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Optimizing Infak Funds in Efforts to Empower Nutrition of Marginalized Communities

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Abstract

Malnutrition and stunting remain persistent challenges in Indonesia and other Muslim-majority countries, demanding innovative financing approaches that address both immediate and structural needs. This study examines the role of infaq as an Islamic social finance instrument in supporting nutritional empowerment for marginalized communities. Employing a systematic literature review of 32 studies published between 2015 and 2025 across Scopus, Web of Science, and national SINTA databases, the analysis followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency in study selection and synthesis. The review identified five major themes: governance and accountability, digitalization of philanthropy, community-based empowerment, hybrid consumptive–productive models, and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. Evidence from randomized and quasi-experimental studies demonstrated that targeted interventions, such as supplemental feeding and maternal education, improve short-term nutritional outcomes, while integrated and well-governed models strengthen long-term resilience. Despite these promising insights, rigorous evaluations directly linking infaq allocation to nutritional indicators remain limited, underscoring the need for pre-registered trials, digital fund-tracking, and stronger institutional collaborations. By synthesizing empirical findings with Islamic economic principles and the maqasid al-shariah, this study proposes a conceptual framework positioning infaq not only as a charitable mechanism but also as a developmental instrument that bridges global health agendas with the ethical imperatives of Islamic economics.

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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, malnutrition remains a persistent issue, particularly among marginalized groups in rural and coastal regions. Beatty et al. (2023) found that despite large-scale community health and nutrition projects, the prevalence of stunting among toddlers remains significantly high. Similarly, Yuliantini et al. (2022) highlighted that children living in coastal communities are more likely to be stunted due to low maternal education and adverse birth outcomes. Furthermore, Mehraban et al. (2021) observed a decline in dietary diversity among rural Indonesian households, indicating structural challenges that exacerbate nutritional inequality. These findings illustrate that malnutrition in Indonesia is not merely an individual health problem but a systemic and recurring phenomenon.

The problem is further compounded in remote areas where poverty, low education, and weak infrastructure create cycles of deprivation. For instance, Wulandari et al. (2025) emphasized that maternal nutrition literacy plays a decisive role in child nutrition outcomes in East Java, yet access to such knowledge is extremely limited in rural communities. Dewiasty et al. (2022) also demonstrated that poor nutrient intake remains a key determinant of malnutrition among Indonesian older adults, reflecting broader intergenerational vulnerabilities. These studies underscore that malnutrition is deeply tied to socioeconomic exclusion (Beatty et al., 2023; Wulandari et al., 2025; Dewiasty et al., 2022).

Similar patterns of marginalization and nutritional deficits are observed globally. Victora et al. (2021) noted that despite global progress, stunting and wasting remain disproportionately concentrated in low- and middle-income countries, particularly in marginalized rural populations. Ginting (2025) also reported that indigenous communities in Asia-Pacific experience persistent food insecurity due to systemic exclusion and lack of adaptive capacity. Moreover, the UNICEF (2022) global nutrition report documented how vulnerable groups, especially women and children, remain at the highest risk of chronic malnutrition. These global findings resonate strongly with the Indonesian case.

The situation is further complicated by the double burden of malnutrition. Popkin et al. (2020) observed that low-income populations often face both undernutrition and overweight as a result of dietary transitions. In Indonesia, Dwiastuti et al. (2022) highlighted that urban populations increasingly suffer from obesity while rural groups struggle with undernutrition. This reflects what Hawkes et al. (2020) describe as the "nutrition transition," where marginalized populations are simultaneously exposed to food insecurity and poor-quality diets. Such dynamics reveal the complexity of nutrition challenges in the modern era.

Despite numerous public health interventions, outcomes remain inconsistent. Beatty et al. (2023) reported that although community-based stunting interventions reduced prevalence in some districts, their effectiveness was undermined by weak governance and limited resources. Similarly, Dewiasty et al. (2022) found that supplementation programs often failed to sustain nutritional improvements due to poor follow-up and lack of community ownership. According to Victora et al. (2021), top-down interventions are often insufficient in addressing locally specific barriers. These limitations highlight the need for complementary, flexible, and community-driven solutions.

Within Islamic-majority societies, Islamic social finance (ISF) instruments such as zakat, waqf, and infak hold significant potential for addressing social inequities. Widiastuti et al. (2022) emphasized that ISF can be mobilized as an integrated model to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable development. Hamzah (2023) demonstrated that infak in particular plays an important role in supporting socio-economic resilience in West Papua through direct assistance and community empowerment. Maulina et al. (2023) further argued that ISF, when combined with commercial finance, can create synergies that enhance inclusive development.

Infak, compared to zakat, offers greater flexibility because it is not restricted to specific categories of recipients. According to Soleman and Lestari (2023), this flexibility makes infak a powerful tool for addressing diverse social needs, including nutrition. Huda et al. (2023), in their bibliometric analysis, found growing scholarly interest in Islamic philanthropy but noted that empirical studies on infak's role in health and nutrition are still limited. Moreover, Hamzah (2023) underlined that while infak contributes to community welfare, its nutritional impacts remain largely undocumented.

A small number of studies have indirectly linked ISF to health and nutrition. For instance, Maulina et al. (2023) suggested that Islamic financial tools can be harnessed to support wellbeing beyond economic outcomes, though their analysis did not provide specific nutrition metrics. Likewise, Widiastuti et al. (2021) showed that non-zakat empowerment programs improve mustahiq welfare through business growth and income support, but they did not evaluate dietary or health indicators. This gap suggests that the potential of infak in directly reducing malnutrition remains underexplored.

In Indonesia, philanthropic organizations such as Dompet Dhuafa and Rumah Zakat have already experimented with nutrition-related programs, often supported by infak. However, these initiatives are typically reported as case studies rather than systematically evaluated through academic research (Dompet Dhuafa, 2023; Soleman & Lestari, 2023). As a result, their contributions to long-term nutritional empowerment cannot be fully measured or generalized. Huda et al. (2023) emphasized that the lack of systematic assessment is one of the major gaps in the literature on Islamic philanthropy.

Governance is another critical factor in maximizing the role of infak. Rahmadhanis et al. (2024) stressed that principles of Good Corporate Governance (GCG) — transparency, accountability, and fairness — are essential to build trust in ISF institutions. Azizah et al. (2024) showed that digital reporting systems improve accountability in zakat and infak management. Similarly, Nurchoiriyah et al. (2025) concluded that transparency in Islamic philanthropic institutions enhances donor participation and program sustainability. Without these elements, the ability of infak to support nutrition initiatives will remain constrained.

Digital innovation is also reshaping the landscape of infak collection and distribution. Akbarillah (2025) demonstrated that digital platforms increase both the efficiency and the volume of infak collected. Azizah et al. (2024) found that management information systems not only streamline fund reporting but also expand outreach. Rosidah et al. (2023) noted that digital transparency strengthens accountability mechanisms and reduces risks of fraud. Collectively, these studies highlight that digitalization can create a positive feedback loop that enhances both fundraising and trust.

Beyond funding and governance, community participation remains essential. Patilaiya et al. (2022) argued that empowerment processes require local involvement to ensure ownership and sustainability. Wulandari et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of maternal knowledge and participation in nutrition interventions at the grassroots level. Ginting (2025) similarly noted that community resilience against food insecurity relies heavily on indigenous knowledge and agency. Such evidence suggests that infak-based nutrition interventions must be participatory to achieve lasting impact.

Nevertheless, very few studies have proposed hybrid models of infak utilization that combine both consumptive and productive approaches. Estuti et al. (2022) observed that sustainable social finance requires balancing short-term relief with long-term empowerment. Rahmadhanis et al. (2024) similarly recommended combining direct assistance with capacity building to avoid dependency. Yet, empirical applications of such hybrid models in the context of nutrition remain scarce, particularly in Islamic philanthropic literature.

From an international development perspective, aligning infak utilization with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could reinforce its relevance. Ginting (2025) linked food security programs to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), while Beatty et al. (2023) demonstrated that community-based nutrition interventions contribute directly to SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing). Widiastuti et al. (2022) proposed that Islamic social finance can be positioned as a strategic partner in SDG achievement. However, explicit connections between infak and nutrition-related SDGs are still underrepresented in scholarly discussions.

Given these conditions, this study seeks to fill the academic gap by systematically reviewing literature on infak and its potential for nutritional empowerment of marginalized communities. By synthesizing evidence from nutrition, philanthropy, and governance research, it aims to construct a conceptual framework for optimizing infak in addressing malnutrition. This study thus contributes both theoretically, by expanding the scope of Islamic social finance research, and practically, by proposing strategies for sustainable, community-based nutrition interventions.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a systematic literature review (SLR) design. The review was intended not only to collect and summarize existing studies, but also to synthesize them into a conceptual framework connecting infak (infaq) with nutritional empowerment of marginalized communities. A systematic review method provides transparency, replicability, and rigor in selecting and analyzing sources (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019; Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). Unlike narrative reviews, an SLR follows structured procedures in identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of sources (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021).

The study relied on secondary data obtained from reputable academic databases and official institutional publications. International databases included Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis, and ScienceDirect, which were used to capture high-impact global research on nutrition, philanthropy, and Islamic social finance (Sweileh, 2020; Donthu et al., 2021). In addition, local and regional databases such as Garuda, Neliti, and SINTA-indexed journals were searched to ensure contextual relevance to Indonesia (Setiawan & Huda, 2022; Nugraha et al., 2021). Grey literature, including annual reports from Dompet Dhuafa, BAZNAS, Rumah Zakat, and UNICEF Indonesia, was also considered to complement peer-reviewed sources (Dompet Dhuafa, 2023; UNICEF, 2022).

Data collection was conducted systematically between January and March 2025 using Boolean operators and controlled keywords. The search string combined terms such as:
“infaq OR “infak” OR “Islamic philanthropy” OR “Islamic social finance” AND “nutrition”

OR "malnutrition" OR "stunting" AND "empowerment" OR "marginalized communities". The search was restricted to articles published between 2015 and 2025*, written in English or Indonesian, and published in peer-reviewed journals or credible institutional reports. The PRISMA 2020 guidelines were followed to enhance transparency (Page et al., 2021).

Inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) articles focusing on Islamic philanthropy, social finance, or infak in relation to welfare, empowerment, or nutrition; (2) studies addressing malnutrition, food insecurity, or marginalized communities; and (3) peer-reviewed or institutional publications. Exclusion criteria included: (1) articles not available in full text, (2) studies irrelevant to nutrition or Islamic finance, and (3) non-academic sources such as blog posts or opinion pieces (Liberati et al., 2009; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

The screening process began with 275 initial records identified across databases. After removing duplicates and non-relevant sources, 58 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Finally, 32 articles were included for synthesis.

The data were analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic coding was applied to identify recurring concepts and categorize them into major themes: (1) Governance and accountability in infak management, (2) Digitalization and innovation in Islamic philanthropy, (3) Community-based nutrition empowerment, (4) Hybrid models of consumptive and productive infak distribution.

This process involved three key stages: data reduction (selecting and organizing relevant findings), data display (constructing thematic matrices), and conclusion drawing (synthesizing evidence into a conceptual model) (Miles et al., 2014). To strengthen rigor, NVivo 12 software was used for coding and cross-validation.

Although secondary in nature, this review emphasized trustworthiness following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria:

Credibility: ensured through triangulation across multiple databases and comparison of international and local studies (Patton, 2015).

Dependability: achieved by maintaining an audit trail of the selection and coding process (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability: safeguarded by peer debriefing with two academic colleagues and systematic documentation of decisions (Nowell et al., 2017).

Transferability: enhanced by providing thick descriptions of context, allowing applicability to other Islamic-majority settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The systematic search of international and national databases produced a total of 275 records. Following the removal of 47 duplicates, 228 titles and abstracts were screened, resulting in 105 articles deemed potentially relevant. After full-text assessment of 58 studies, 32 publications were finally included in the synthesis. This process was carried out in line with PRISMA 2020 standards to ensure transparency and replicability of the review (Page et al., 2021). The summary of the selection process is presented in Table 1, which shows the progressive narrowing of sources until only those meeting the inclusion criteria were retained.

Table 1. Study Identification And Selection

Stage	Number of Articles
Initial search results	275
After duplicates removed	228
After abstract/title screening	105
Full-text assessed	58
Final included studies	32

The 32 studies included in the review represent a diverse range of research types and contexts. As shown in Table 1, most of the studies were conducted between 2015 and 2025, with a significant concentration on Indonesia, reflecting the country's position as a global hub for Islamic social finance innovation and one of the world's most pressing contexts for nutrition and stunting. Out of these studies, 18 were published in Scopus- or Web of Science–indexed journals, while 14 were sourced from national SINTA- or Garuda-indexed publications. Methodologically, 12 studies were quantitative, 10 qualitative, 7 mixed-methods, and 3 programmatic reports from NGOs or international agencies.

Table 2. General Characteristics Of Included Studies

Category	Details
Publication period	2015–2025
International sources	18 (Scopus/WoS-indexed)
National sources	14 (SINTA/Garuda-indexed)
Methodological approaches	12 quantitative, 10 qualitative, 7 mixed, 3 policy/NGO reports
Contexts covered	Indonesia (21), Malaysia (4), Middle East (3), Global (4)

To provide further depth, Table 2 presents a matrix of selected key studies that formed the backbone of the analysis. These studies were chosen because of their conceptual strength, methodological rigor, or their relevance as programmatic examples. For instance, Widiastuti et al. (2022) proposed an integrated governance model for Islamic social finance and empirically demonstrated its stronger impact on welfare outcomes, while Maulina et al. (2023) conducted a bibliometric review that showed how digitalization and integration have become dominant topics in recent scholarship. On the other hand, empirical evidence such as the randomized controlled trial by Beatty et al. (2024) tested a large-scale community intervention in Indonesia but found no significant impact on stunting reduction, even though improvements in maternal and infant health behaviors were noted. By contrast, Khomsan et al. (2024) demonstrated significant gains in dietary adequacy and anthropometric indicators in a smaller intervention combining fortified milk with maternal education.

Table 3. Selected Key Studies In The Review

Study (Author, year)	Setting	Design / data	Key result
Widiastuti et al., 2022 (Heliyon)	Indonesia	Mixed	Integrated ISF models ~12% more effective on welfare outcomes.
Maulina et al., 2023 (Heliyon)	Global/Indonesia	SLR + bibliometric	Growth of digital and integrated ISF research.
Beatty et al., 2024 (Matern. &	Indonesia	Cluster RCT	No impact on stunting, but improved maternal/infant

Study (Author, year)	Setting	Design / data	Key result
Child Nutr.)			behaviors.
Khomsan et al., 2024 (Prog. in Nutrition)	Indonesia	Pre-post	Fortified milk + education improved WAZ/HAZ and knowledge.
Hamzah, 2023 (HTS)	West Papua	Case study	Infaq supported socio-economic resilience during COVID.
Dompet Dhuafa, 2024 (Impact Report)	Indonesia	NGO monitoring	Outputs of Pos Gizi programs targeting stunting.
UNICEF–BAZNAS, 2019 (Policy brief)	Indonesia	Institutional doc	Global–local partnership for nutrition via zakat/infaq.

Beyond documenting the diversity of evidence, a quality appraisal was undertaken to ensure the trustworthiness of findings. Using JBI and CASP checklists, nine studies were judged to be of high quality, fourteen of moderate quality, and nine of lower quality. High-quality studies included the Beatty et al. (2024) randomized controlled trial and the Khomsan et al. (2024) quasi-experimental evaluation, both of which provided measurable outcomes on nutrition. Moderate studies often relied on mixed methods or descriptive approaches with some limitations in sampling, while lower-quality items tended to be NGO reports that, although rich in operational detail, lacked independent validation. These distinctions were important in weighting the evidence: quantitative outcomes were given more interpretative weight, while descriptive reports were used primarily to contextualize program practices (JBI, 2020; CASP, 2018).

The thematic synthesis identified several dominant strands across the reviewed literature. Governance and accountability emerged as central to effective infaq mobilization, as emphasized by Widiastuti et al. (2022) and corroborated by NGO reports showing that transparent systems foster trust and sustainability. Digitalization was another recurring theme, with studies on systems such as SIMBA and e-ZIS demonstrating that digital platforms not only expand donation flows but also improve traceability (Mulyo et al., 2023). Nevertheless, both governance and digitalization were repeatedly found to be enabling conditions rather than sufficient guarantees of impact. In other words, funds could be mobilized at scale, but without careful program design and monitoring, nutrition outcomes remained uncertain.

The third theme concerned the design of interventions themselves. Evidence from smaller-scale, targeted programs such as the DASHAT study (Khomsan et al., 2024) showed tangible improvements in toddler growth indicators and maternal knowledge when interventions combined education with direct supplementation. These findings stand in contrast with the null results of the large, complex MCC Generasi intervention (Beatty et al., 2024), which illustrates that scope and fidelity of implementation critically determine outcomes. This suggests that while small, well-designed interventions are effective in the short term, scaling such programs requires more robust planning, extended time horizons, and rigorous monitoring systems.

A further theme was the importance of hybrid modalities of infaq utilization. Studies on productive versus consumptive zakat and infaq (Alim, 2015; Hidayat, 2023) showed that consumptive transfers provide immediate relief for food and nutritional insecurity, while productive uses generate longer-term household resilience. Integrating both has been recommended as a way to meet immediate nutritional needs while also laying the foundation for sustained improvements in welfare, an approach that resonates with the four-stage ISF model proposed by Widiastuti et al. (2022).

Finally, the literature collectively pointed to an evidence gap in rigorously measured nutrition outcomes funded directly from Islamic social finance. While bibliometric reviews confirm strong conceptual development (Maulina et al., 2023; Huda et al., 2023), empirical evaluations remain scarce. Apart from the Beatty et al. (2024) RCT and the DASHAT quasi-experimental study, most evidence comes from descriptive NGO reports such as the Dompet Dhuafa Impact Report (2024), which document reach and outputs but not causal outcomes. This highlights the need for future research to include randomized or quasi-experimental designs that directly trace infaq funding to measurable nutritional changes.

Taken together, the triangulation of findings from high-quality trials, quasi-experiments, and descriptive reports leads to a nuanced interpretation. Validated empirical outcomes show both successes and failures, descriptive evidence reveals the operational realities of programs, and conceptual models provide the frameworks within which to situate these practices. By aligning these strands, a conceptual framework can be articulated in which infaq resources, strengthened through governance and digitalization, are channeled through hybrid consumptive and productive programs, implemented with community participation and monitored through rigorous systems, thereby contributing to nutritional empowerment and progress toward SDGs 2 and 3.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the strategic potential of infaq, when mobilized under strong governance and innovative mechanisms, to contribute significantly to nutritional empowerment and the alleviation of stunting in marginalized communities. This resonates with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2 and 3) while simultaneously fulfilling the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqasid al-shariah*), particularly the preservation of life (*hifz al-nafs*) and wealth (*hifz al-mal*). The convergence between global development frameworks and Islamic objectives reinforces the importance of situating infaq not merely as an act of charity but as a systemic tool for social justice (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007; Chapra, 2008).

A key aspect that emerged is the role of governance and accountability in shaping the effectiveness of infaq. As observed in the integrated model proposed by Widiastuti et al. (2022), governance frameworks significantly enhance welfare outcomes by ensuring transparency and proper allocation. This is consistent with the Islamic principle of *amanah* (trust), which requires custodians of wealth to act with integrity. Ibn Khaldun, in his *Muqaddimah*, emphasized that social prosperity depends on justice and trustworthy leadership (Ibn Khaldun, 1377/2015), a principle that underpins the modern call for effective governance in Islamic finance (Ahmed, 2015).

The digitalization of Islamic philanthropy has opened new opportunities to expand donation flows and improve transparency. Platforms such as SIMBA and e-ZIS in Indonesia exemplify how technology can enhance both efficiency and accountability (Mulyo et al., 2023). From a shariah perspective, this aligns with the principle of *hisbah* (market oversight), ensuring that economic activities are transparent and fair. Contemporary scholars such as Habib Ahmed (2011) argue that technology can be harnessed to fulfill the ethical imperatives of Islamic finance, provided it is guided by strong governance structures.

Nevertheless, digitalization is an enabling mechanism rather than an end in itself. While it facilitates resource mobilization, the findings indicate that without robust program design and monitoring, the expanded flows of infaq may not translate into measurable nutritional outcomes. This echoes Al-Ghazali's (1901/1993) insight that means must always be aligned with noble ends, lest efficiency becomes detached from ethics. In the same vein, Yusuf al-Qaradawi (2011) stresses that zakat and infaq are not merely to be collected but must be disbursed in ways that tangibly uplift the poor and protect their dignity.

The comparison between small-scale, targeted interventions and large, multifaceted programs provides further lessons. The DASHAT study (Khomsan et al., 2024) demonstrated measurable improvements in toddler growth when fortified milk distribution was combined with maternal education. By contrast, the large-scale MCC Generasi trial (Beatty et al., 2024) failed to reduce stunting, despite improved behaviors. These findings resonate with the views of Adiwarman Karim (2010), who argues that Islamic social finance should prioritize interventions that are both targeted and context-sensitive, rather than overly ambitious projects that risk dissipating resources without measurable impact.

The hybrid use of infaq combining consumptive and productive modalities emerged as an important theme in the literature. Consumptive infaq addresses immediate nutritional needs, while productive infaq strengthens long-term resilience. This dual approach mirrors Qaradawi's (2011) framework, which underscores the need for zakat and infaq to support both short-term relief and sustainable development. Contemporary evidence confirms that productive zakat and infaq programs generate stronger welfare effects over time compared to consumptive transfers alone (Hidayat, 2023; Alim, 2015).

From an Islamic economics perspective, this hybrid model aligns with the maqasid objective of *istidamah* (sustainability). As Umer Chapra (2008) notes, economic justice in Islam requires not only meeting immediate needs but also building long-term capabilities for self-reliance. Thus, the integration of consumptive and productive infaq models represents a contemporary operationalization of classical Islamic principles of social solidarity (*takaful ijtima'i*). The validation of results through triangulation also provides a valuable lens for Islamic economics. High-quality empirical evidence, such as the DASHAT quasi-experiment, offers robust proof of impact, while descriptive NGO reports provide operational insights. In Islamic jurisprudence, the principle of *tahqiq al-manat* (establishing the context of application) demands that rulings and financial instruments be based on accurate knowledge of real conditions (Kamali, 2008). Similarly, the blending of empirical data and descriptive reports ensures that infaq-based policies are grounded in both theory and practical realities.

At the policy level, the findings have direct implications for the Indonesian economy, where Islamic social finance is recognized as a strategic pillar of the national sharia economy master plan (KNEKS, 2020). The partnership between BAZNAS and UNICEF demonstrates how local Islamic institutions can collaborate with global actors to align humanitarian and developmental goals (UNICEF, 2019). This illustrates a model for other Muslim-majority countries, positioning infaq as an instrument for both domestic social protection and international humanitarian engagement.

The discussion also reveals that while Islamic social finance has strong conceptual foundations, empirical evidence on nutrition-specific outcomes remains scarce. This represents both a limitation and an opportunity. Scholars such as Habib Ahmed (2015) and M. Kahf (2017) argue that Islamic finance must evolve from its narrow financial orientation to become more developmental and outcome-focused. Integrating rigorous monitoring and evaluation into infaq-funded nutrition programs would directly address this call and strengthen the case for Islamic finance as a developmental tool.

The novelty of this study lies in its conceptual framework, which synthesizes governance, digitalization, hybrid funding models, and community participation into a coherent pathway linking infaq to nutritional empowerment. While previous studies have addressed individual aspects governance (Widiastuti et al., 2022), digitalization (Mulyo et al., 2023), or empowerment (Hamzah, 2023)—this review integrates them into a unified model that is both theoretically grounded and practically actionable. This framework thus advances the discourse in Islamic economics by offering a model that can be tested, adapted, and scaled in different contexts.

Nevertheless, the study has limitations that must be acknowledged. The scarcity of randomized controlled trials or large-scale quasi-experiments specifically funded by infaq restricts the ability to make definitive causal claims. Many of the included studies relied on descriptive data or small-scale evaluations, which, while valuable, limit generalizability. Furthermore, publication bias is likely, as successful programs are more frequently reported than failures. This highlights the importance of transparent and pre-registered evaluations in future research. Future research should therefore prioritize the design of rigorous, pre-registered evaluations of infaq-funded nutrition programs, employing randomized or stepped-wedge methodologies. Such studies should also incorporate digital fund-tagging systems to enable precise tracking of infaq flows from collection to nutritional outcomes. In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the sustainability of hybrid models that combine consumptive and productive elements. These steps would not only strengthen the empirical base but also enhance the credibility of Islamic social finance in global development discourse.

Finally, the findings of this review reinforce the broader Islamic vision of economic justice. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the obligation to care for the poor and vulnerable, linking charitable giving with societal stability (Qur'an 2:177; 9:60). By demonstrating how infaq can be systematically leveraged to address malnutrition and stunting, this study positions Islamic social finance within both a spiritual and developmental framework. As Ibn Khaldun argued centuries ago, societies flourish when wealth circulates justly and meets collective needs (Ibn Khaldun, 2015). Thus, optimizing infaq for nutritional empowerment is not only an academic proposition but also an ethical imperative deeply rooted in Islamic tradition.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that infaq, when supported by robust governance, digital transparency, and hybrid modalities of utilization, has the potential to play a transformative role in addressing nutritional challenges among marginalized communities. Evidence from high-quality empirical studies, complemented by descriptive programmatic reports, reveals that targeted and context-sensitive interventions such as supplemental feeding combined with maternal education yield measurable short-term improvements, while integrated and well-governed models ensure long-term resilience. These findings position infaq not merely as a charitable instrument but as a strategic tool aligned with both the Sustainable Development Goals and the maqasid al-shariah, particularly in safeguarding life (hifz al-nafs) and promoting social justice.

At the same time, the review underscores significant gaps that demand attention. The scarcity of rigorous evaluations directly linking infaq funding to nutritional outcomes highlights the need for future randomized or quasi-experimental research, digital fund-tracking systems, and stronger collaborations between Islamic social finance institutions and global development actors. By synthesizing insights from Islamic economic thought, empirical evidence, and operational practice, this study offers a conceptual framework that bridges theory and application. Optimizing infaq for nutritional empowerment is therefore both a developmental necessity and an ethical imperative in advancing the vision of Islamic economics for equitable and sustainable human well-being.

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