure that emerges from the co-citation network, illustrated in Figure 2. Community detection identified six thematic clusters, summarized in Table 1.

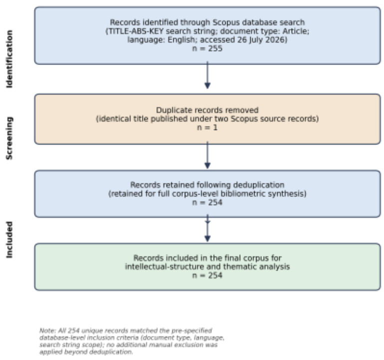

Figure 1. Identification and Screening Flow of the Retrieved Corpus

Cluster 1, the largest, anchors the field's classical conceptual core: it links studies that theorize waqf's role in poverty alleviation and situate this role within the maqasid al-shariah (higher objectives of Islamic law) framework (e.g., Sadeq, 2002; Abdullah, 2018; Haneef et al., 2015). Cluster 2 comprises more recent, sector-specific innovations, waqf-based financing for higher education, renewable energy, and crowdfunding platforms (Usman & Ab Rahman, 2023; Ascarya & Masrifah, 2023; Ari & Koc, 2021), suggesting a diversification of waqf's application beyond its traditional poverty-alleviation remit. Cluster 3 centers on the institutional sustainability and legal-regulatory frameworks that govern waqf institutions across jurisdictions (Sulaiman & Alhaji Zakari, 2019; Zawawi et al., 2023; Iskandar et al., 2021), while Cluster 4 draws together comparative, cross-country studies of cash waqf practice (Saiti et al., 2021; Sulaiman et al., 2019; Kabir Hassan et al., 2018).

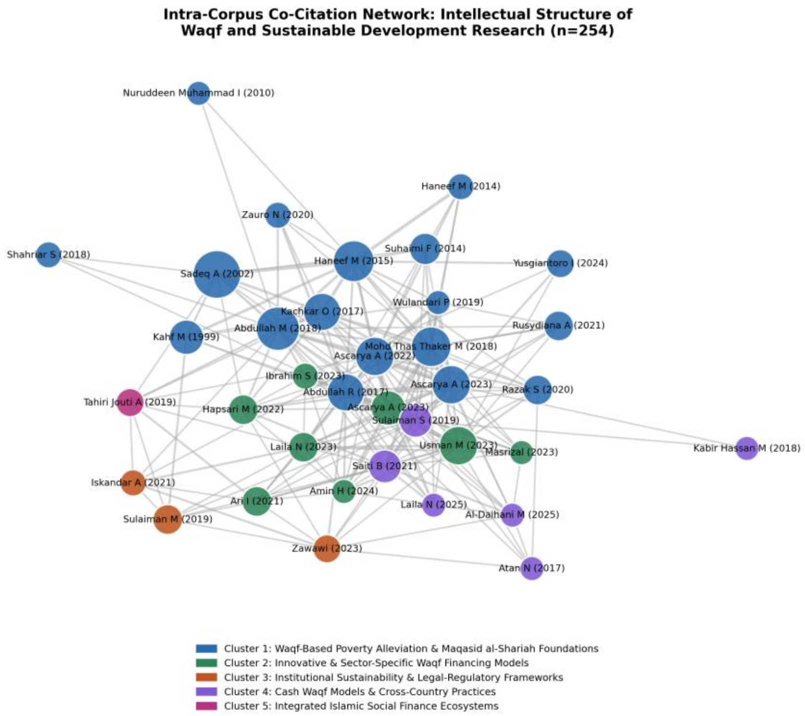

Figure 2. Intra-Corpus Co-Citation Network of Waqf and Sustainable Development Research (n = 254)

Two smaller, more peripheral clusters point to emerging research frontiers. Cluster 5 addresses the integration of waqf with the broader Islamic social finance ecosystem, including zakat and cash waqf convergence (Tahiri Jouti, 2019; Laallam et al., 2020), while Cluster 6 concerns waqf governance and maqasid-based policy design (Siddiq et al., 2025; Mahmudi & Muhammad, 2022). Their smaller size and lower density relative to Clusters 1–4 suggest that governance-oriented and ecosystem-integration perspectives remain comparatively underdeveloped, despite their apparent relevance to the institutional durability of waqf-based development finance.

Cluster	Thematic Focus	n	Representative Studies
1	Waqf-based poverty alleviation and its grounding in maqasid al-shariah	29	Sadeq (2002); Abdullah (2018); Haneef et al. (2015)
2	Innovative and sector-specific waqf financing models (education, renewable energy, crowdfunding)	19	Usman & Ab Rahman (2023); Ascarya & Masrifah (2023); Ari & Koc (2021)
3	Institutional sustainability and legal-regulatory frameworks	15	Sulaiman & Alhaji Zakari (2019); Zawawi et al. (2023); Iskandar et al. (2021)
4	Cash waqf models and cross-country practice	13	Saiti et al. (2021); Sulaiman et al. (2019); Kabir Hassan et al. (2018)
5	Integrated Islamic social finance ecosystems (emerging)	4	Tahiri Jouti (2019); Laallam et al. (2020)
6	Waqf governance and maqasid-based policy (emerging)	2	Siddiq et al. (2025); Mahmudi & Muhammad (2022)

Table 1. Thematic Clusters in the Intra-Corpus Co-Citation Network (core network, n = 82)

Taken together, these findings indicate that waqf scholarship on sustainable development has evolved along two intersecting trajectories: a deepening of classical, poverty-centered theorization (Cluster 1) and a broadening into sector-specific and cross-jurisdictional applications (Clusters 2–4). This pattern is consistent with the observation that waqf research has moved from largely conceptual and historical treatments toward applied, instrument-specific inquiry as governments and Islamic financial institutions have sought concrete mechanisms for SDG-aligned financing. However, the comparatively sparse Clusters 5 and 6 suggest that questions of institutional governance, accountability, and ecosystem-level integration across waqf, zakat, and other Islamic social finance instruments remain underexplored relative to the volume of instrument-specific and country-specific studies, a gap with direct implications for the long-term sustainability of waqf-based development initiatives.

It should be noted that, because the co-citation network was restricted to citation linkages within the retrieved corpus, foundational works cited by corpus articles but not themselves indexed within the search parameters (for instance, early historical treatments of waqf published before the study period or outside the specified search terms) are not represented as nodes in Figure 2. The intellectual structure reported here should therefore be interpreted as characteristic of the contemporary, SDG-oriented waqf literature specifically, rather than of Islamic economic thought on waqf as a whole.

CONCLUSION

This study mapped the intellectual structure of waqf-related sustainable development research by constructing an intra-corpus co-citation network from 254 Scopus-indexed articles. The analysis identifies six thematic clusters, revealing a field anchored in classical, poverty-focused conceptualizations of waqf but increasingly diversifying into sector-specific financing models and cross-country institutional studies, while governance- and ecosystem-integration-oriented research remains comparatively sparse. These findings suggest that future research and policy attention may usefully focus on strengthening the governance architecture and cross-instrument integration of waqf within the broader Islamic social finance ecosystem, as a complement to the instrument-specific innovations that currently dominate the field.

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