

Assessment on Accountability Using Control Activities Approach for Waqf Management in Public University: Case Study in University Putra Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Accountability is an important element when it comes to managing the waqf fund. Issues of mismanagement of waqf fund will lead to the loss of trust among the public. Currently, most of the public universities are involved in managing waqf fund in order to increase their income due to the budget deduction from the government. Very limited study has been conducted in evaluating the accountability of waqf management in public universities. Hence this study aims to conduct assessment on accountability using control activities component in the Centre for Management of Waqf, Zakat and Endowment (WAZAN), University of Putra Malaysia. The study uses qualitative method where the questions relating to the control activities are posed to respondents in the form of focus group discussions. The respondents are the staffs from WAZAN who manage the waqf fund; from higher management to the administration staff. The finding shows that WAZAN yet to implement control activities component in its Centre. Accountability assessment was not able to be conducted due to the absence of internal control system. This study recommends for WAZAN to incorporate the internal control system, especially control activities component in order to reduce the risk of mismanagement of fund and to increase the trust among the public to donate.

Keywords:: Waqf fund, Accountability, Internal Control, Control Activities, Mismanagement

INTRODUCTION

The sole trustee for waqf management in Malaysia falls under the jurisdiction of State Islamic Religious Council (MAIN). Nevertheless, MAIN can appoint other institutions as mutawalli agent to collect the waqf donation and to manage it. Among the institutions that has been appointed by MAIN as mutawalli agent are Public Universities. Education and waqf is inseparable. Education is the most important element for the development of the economy in a country. Usman et al. (2022) reported that the public funding for public universities has dropped dramatically in Malaysia due to the local and global challenges. On the other hand, the

public universities require substantial amount of funding to meet the needs and to sustain. Hence, most of the public universities in Malaysia are participating actively in generating income using waqf as an instrument for the sustainability of the university.

Waqf is an instrument that plays an important role in resolving major issues in socio-economic problems. Based on the history, waqf development has contributed tremendously to the benefits of society and this can be observed during the Ottoman Empire. Financing of education was from the waqf system during the Ottoman period (Baskan, 2002). It is undeniable fact that Waqf is

able to contribute significantly to the economic development of a country by eradicating the poverty, promoting socio-economic justice and uplifting the well-being of the society. However, without robust governance system for waqf, it will not be able to benefit the society and it may lead to the serious repercussion in the long run.

According to United Nation (2015), good governance has eight major characteristics, namely; participations, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus oriented, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency and accountability. Interestingly, accountability appeared to be as one of the top ten keywords related to waqf (Ainol Basirah, et al. 2022; Alshater at al. 2022; Sukmana 2020). This indicates the importance of accountability issue in managing the waqf. Hisham (2006) reported that there are some cases where the waqf assets were misused and mishandled and Hisham et al. (2015) stressed that the public are becoming more concerned and demanding for greater transparency. This is due to the increase of number of cases relating to the Islamic faith-based institutions in Malaysia, including waqf institutions. Such issues will demotivate people to donate their money for waqf purposes and it will develop negative perceptions towards the institutions. It is important to note that stakeholders trust and public support for waqf institutions depends on the accountability shown by the institutions.

It is vital that every institution that has been appointed as mutawalli agent need to give emphasis on the aspect of accountability as it can prevent the waste of resources and corruption. There are five mechanisms to operationalise accountability, namely disclosure statements and reports, performance assessment and evaluation, participation and self-regulation and social performance (Ihsan et.al., 2021). These elements should be evaluated in an organization using a proper tool to identify the loopholes and to fix it in order to ensure good management. One of the common tools used for this purpose is the

internal control practices. The internal control practices have five elements which consists of control environment, risk assessment, control activities, information and communication and monitoring activities. In terms of operationalizing accountability, control activities component plays a major role in evaluating the impact.

Realising the importance of the accountability aspect in managing the waqf fund, this study aims to conduct assessment on accountability using control activities components for waqf management in WAZAN, UPM. UPM has been appointed by Islamic Religious Council of Selangor (MAIS) as a mutawalli agent to manage waqf fund since 2016.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Waqf is a tool of wealth creation and distribution to address a number of socio-economic problems in a country (Hisham et al, 2018). Waqf Institutions are not profit motivated and it should portray the element of empathy, kindness, righteous, goodness, mercy and benevolence (Hassan et al. 2018). Working for the welfare of others are the best way in pleasing Allah (Abdul Rahman et. al, 1998). According to Chowdhury (2012), waqf can be the prime tools to uplift the pride, dignity and supremacy of Islam. The contribution of waqf is apparent during the Ottoman period where the waqf fund is able to sustain the economy of Ottoman. (Mohsin 2009, Cizacka, 2004, Sadeq 2002).

The mismanagement of waqf fund cases is increasing dramatically in recent years and frequently the main cause of mismanagement is associated with dishonesty, corruption, unqualified human capital and insufficient resources to maintain and develop waqf properties, lack of financial reporting and lack out accounting standard (Hisham et.al 2021), Hisham 2018, Chowdhury et al. 2012, Ihsan et al. 2011, Rashid 2008, Ihsan et al. 2006, Hisham et al. 2006, Siti Rokyah 2005, Ali 2002). Ramli (2015) asserted that in certain Muslim countries, waqf properties are not recorded

properly and some goes missing. Mohidin et. al (2015) also revealed that some Muslim countries waqf has been neglected and abandoned.

In Malaysia, Siraj et al. (2015) claim that management of waqf has been neglected by the relevant authorities and it is yet to contribute significantly to the development of Muslim communities in the country. This statement is further supported by the statistics published by Department of Waqf, Zakat and Haj (Jawhar) in 2010 and Auditor General's Report in 2014. The two reports revealed that the waqf land are not fully utilized and developed and the waqf properties were not managed well. The waqf institutions are facing the risk of poor governance (Mansor et.al 2017).

In term of waqf management in the universities, Usman et al. (2022) claim that there is a need for proper system to audit and to manage the accounts to ensure transparency. Ihsan et al. (2016) highlighted that the regulators should introduce regulation regarding accountability where it includes audit on waqf accounts. This statement is also supported by Hasbullah et al. (2021). To date, less studies has been conducted relating to the accountability of waqf management, especially in Public Universities in Malaysia (Usman et al. 2022, Ihsan et al. 2016, Ihsan et al. 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Accountability

Accountability is one of the most important fundamental for good governance. According to Salman (2022), Robert et al. (1985) Harmon et al. (1986), Cutt et.al (2000), Velayutham et al. (2004) and Ayedh et al. (2019), accountability involves the trust to manage resources meanwhile Arshad et al. (2017) Frink et al. (2004), Robert et al. (1985), Hopwood (1985), Gray et al. (1997), defined accountability as the duty to provide an account in which one is held responsible. However, Vellayutham and Perera (2004) argues that the definition of accountability could differ depending

on the culture, norms and beliefs.

The concept of accountability in Islam differs from the conventional perspectives. Human beings are khalifah who are responsible to manage the resources entrusted to them by Allah (Abu Umar Faruq Ahmad 2017, Ihsan 2016, Haniffa 2002, Shahul 2000, Al-Safi 1992). The major differences between the conventional and Islamic concept of accountability is the accountability to Allah (Ahmad, 2017, Ihsan et al. 2021, Ramli et al 2015, Yasmin et al. 2014, Hassan 2001, Al-Safi 1992, Philips 1994).

Discussions relates to the institutional accountability, it involves twofold accountability, that is, Allah and human beings (Daud 2018, Ihsan 2016, Ramli et al 2015, Iqbal et al. 2009, Sulaiman et al. 2009, Abdul Rahman et al. 1998, Al-Safi 1992).

Waqf Management and Accountability

Ihsan et.al (2006), Cajee (2008) and Ramli (2015) highlighted that the waqf development requires good governance to grow in the future. Increased transparency and better information will instill confidence among the public towards the waqf institutions (Yunanda et al. 2016). The sustainability of waqf to develop the economy is very important and it depends on the good and prudent management (Hisham 2013).

There are eight elements of good governance introduced by United Nation (2015) and the element that mostly discussed in the waqf management is the element of accountability. The nature of waqf institutions makes accountability as the center of attention (Ahmad et al. 2017). According to Ihsan et al. (2011) and Kumar (1996) the expectation for greater accountability is growing among the public due to several mismanagement issues in waqf and other Islamic charitable organization. This scenario may give a negative impact to the waqf institutions if a drastic action is not taken to strengthen the accountability of the institutions. According to Ihsan (2016), many waqf institution fail to address

the accountability issue seriously. Ainol Basirah (2022) further added that the lack of knowledge on accountability is one of the major reasons for waqf institutions fail to address the issue.

Ramli (2015) stressed that accountability is the core value of a public management. Yasmin et al. 2019, Ayemang et.al, 2017 and Ebrahim 2009 highlighted that accountability concept is the fundamental for waqf institutions as it has a significant impact on the institutions' sustainability and legitimacy. It is undeniable that the credibility of waqf institutions is linked closely with the accountability (Yunanda et al. 2016). Sinclair et al. (2013) affirms that accountability is a proactive function to ensure public confidence in the waqf institutions.

Majority of the literature used the accountability mechanisms proposed by Ebrahim (2003) to analyse the accountability of waqf institutions (Ihsan et al. 2021, 2016, Ayedh et al. 2019, Arshad et al. 2017, Ahmad et al. 2017). According to Ebrahim, there are five mechanisms to operationalize accountability. The five mechanisms are disclosure statements and reports, performance assessment and evaluation, participation, self-regulation and social auditing. Obaidullah (2014) has also proposed framework for accountability assessment. The framework of Obaidullah covers four dimensions; namely governance, effectiveness, finance fund raising. Very few studies have used internal control framework to conduct assessment on the accountability of waqf institutions. The internal control framework consists of control environment, risk assessment, control activities, information and communication and monitoring activities.

Waqf Management in Higher Education

Waqf fund is very important for the sustainability of higher education. The government fund for the higher education in Malaysia has been reduced from year to year and the higher education is required to look for grants and fund from other sources to sustain the institutions (Mujani et al. 2021, Mujani et.al 2018, Ismail et.al 2019, Usman et al. 2022,

Harun et al. 2016, Hasbullah et al. 2021, Mohamad Nor et al. 2017).

The Purple Book launched by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia suggested three governance models to be adopted by the public universities in Malaysia. The first model is the university is required to set up a unit or department under the management of the university. The waqf committee is placed under the Board of Directors of the university and acknowledged to be one of the Board Committee. The second model propose the university to set up an office for Waqf under the Board of Trustees (BoT). The university waqf fund is placed under BoT as a project under the University Foundation which has a separate account and financial management. The final model which is the third model suggests the university to establish a University Waqf Board (UWB) as a separate and independent entity (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia 2017).

The first step that the universities need to take to implement waqf is to get the permission from the Islamic Religious Council of respected state (MAIN). The approval from MAIN will allow the public universities to collect, raise, and use, manage, invest and develop waqf funds (Hasbullah et al. 2021, Mujani et al. 2021). Any income generated by the university from the waqf fund, there will be some portion that need to be distributed to MAIN. The benefits to the beneficiaries can be in various forms including; scholarships and other academic financial support, grants for research, academic or professional chairs, travelling allowances for conferences as well as sponsorships for academic and research programme (Mohd Taib et al. 2016).

According to Usman et al. (2022), the establishment of waqf-based universities has benefited the students, the staffs and the university as a whole. Universities also uses the fund to run welfare programs such as future income generating projects. Ismail et al. (2019) reported that the responsibilities carried by the public university in

managing the waqf is challenging. The universities are not only required to receive waqf donation, manage waqf assets and distribute the benefits, they are also required to expand the assets and its benefits.

Internal Control Practices

Internal control system gives the management with all the possibilities to prevent, detect and react against all the associated risks in order to achieve the objectives and mission of the organization (Thabit et al. 2017, Abbas et al. 2012). In 1992, COSO has published Internal Control-Integrated Framework and the framework has been revised in the year of 2013 (COSO, 2013). The framework provides robust conceptualization and it is used in firms around the world (Lansiluoto et al. 2016). COSO 2013 framework consists of five components and 17 principles that plays an important role in the achievement of the institution's role. (COSO 2013).

Accountability issues can be resolved using the internal control practices (Hisham et. al. 2018). Implementation of internal control practices in waqf institutions or institutions that manages waqf fund will lead to efficiency and effectiveness (Siraj et al. 2014). According to Sloan (2009) a good internal control practices will increase the trust among the public.

Based on COSO Internal Control Integrated Framework (2013) the five components that plays an important role in the achievement of an organisation's internal control are (i) control environment- the control environment describes a set of standards, processes, and structures that provide the basis for carrying out internal control across the organization; (ii) risk assessment -forms the basis for determining how risks will be managed., (iii) control activities- are actions (generally described in policies, procedures, and standards) that help management mitigate risks in order to ensure the achievement of objectives., (iv) information and communication- to obtain and disseminate important information and (v)

monitoring activities- are periodic or ongoing evaluations to verify that each of the five components of internal control.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative method using the approach of focus group discussions. The focus group discussions approach is used in order to get in-depth information from various group of respondents who are responsible in managing the waqf fund in the Centre for Management of Zakat, Waqf and Endowment (WAZAN) in University of Putra Malaysia. WAZAN is chosen for this study as it is one of the Centre that has managed waqf for nearly seven years since its establishment in 2016.

The respondents for this study are the director of WAZAN, the head of Waqf Knowledge Management Fund Section, Executive Staff Waqf Knowledge Management Fund Section, Head of Endowment Management Section, Head of Finance and Administration Section, Operation Assistance in Finance and Administration Section and Executive Officer from program development unit. The information gained from the focus group discussion is transcribed and the relevant information is analysed based on the principles of control activities. The principles of control activities as stated in the COSO are selects and develops control activities that contribute to the mitigation of risks to the achievement of objectives to acceptable levels, selects and develops general control activities over technology to support the achievement of objectives and deploys control activities through policies that establish what is expected and procedures that put policies into action.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Centre for Management of Waqf, Zakat and Endowment (WAZAN) in University Putra Malaysia (UPM) manages waqf fund for the university. WAZAN is given the status of Mutawalli agent by "Perbadanan Wakaf Selangor" (PWS) where they are given the authority to collect, to

distribute and to invest the waqf fund. The role of WAZAN in managing the waqf fund is clearly stated in the agreement signed between WAZAN and PWS. In terms of operation, the waqf fund collected will be channeled to the UPM's Bursar. However, every month the collection of waqf which is channeled to the UPM's Bursar is required to transfer to PWS account and PWS will return the fund to the UPM's Bursar. The process of transferring the fund from PWS to UPM's Bursar takes some time and it delays the decision-making process in WAZAN.

The waqf fund returned by PWS will be invested by WAZAN and 15 percent from the profit of the investment will be given to PWS. WAZAN is required to get approval from PWS for any investment using waqf fund. Based on the focus group discussion, the only investment allowed by PWS is the fixed deposit and this has restricted WAZAN in expanding the waqf fund. The restriction made by PWS has led WAZAN to explore on endowment which is more flexible. In terms of infrastructure, WAZAN does not have any system to monitor on the management of waqf in the university. There are only two permanent staffs who manage waqf in WAZAN.

Internal audit is carried out on yearly basis in WAZAN to determine the compliance of the Centre with the policies and procedures. The internal audit conducted does not represent the holistic process of internal control. The control assessment is not included in the internal audit conducted by the university. Accountability assessment is very surface. The lack of accountability assessment can expose the Centre to the risk of mismanagement of fund. Eventually, mismanagement of fund will lead to loss of public trust to contribute more for waqf.

Awareness training related to the internal control is important for the staffs in WAZAN. The knowledge of internal control will help to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of WAZAN and it could also promote a better governance in the

Centre. Accountability is achievable when there are clear protocols on how data is transmitted, recorded, shared and reported are outlined. Good accountability reflects that the Centre stays in compliance with regulatory requirements.

As discussed earlier in the literature review, the element of accountability is very important, especially to the institution that collects fund from the public. UPM, via WAZAN currently is collecting waqf fund as an alternative source as the government funding has dropped tremendously over the years to the university. Without proper internal control assessment, it will expose the university to the reputational risk and loss of public trust. It is vital for the university to conduct internal control assessment on a yearly basis in order to reduce the risk of fund mismanagement and to increase public trust.

Hence, one of the components of internal control proposed in this study in order to conduct accountability assessment is control activities. Rigorous assessment using control activities would promote transparency, integrity, accountability and consistency. WAZAN should select and develop control activities that contribute to the mitigation of risks in achieving its objectives to acceptable levels. In addition to that, WAZAN should also select and develop general control activities over technology to support its objectives. Finally, WAZAN should deploy control activities through policies that establish what is expected and procedures that put policies into action.

CONCLUSION

Managing public fund such as waqf fund by the public universities requires a robust framework to avoid any mismanagement. Accountability is an important element to increase the public trust to donate. Any violation of trust in managing the waqf fund will lead to reputational risk of the university. Hence it is important to incorporate the internal control in the universities to create an effective and efficient management of waqf fund.

Based on the findings of the study, WAZAN is yet to incorporate control activities component in its Centre. The staffs have lack of knowledge relating to the internal control system. It is difficult to conduct the assessment of accountability due to the absence of control activities component. It is important for WAZAN to take a drastic action to incorporate the control activities component in order to avoid any serious repercussion in the long run.

Incorporating systematic internal control system, especially control activities component will reflect the integrity, ethics, transparency and accountability of an institution. These elements are very crucial when it comes to managing the public fund.

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