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THE IMPORTANCE OF ZAKAT INTERVIEW PANEL: AN ANALYSIS AT UNIT ZAKAT, SEDEKAH AND WAKAF (UZSW) UiTM JOHOR BRANCH

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Abstract:

Zakat institutions play an important role to distribute zakat to the qualified *asnaf* according to the specific conditions and requirements. Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Johor Branch is one of the universities that apply zakat interview panel under Unit Zakat, Sedekah and Wakaf (UZSW). However, there is an issue where some of the people still does not receive zakat even though they meet the requirements. Therefore, this research is conducted to study the importance of zakat interview panel in choosing qualified *asnaf* recipient to receive zakat at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Johor. This study uses qualitative method by using data through primary sources and semi-structured interview. The primary data is extracted from USZW of UiTM Johor and is analyzed through document analysis. Meanwhile, data from semi-structured interview is analyzed by using thematic approach. The result of the study shows that there is an increase in the number of panels from 2023 to 2024 which is from 34 panels to 38 panels. The recruitment of zakat interview panel is very important to conduct zakat interview session, verify the document of zakat applicants, identify *asnaf* category among zakat recipients, deliver *da'wah* and advice to the zakat applicants and speed up the interview and review process. As a conclusion, zakat interview panel is greatly significant and important as the panel really helps zakat management in smoothen the interview process of zakat applicants in UiTM Johor. The existence of the panel is necessary to maximise the effectiveness of zakat management.

This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Keywords:**

UiTM Johor; Unit Zakat, Sedekah Dan Wakaf (UZSW); Zakat Applicant; Zakat Interview Panel.

Introduction

Zakat is one of Islam's five pillars where it is obligatory to all Muslims who meet specific financial requirements. Al-Quran mentions the orders to issue zakat for 32 times (Al-Khin et al., 2003). It requires giving a portion of one's wealth to those in need such as poor, needy and others. Allah said in the Quran as follows:

إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَاتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْعَامِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَالْغَارِمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ ۖ فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

Zakat expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy and for those employed to collect [zakat] and for bringing hearts together [for Islam] and for freeing captives [or slaves] and for those in debt and for the cause of Allah and for the [stranded] traveler – an obligation [imposed] by Allah. And Allah is Knowing and Wise. (At-Taubah 9:60)

Based on the Quran above, it shows eight categories of asnaf. There are *al-fuqara'* (poor), *al-masakeen* (needy), *al-amileen* (those employed to collect zakat), *muallaf* (those inclined towards Islam), *al-riqab* (freeing captives), *al-ghaarimeen* (those in debt), *fisabilillah* (the cause of Allah) and *ibnu sabil* (stranded traveller).

Zakat, waqf and baitulmal are three main Muslim property managed by state government. Zakat institutions play an important role to distribute zakat to the qualified *asnaf* according to the specific conditions and requirements. Wahid et. al (2019) stated that the State Islamic Religious Department, the State Islamic Religious Council (MAIN) and agencies mandated by MAIN such as zakat, waqf, and baitulmal institutions are in charge of administration. In Negeri Sembilan Islamic Religious Council (MAINS), they have collected zakat with total amount of RM67 million for the period from January to June this year while Federal Territory Islamic Religious Council and Zakat Collection Center (PPZ-MAIWP) recorded zakat collection of RM511 million from January to June this year with an increase of 10 percent compared to the same period in 2023 (Bernama, 2024). Besides, Yahya (2024) mentioned the squad of Saidina Umar of Selangor Zakat Board (LZS) welcomed the ambiguous *khunsa* which is from poor asnaf. All these show that zakat function well in the state government.

According to a study by Ismail et. al (2022), more contemporary techniques that adhere to industry standards should take the place of the conventional manual approach to zakat collection and distribution. Technology improvement, as noted by Meerangani et al. (2021), makes zakat institutions easier to manage which raises zakat collection. Saro et al. (2022) also asserts that the advancement of Industrial Revolution 4.0 coincides with the technological adaptation in the zakat implementation process. Other than technology approach, zakat interview panel also is a component of the procedure designed to guarantee that zakat is disbursed equitably and in compliance with Islamic teachings. It also helps in smoothing the management of zakat distribution.

However, there is an issue where some of the people still does not receive zakat even though they meet the requirements. This circumstance happened due to few factors. It can be from the zakat institution itself or the people are not alert with the zakat assistance. Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim also has reminded Islamic Religious Council of the Federal Territory (MAIWP) to standardize the distribution of zakat assistance with other agencies to ensure that people who are truly in need get the benefit (Bernama 2024).

Therefore, this research is conducted to study the importance of zakat interview panel in choosing qualified *asnaf* recipient to receive zakat at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Johor. It is to ensure that the students can receive zakat according to the *asnaf* classification and there is no issue of overlooking for the qualified students related to that matter.

Literature Review

Zakat Management in Malaysia

There are two functions of zakat institution which are collecting and distributing where it is handled by the authorised zakat officers at the government level (Alwi & Wahid, 2020). Adali and Wahid (2020) added that during COVID-19 pandemic, state zakat centres have decided to release zakat funds as a special allocation for COVID-19 to zakat recipients who are from the B40 income group.

In general, zakat administration varies to each state subject to their respective provisions. Every state is allowed to design its Islamic affairs administration structure in a way that best suits its needs. As a result, it illustrates how the pattern and format of each unique administration is different from each other. This is a crucial matter for all parties to comprehend since it has an impact on Malaysia's zakat administration system either directly or indirectly. Alias (2016) added that the success factors of PPZ-MAIWP in collection and distribution zakat are due to the good organization, work culture, economy and others. In a study of Paizin (2016), it stated that one of the strategies of the State Islamic Religious Council (MAIN) to increase zakat collection is establishing a Zakat Collection Institution (IPZ).

Due to that, Paizin (2016) also has generally classified Malaysia's zakat administration system into four categories. Firstly, direct zakat administration by MAIN like in Perlis, Kelantan, Terengganu, Johor and Perak. Secondly, dual-system administration where collection matters under subsidiary companies (IPZ) while distribution matters remain under MAIN such as in the Federal Territory, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang. Thirdly, indirect zakat administration by holding other bodies on behalf of MAIN in matters of zakat collection and distribution such as in Selangor, Penang, Sabah and Sarawak. Fourthly, department administration where it is separate from MAIN but still led by the sultan for example in Kedah.

Zakat Interview Panel

Zakat according to *syara'* can be defined as a certain amount taken from a certain portion of the property, which must be given to a certain group when meets the requirements and conditions. Property given to a certain group is called a zakat. This is because the distribution and the prayer of the recipient will cause the rest of the property to be fertile and increase in blessings (Al-Khin et al, 2003). Zakat indirectly is a key principle that governs Islamic economics. According to al-Qardawi (1999), zakat improves the value of zakat payer's life, cleans and enriches property, helps those in need and strengthens social security.

Meanwhile, zakat interview panel is a crucial part in ensuring that the zakat operation and process run well. The purpose of its existence is to ensure that the student's welfare is taken care of. Basically, to become the panel, they are given training and guidance from the zakat coordinator. The training includes understanding about the role of the zakat interview panel as a preacher, counsellor and adviser as well as the *asnaf* category and efficient interview techniques (UZSW, 2023).

According to Mearaj et. al (2023), in addition to lead zakat interview, the panel also serves as a preacher. They must occasionally inspire the applicant by using communication techniques in order to foster positive engagement with the student.

Also, by participating in student-friendly events like the Ziarah Mahabbah program, the panel serves as a *da'wah* activist. This program is carried out by visiting the student's house. Throughout this program, the panel is exposed to the student's actual life and assists them in solving their problems aside from offering advice and assistance with medical and necessary matters.

In order to develop students' faith, the panel also serves to deliver high-quality Islamic education in the form of both physical and spiritual support. The panel can remind the students to improve prayer, zikr, and fasting throughout their studies at UiTM (Mearaj et. al, 2023).

As a conclusion, zakat interview panel plays a good role in many aspects. Indirectly, panel helps to smoothen the zakat management.

Unit Zakat, Sedekah and Wakaf (UZSW)

Unit Zakat, Sedekah and Wakaf or known as UZSW is one of the zakat institutions established at the university level under UiTM Johor. It manages activities related to zakat, alms and waqf. UZSW also plays an important role in taking care of the welfare of the students who are eligible to receive zakat. As Bakri (2022) mentioned, UiTM has 70% of students who are from B40 group including *asnaf*.

Besides, UZSW must administer the zakat distribution fund in compliance with the established distribution management guidelines. Then, they have to ensure the efficiency of distribution management that has been planned and carried out. Other than that, UZSW must guarantee that all the collections and distributions are managed in accordance with *syara'* and authorized rules. It is also important for UZSW to spread good awareness to the community especially to UiTM residents related to the significant of sharing and giving through zakat, alms and waqf. It also fosters possibilities to commit to the communities through volunteering activities, aside from delivering extra value to the beneficiaries in terms of personality, intellectual and soft skills (UZSW n.d).

Methodology

This study uses qualitative method by using data through primary sources and semi-structured interview. The primary data is extracted from the zakat unit in one of the institutions that apply zakat interview panel which is from UZSW of UiTM Johor. The data is analyzed by using document analysis and it is limited to the data from this branch of UiTM only.

In addition, data is analyzed based on semi-structured interview from the coordinator of UZSW by using thematic analysis. It is a research strategy used to detect and evaluate patterns or themes in a data set, and it frequently leads to new insights and understanding (Boyatzis, 1998).

Thematic analysis was utilised by Naeem and Ozuem (2022) to create a conceptual model of their findings. The process involved selecting keywords and quotations, coding, theming, interpreting the data, and developing the model. The flow chart of the methodology can be summarized as below:

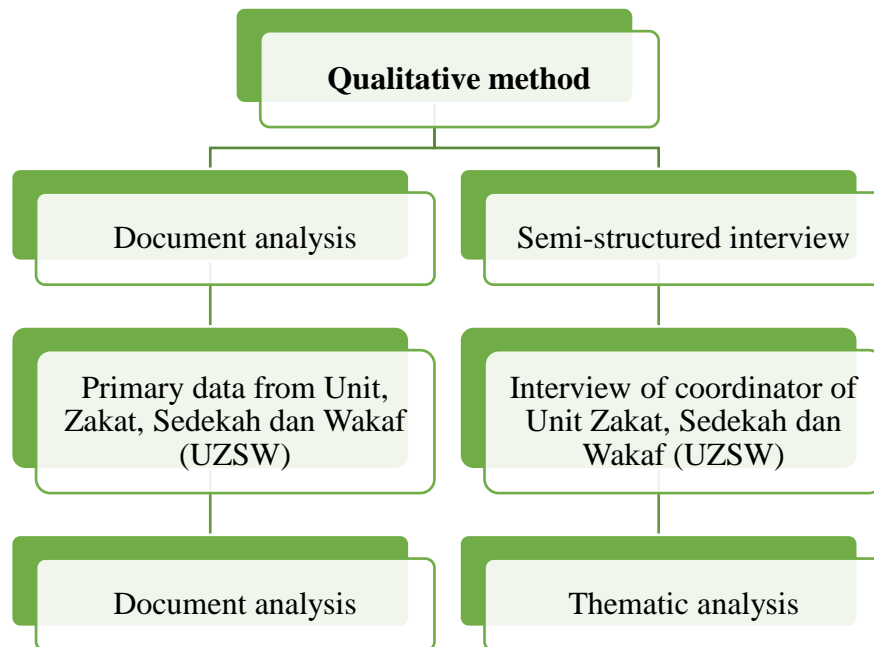


Figure 1: Methodology of the Study

Findings and Discussion

Findings

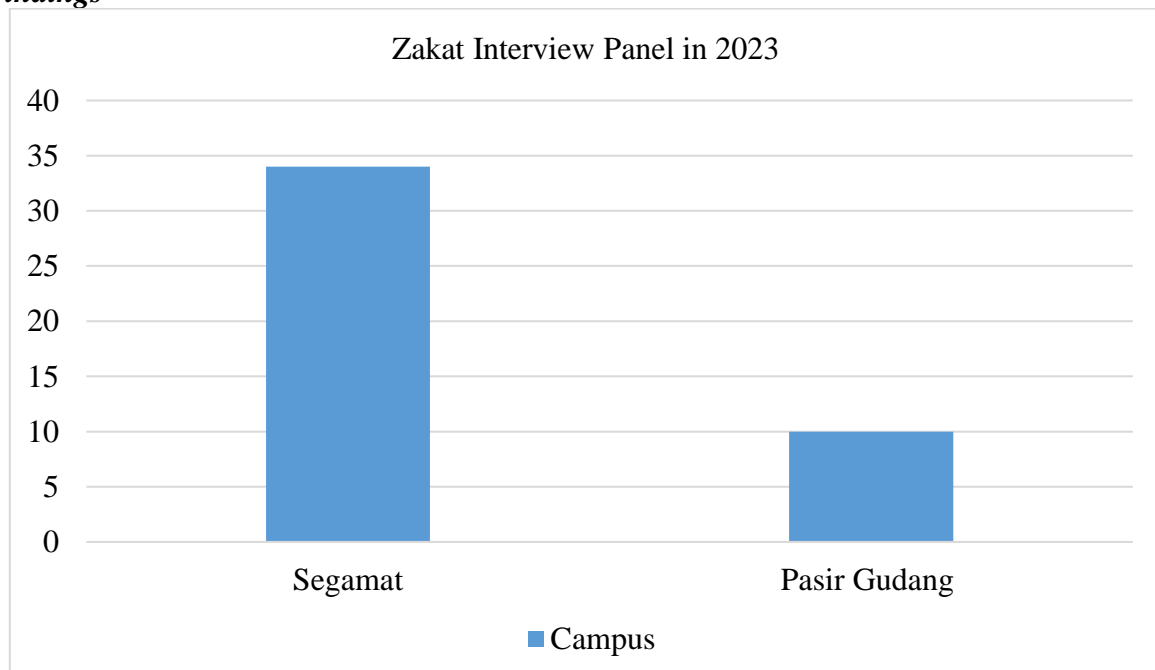


Figure 2: Number of Zakat Interview Panel in 2023

Source: (UZSW, 2024)

According to figure 2 (UZSW, 2023), there are 34 zakat interview panels from Segamat campus and 10 panels from Pasir Gudang campus. The total number from two campuses are 44 panels.

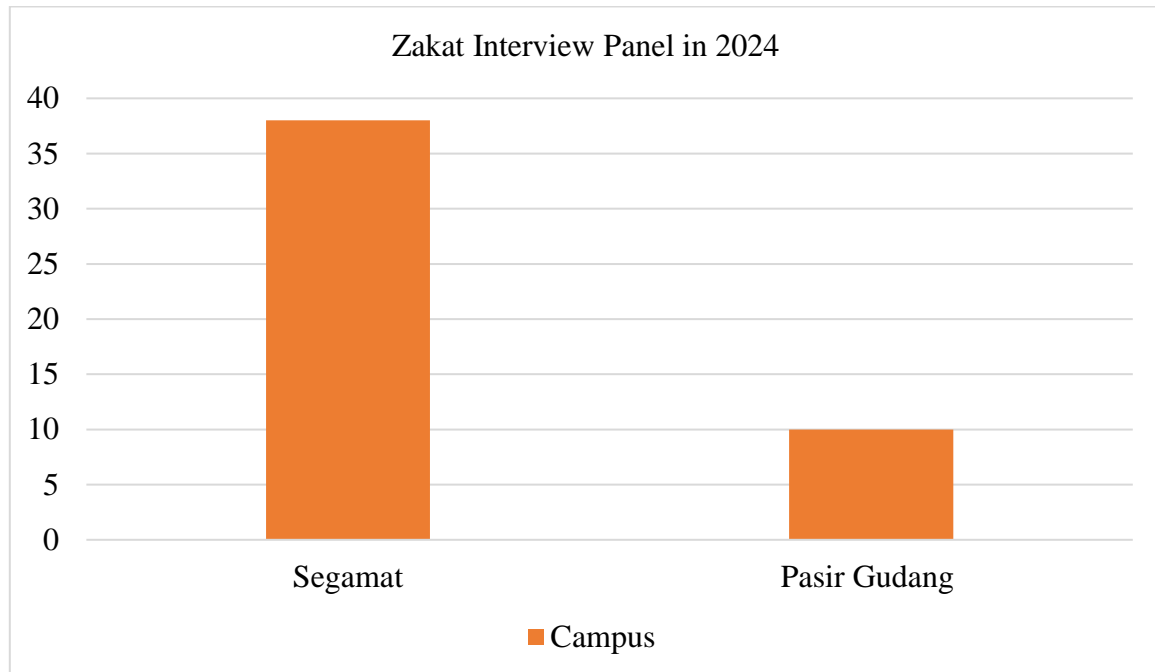


Figure 3: Zakat Interview Panel in 2024

Source: (UZSW, 2024)

Meanwhile, according to figure 3 (UZSW, 2024), UZSW has recruits 38 panels from Segamat campus and Pasir Gudang campus still maintains with the same number. The total number of panels is 48, which is higher than the previous year. The number of panels depends on the student application received by UZSW every semester.

Discussion

Based on the data above, it shows that there is an increase in the number of panels from 2023 to 2024. It indicates a good improvement in showing zakat interview panel as an important member in the zakat management towards zakat applicants in UiTM Johor.

The recruitment of zakat interview panel plays a significant role in many aspects (M. Mearaj, personal communication, August 5, 2024). It can be summarized in the figure as follows:

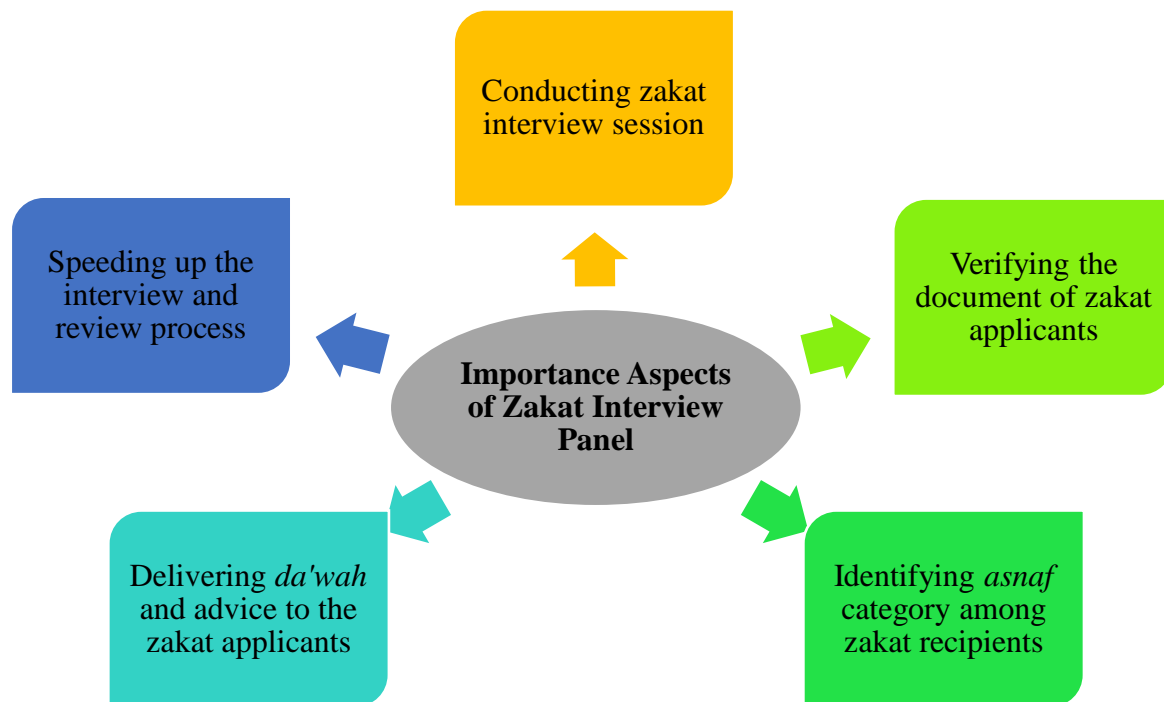


Figure 4: The Importance of Zakat Interview Panel

According to figure 4, there are five important aspects of the existence of zakat interview panel in UZSW of UiTM Johor.

Conducting Zakat Interview Session

One of the importance of zakat interview panel is conducting the interview session to the zakat applicants of UiTM Johor. This is an important task that needs to be carried out by each panel before choosing the qualified applicants to receive zakat. Usually, the interview is conducted face to face. Indirectly, it helps the panel to observe the applicants in terms of their appearance, personality, attitude and the way they answer the interview questions. The panel then can evaluate whether the applicants are qualified to receive zakat or vice versa.

Verifying the Document of Zakat Applicants

Secondly, the panel functions to verify the document of zakat applicants in the E-ZAKAT system. Generally, every application must attach a few important documents such as softcopy of identity card or student card, student bank account number and pay slip or confirmation income of the parent. As this stage is crucial part, the coordinator needs help from the panels to verify and smoothen the process. In addition, the panel must ensure that the zakat applicants make a pledge and admit that the documents provided are true and accurate. This is to prevent data and information fraud.

Identifying Asnaf Category among Zakat Recipients

Then, the zakat interview panel is given authority to identify *asnaf* category among zakat recipients. This is because there will be a slight change in the *asnaf* category every semester. For instance, there is a case where the parent of the zakat recipient does not have income due to no job at the previous semester. Due to that, the zakat recipient is classified as *al-fuqara* (poor). However, apparently in the current semester, the parent gets a new job and minimum income to support the dependents. Thus, the *asnaf* category changes from *al-fuqara* (poor) to

al-masakeen (needy). This circumstance happens every semester to some of zakat recipients. Therefore, the panel plays an important role in identifying the *asnaf* category during the interview session accordingly.

Delivering Da'wah and Advice to the Zakat Applicants

Besides, the panel can build a good relationship with the applicants by delivering *da'wah* and advice to them. It is a very valuable element to ensure that the qualified zakat applicants will have a good attitude and manner. In addition, by giving advice, it helps the applicants to study hard to get better results every semester. It shows that they take serious in improving their studies after receiving zakat. Other than that, it will make the applicants feel honored and grateful when receive zakat and make them want to become a zakat payer in the future.

Speeding Up the Interview and Review Process

Zakat interview panel also is responsible to help the coordinator and distribution committees in speeding up the interview and review process of qualified *asnaf*. This is because the zakat application is between 300-700 students every semester. The coordinator is unable to manage alone as it will take longer time to complete with that huge capacity. If the coordinator makes such an action, it will affect the zakat recipients where the zakat distribution will be given late at the end of the semester. Due to that, zakat interview panel plays an important part to complete the process.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the recruitment of zakat interview panel is fundamentally significant and important due to few aspects. In fact, the panels really help zakat management in smoothen the interview process of zakat applicants in UiTM Johor. Indirectly, panels ensure that zakat distribution is correctly distributed according to right *asnaf* category and complies with shariah principles other than achieves its goals by upholding the religious and ethical norms of the practice.

The existence of zakat interview panel is necessary to maximise the effectiveness of zakat management. It also guarantees that it fulfils its intended role of reducing poverty and advancing social justice to the zakat recipients while upholding Islamic principles.

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