JURNAL YADIM
ياياسن دعوه اسلامية مليسيا
"International Journal Of
Islam And Contemporary Affairs"

VOL. 5 (2) |DISEMBER 2025: 143-178
E-ISSN: 2785-8898
www.e-jurnal.yadim.com.my

Submission date: 15 November 2025 Acceptance date: 15 Disember 2025 Available online: 25 Disember 2025

A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW ON THE ISLAMIC MICROFINANCE STRATEGIES IN PROMOTING FINANCIAL INCLUSION AMONG THE MUSLIM POOR

TINJAUAN LITERATUR BERSISTEMATIK KE ATAS STRATEGI KEWANGAN MIKRO ISLAM BAGI MEMPROMOSI KETERANGKUMAN KEWANGAN DALAM KALANGAN MUSLIM MISKIN

[i*]Shahida Shahimi, [ii]Nurul Wafa' Mohd Bohari,
[iii]Nik Mohd Azim Nik Ab Malik, [iv]Abd Ghafar Ismail

[i, iii-iv]Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.

[ii]Yayasan Maghfirah, 43000 Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia

Corresponding Author: e-mail: *shahida@ukm.edu.my

DOI : https://doi.org/10.61465/jurnalyadim.v4.349

ABSTRACT

This study aims to systematically review the existing literature on the strategy of Islamic microfinance in promoting financial inclusion among the Muslim poor. The systematic literature review (SLR) method is used based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Statement (PRISMA). The SLR approach offers a reliable study, as it is supported by a rigorous methodology. The literature is compiled from nine online databases, namely, Emerald Insight, Oxford Journals, Sage, Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science, Wiley Online Library, Dimensions and Google Scholar. Following the systematic protocol of inclusion and exclusion criteria, seven primary studies on Islamic microfinance are identified for further analysis. The findings show that Islamic microfinance has five main strategies in promoting financial inclusion, namely, effective financial services, inclusive customers, simple requirements, robust technology, and capacity building.

Keywords: financial exclusion, Islamic social finance, strategy, systematic literature review, sustainable development

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan menjalankan kajian literatur bersistemik mengenai strategi kewangan mikro Islam bagi mempromosikan keterangkuman kewangan dalam kalangan Muslim miskin. Kaedah kajian literatur bersistematik (SLR) ini mengaplikasikan Pernyataan Peruntukan Berprinsip untuk Kajian Literatur Sistematik dan Meta-Analisis (PRISMA). Kaedah SLR ini menawarkan kajian yang boleh dipercayai kerana disokong oleh metodologi berbanding dengan kaedah kajian literatur yang lain. Kajian ini memperoleh literatur dari sembilan pangkalan data artikel jurnal secara dalam talian, iaitu Emerald Insight, Oxford Journals, Sage, Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), Wiley Online Library, Dimensions, dan Google Scholar. Setelah menjalankan kirteria kemasukan dan pengecualian, sebanyak tujuh buah kajian utama tentang kewangan mikro Islam dikenal pasti untuk analisis lanjutan secara deskriptif dan bertema. Dapatan kajian SLR ini menunjukkan bahawa kewangan mikro Islam mempunyai lima strategi utama bagi mempromosikan keterangkuman kewangan, iaitu perkhidmatan kewangan yang efektif, pelanggan yang inklusif, syarat yang mudah, teknologi yang kukuh, dan pembinaan kapasiti.

Kata kunci: penyisihan kewangan, kewangan sosial Islam, strategi, tinjauan literatur bersistematik, pembangunan mapan

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, financial inclusion has emerged as a popular topic for discussion among researchers, politicians, policymakers, and other financial stakeholders all over the world. Financial inclusion has become global agenda given abundant evidence from practical experiences and research that this inclusion has a far-reaching impact on economic and social improvement and thus contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Financial inclusion is a situation in which all players in an economy have equal access to formal financial services that meet their needs, such as transactions, payments, savings, borrowings, and insurances. Today, 3.8 billion people, or 69% of adults in the world, are reported to have access to an account in formal financial institutions[1]. (Demirguc-Kunt *et al*., 2018).

Although successes were achieved in advancing financial inclusion by 18% from 2011 to 2017, recent evidence from the 2017 World Bank's Global Financial Inclusion (Global Findex) database demonstrates that 1.7 billion of the global population are financially excluded (Demirguc-Kunt *et al*., 2018). That is, many countries are still suffering from

[1] In the context of this paper, financial inclusion is measured by account ownership, which means 'the percentage of respondents who report having an account (by themselves or together with someone else) at a bank or another type of financial institution (credit union, microfinance institution, cooperative or the post office) or report personally by using a mobile money service in the past 12 months.'

financial exclusion, including Muslim countries. Shinkafi *et al*. (2019) indicated that financial inclusion inclines to be lower in Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries, supported by a hugely different financial inclusion level of OIC countries compared with the rest of the world, which are 25%, 29% and 24% for the years 2011, 2014 and 2017, respectively, as shown in Figure 1.

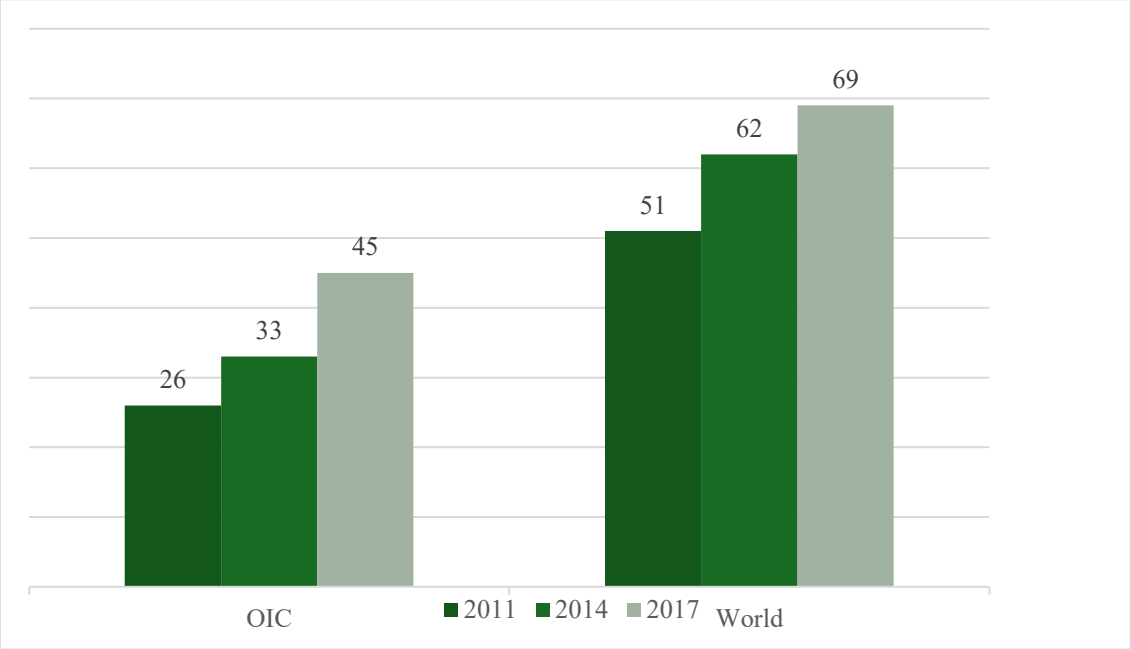

Figure 1. Account (% age 15+) in OIC member countries and world

Source: Authors' calculation from Global Findex database[2] (2011, 2014 and 2017)

Financial inclusion in OIC countries is hindered by a religious reason, as a 2010 Gallup poll indicated that about 90% of the adults living in OIC countries recognize religion as an important part of their lives (Crabtree, 2010). Thus, in OIC countries like Turkey and Pakistan, the percentage of adults without accounts in formal financial institutions for religious reasons stands at 19% and 13%, respectively, and exceeds the world average of 6% (Demirguc-Kunt *et al*., 2018). This situation is explained by the corresponding religious prohibition against holding conventional accounts (Mohieldin *et al*., 2012) that causes Muslims to lack access to financial services.

To combat this problem, Dusuki (2008) suggested Islamic microfinance to take the initiative to meet the needs of the Muslim poor with the aim of fighting financial exclusion.

[2] The Global Findex database is the world's most comprehensive data set on how adults save, borrow, make payments and manage risk. Launched with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the database has been published every three years since 2011. The data are collected in partnership with Gallup, Inc., through nationally representative surveys of more than 150,000 adults in over 140 economies.

Islamic microfinance,[3] which is the provision of financial services and products of small amounts to the poor, has become an effective tool to improve financial inclusion by increasing the access to finance of the Muslim poor who are often being marginalized by mainstream finance through *shariah*-compliant instruments. By serving financial services and products to the low-income segments of the Muslim society, Islamic microfinance plays a strong role in promoting financial inclusion (Fianto *et al*., 2018).

The need for a systematic literature review (SLR)

SLR is a review of a formulated question study by using systematic methods in identifying, selecting, and critically evaluating related research to collect and analyze the data from the studies included in the review (Cochrane Collaboration, 2005). SLR has emerged in the field of health science in response to the need of professionals to access the most recent knowledge on a specific topic efficiently (Mangas-Vega *et al*., 2018). Although its origin is related to health science, SLR is increasingly being adopted in other disciplines, particularly education, management, and social science.

To conduct a bibliographical review in the field of social science is commonly to apply a traditional literature review. However, due to the recent interest in developing conceptual maps of the subjects studied, the use of SLR has increased in social science (Mangas-Vega *et al*., 2018). SLR is different from the traditional literature review, which can be made to tell any story one wants it to. The failure of literature reviewers to apply scientific principles to the process of reviewing evidence can lead to biased conclusions. Consequently, this failure can harm and waste resources (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). In this respect, SLR is more suitable for answering specific research questions and testing hypotheses than the traditional literature review. By contrast, SLR adopts a rigorous methodology in an endeavour to limit bias with the aim to produce a scientific summary of the evidence in any field. Higgins (2016) mentioned that this method comprehensively synthesizes relevant research by using systematic and transparent procedures at each step in the process. Doing so can produce quality evidence with significant results (Mallet *et al*., 2012).

Despite the abundance of research around the world noting the potential of Islamic microfinance to accelerate financial inclusion (Alaro and Alalubosa, 2018; Abdullah and Ismail, 2017; Maulana *et al*., 2018; Samad, 2014; Zulkhibri, 2016), how such a role

[3] In the early 1990s, microcredit was gradually replaced by the new term 'microfinance', referring to a range of financial services for the poor that included not only credit but also saving, insurance and money transfers.

encourages financial inclusion remains unclear, as previous studies failed to discuss it in detail. Therefore, finding the answer to the question - how does Islamic microfinance promote financial inclusion among the Muslim poor? - is imperative. Guided by the above research question, this study aims to systematically review the existing literature on the strategy of Islamic microfinance in promoting financial inclusion among the Muslim poor, hence offering more quality and minimizing bias in the review. This study is important because, to the best of the knowledge of the authors, no SLR has been conducted until now for the strategy of Islamic microfinance.

The principal focus of Islamic microfinance is on the services offered by *shariah*-compliant microfinance institutions that meet the varied needs of the Muslim poor, including credit services, deposit services, micro-*takaful* services, and transfer payments. More importantly, this study focuses on the strategy of Islamic microfinance towards the household level of borrowers.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 details out the method applied and the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) Statement approach used; Section 3 presents the findings of SLR, including a descriptive analysis of the scientific development of Islamic microfinance in promoting financial inclusion and the synthesised results of the thematic analysis; Section 4 provides a discussion on the economic and social impacts of Islamic microfinance; Section 5 provides suggestions for future researchers; Section 6 concludes the study.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Muslims come under the highest level of financial exclusion due to the interest-based credit and deposit system (Hassan, 2015). Although financial services are available, low-income Muslims may be voluntarily excluded from using conventional microfinance because it contains the element of *riba'* that is prohibited in Islam. Thus, Islamic microfinance bridges the gap by providing viable alternatives to conventional debt-based financing, namely, redistribution of wealth and risk-sharing mechanisms.

The redistribution of wealth mechanism is the redemption of poor people's rights in the wealth of the rich Muslims through either voluntary or involuntary levies such as *zakah*, *sadaqa* and *waqf* (Nabi *et al*., 2017). Islam has encouraged this mechanism for ensuring the

social justice of all the Muslim poor who lack basic needs for survival and financial support to participate in economic activities, particularly the extreme poor. Thus, Islamic microfinance institutions (IMFIs) and Islamic financial institutions can work together (Hassan, 2015) to achieve a balanced society. The collection from the Islamic social instruments can be integrated into the Islamic microfinancing system to benefit the poor in order to break poverty and can be used for asset building (Ul-Hassan and Usman, 2013). For example, an innovative cash *waqf* acts as a financial assistant in various forms of productive activities, like assisting micro-entrepreneurs to start, grow, and expand their businesses (Mohd Thas Thaker, 2018).

By contrast, a risk-sharing mechanism allows the Muslim poor to participate in real business and foster real economic activities through the concept of risk sharing during unpredictable events. This mechanism is in line with the spirit of Islam and promotes brotherhood. Through *mudaraba* instrument, the entrepreneurs (the Muslim poor) and the financiers (the wealthy Muslims who intend to do charity via the Islamic participatory approach of risk sharing) become partners in a business. Any financial losses in the business are borne by the financier, while the entrepreneur is not responsible for the financial losses except for losses of time and effort. This practical application of *mudaraba* instrument shows that the risk-sharing mechanism in Islamic microfinance is appreciated by the Muslim poor, and this helps them to be self-sustaining. Thus, through a risk-sharing mechanism, Islamic microfinance promotes all types of poor, including the extreme poor who is highly skilled in certain specialisation, to fulfil their diversities needs and business nature (Ali, 2015).

As conventional microfinance fails to tackle extreme poverty, Islamic microfinance based on the principles of wealth redistribution and risk sharing acts as an effective tool for poverty reduction and inequality in the Muslim populations. The unique mechanisms of Islamic microfinance help all types of poor to climb out the cycle of poverty, hence promotes financial inclusion for creating a balanced society (Nabi *et al*., 2017).

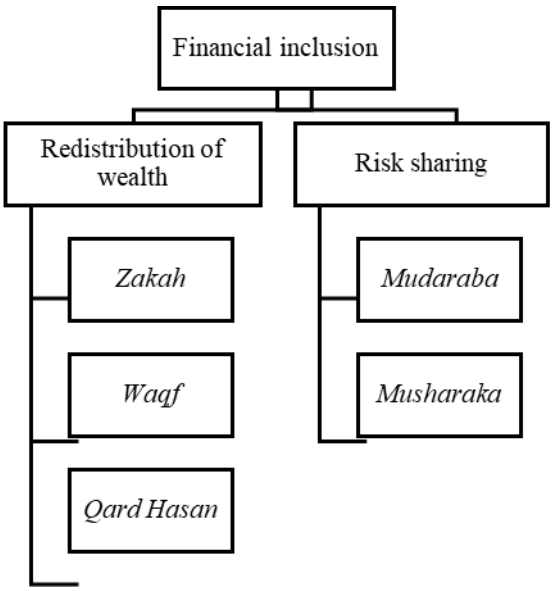

Figure 1. Financial inclusion through Islamic microfinance

METHODOLOGY

The present systematic review follows the review process of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) Statement (Moher *et al*., 2009).

PRISMA

The PRISMA Statement consists of a 27-item checklist and a four-phase flow diagram, which is an update of the QUOROM (Quality of Reporting of Meta-analyses) Statement. It guides the authors to improve the clarity and transparency of SLR reporting. By following the PRISMA guidelines, the scope of studies can be focused and the results become transparent as no biased information exists. In this study, PRISMA helps explore the comprehensive scientific databases, which allows the appropriate search terms to be conducted at a defined time regarding the Islamic microfinance strategies for inclusive finance. However, in line with social science studies, not all 27 items are suitable to be adapted in this study, as PRISMA is often utilized within medical studies.

As SLR is a rigorous methodology, it is essential to develop methodological procedures when conducting the study, as illustrated in Figure 3. Firstly, the authors start the SLR process by formulating an appropriate research question for the review. Then, the authors select the extensive databases related to social science studies. Next, the systematic searching process, which consists of three stages - identification, screening, and eligibility - is conducted. The authors then assess the quality of the selected articles using the MMAT QA

tool to ensure they are in good shape in terms of quality to be reviewed. Finally, the authors disclose how the data are abstracted and analysed.

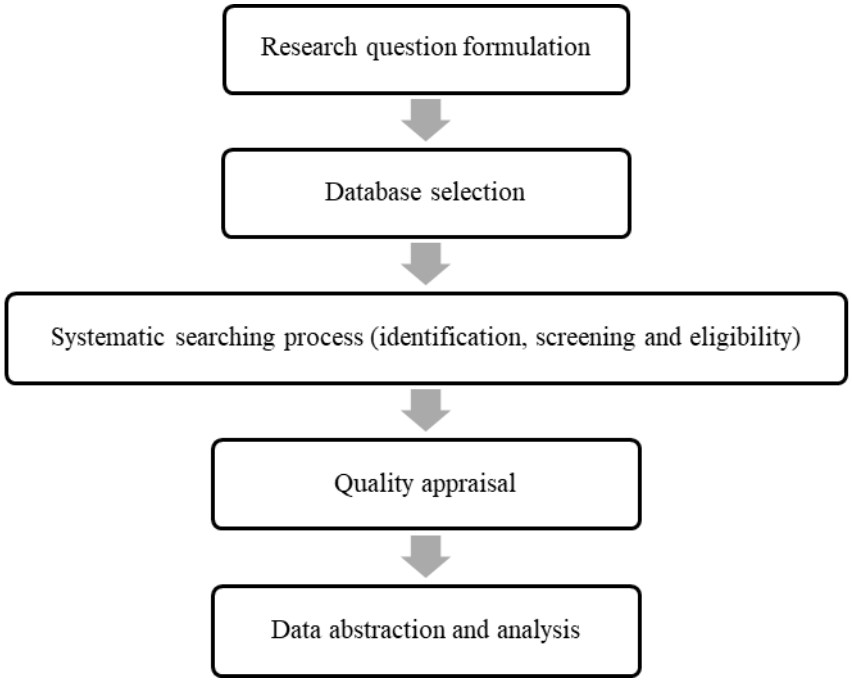

Figure 3. Methodological procedures

Research question formulation

The research question of this study is formulated through a specialized framework called PICo (Population, Interest and Context). PICo, which is commonly used in SLR, helps the authors to develop a suitable research question for the qualitative review (Korhonen *et al*., 2013). Based on the criteria, the authors include three main aspects in this review, namely, the Muslim poor (population), the strategy of Islamic microfinance (interest), and financial inclusion (context). Thus, the research question posed is: How does Islamic microfinance promote financial inclusion among the Muslim poor?

Database selection

According to Younger (2010), future researchers should use additional databases in the searching process to increase the likelihood of obtaining relevant articles. Gusenbauer and Haddaway (2019) also suggested choosing databases that can benefit research. Thus, the present study uses nine online journal databases, considering that they are reliable and relevant databases in the social science area: seven main databases, which are Emerald Insight, Oxford Journals, Sage, Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science (WoS) and Wiley

Online Library, and two supplementary databases, which are Dimensions and Google Scholar. These selected databases contain additional articles and wide coverage. For example, Scopus stores 75 million items with 1.4 billion cited references from 1970 to present (Elsevier, 2020), whereas WoS stores more than 171 million records with over 1.9 billion cited references across disciplines from 1900 to present (Clarivate, 2020), including social science studies. For supplementary databases, the authors decide to rely on two databases, namely, Dimensions and Google Scholar. Although Halevi *et al*. (2017) stated the weaknesses of Google Scholar, particularly on quality, scholars such as Haddaway et al. (2015) noted its strength as a supporting database in any SLR. A manual search via handpicking technique is also employed to retrieve additional literature, thus reducing the risk of missing valuable information.

Systematic searching process

The selection of relevant articles follows three main processes, namely, identification, screening, and eligibility.

Identification

Identification is a process conducted to enrich the main keywords used in the study (Liberati *et al*., 2009). To achieve this process, the authors consider several basic keywords, such as Islamic microfinance, financial inclusion, and role. The two authors broaden the search terms by determining the synonyms, related terms, and other variations of the main keywords that should be included to identify as many relevant studies as possible. The process of searching for such variations is performed by relying on thesauruses, dictionaries, and previous research. Variation terms then are modified together by using search strategies - phrase searching, truncation, and combining with Boolean operators - which finally are transformed into search strings. As stated by Costa *et al*. (2016), the usage of good search strings is important so that valuable research articles are not missed in the review. In this study, search strings on Emerald Insight, Oxford Journals, Sage, Science Direct, Scopus, WoS, Wiley Online Library, Dimensions, and Google Scholar databases were developed in July 2019 after all the relevant keywords were identified, as demonstrated in alphabetical order (Appendix). However, after conducting a thorough search by using these search strings, only a few keywords are deemed relevant and consistent in producing a significant number of article hits

(Table 1). Hence, the use of advanced search from nine selected databases resulted into 306 articles while two articles are identified through manual searching.

Table I. The search string

Database	Search String
Main	
Emerald Insight	("islamic microfinance") AND ("financial inclusion" OR "access to finance") AND (role OR function)
Oxford Journals	all = islamic microfinance and financial inclusion and role
Sage	for [[All "islamic microfinance"] OR [All "islamic micro-finance"] OR [All "shariah compliant micro-credit"]] AND [[All "financial inclusion"] OR [All "access to finance"]] AND [[All "role" OR "contribution"]]
Science Direct	("islamic microfinance") AND ("financial inclusion" OR "access to finance") AND (role OR function)
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("islamic microfinanc*" OR "islamic micro-financ*" OR "shariah compliant micro-credit") AND ("financial inclusion" OR "access to finance") AND ("role" OR "contribution"))
Web of Science	TS = (("islamic microfinanc*" OR "islamic micro-financ*" OR "shariah compliant micro-credit") AND ("financial inclusion" OR "access to finance") AND ("role" OR "contribution"))
Wiley Online Library	"(“islamic microfinanc*” OR “islamic micro-financ*” OR “shariah compliant micro-credit”) AND (“financial inclusion” OR “access to finance”) AND (“role” OR “contribution”)
Supplementary	
Dimensions	(“islamic microfinanc*” OR “islamic micro-financ*” OR “shariah compliant micro-credit”) AND (“financial inclusion” OR “access to finance”) AND (“role” OR “contribution”)
Google Scholar	allintitle: ("islamic microfinance") AND ("financial inclusion")

Screening

Screening is a process conducted to include or exclude articles on the basis of the criteria determined by the authors (Liberati *et al*., 2009). For the purpose of screening, the authors rely on justification by Kitchenham and Charters (2007). According to them, selecting criteria that can assist researchers in answering research questions is important. Two important stages are involved in the screening process. For the first stage, duplicate articles are excluded. Five duplicate articles are retrieved from all nine databases. For the first stage, the authors screen articles on the basis of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The first criterion is the literature type. To guarantee minimum quality, the authors focus only on journal articles. Therefore, publications in the forms of systematic review, review, meta-analysis, meta-synthesis, book series, book, book chapter, and conference proceeding are excluded in the study. Moreover, it only focuses on articles that are published in English, Malay, and Indonesian languages to avoid any difficulty and confusion in translation as suggested by Okoli (2015), to review

articles that can be understood only. Hence, non-English, non-Malay, and non-Indonesian articles are removed from the study. However, no Malay and Indonesian-related articles are found in the nine selected databases. For the time criterion, the authors do not include the selected year and intend to review the entire articles to get a holistic view over time (Table II). Consequently, 81 articles are eliminated from the first stage of screening. For the second stage, duplicate articles are excluded. Five duplicate articles are retrieved from all nine databases.

Table II. The inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Literature type	Journal articles.	Systematic review, review, meta-analysis, meta-synthesis, book series, book, chapter in a book and conference proceedings.
Language	English, Malay and Indonesian.	Non-English, non-Malay and non-Indonesian.
Time period	Entire (2008 to 2019)	<2008 and >2019

Note: The output of the search string is valid until July 2019.

Eligibility

Eligibility is a manual process used to include or exclude the remaining articles (from the screening process) based on the criteria determined (Liberati *et al*., 2009). Titles, abstracts, and main contents of all articles are reviewed by two of the authors to ensure that they fulfil the inclusion criteria and are suitable to be employed in the study to answer the research question. After a careful examination of the titles, abstracts, and main contents of all articles, 215 articles are excluded from 222 articles because such articles neither focus on the Islamic microfinance strategy nor on financial inclusion. A total of seven remaining articles is ready to be analyzed (Figure 2).

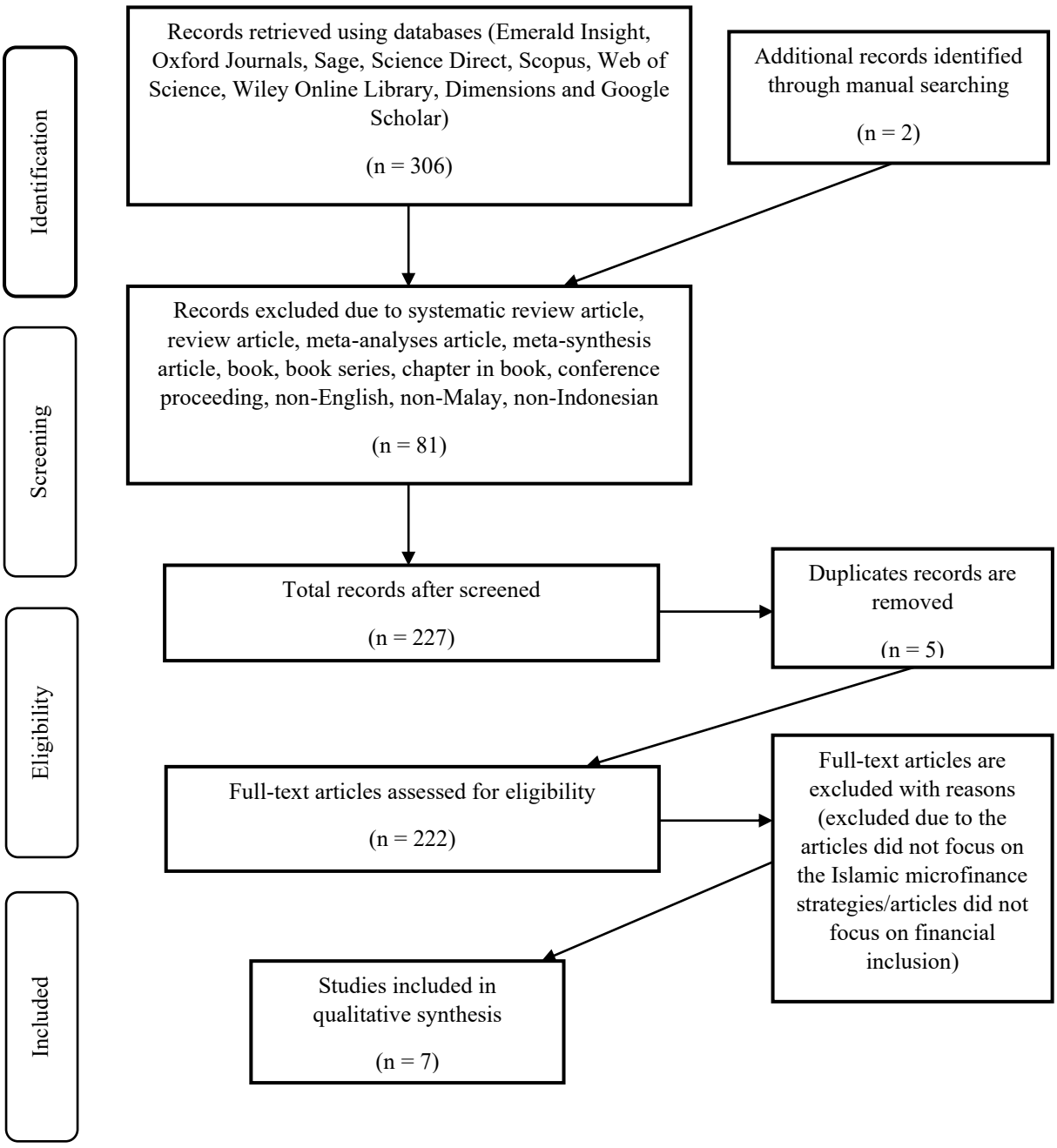

Figure 2. PRISMA flow diagram
Source: Adopted from Moher *et al*. (2009) and Shaffril *et al*. (2019)

RESULTS

In this section, the synthesis of the analysed contributions is illustrated in two steps. Firstly, it consists of a descriptive analysis of the studies. Secondly, the authors report the findings from the thematic analysis.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis is an analysis of the body literature in essential aspects. For example, Tranfield *et al*. (2003) and Pittaway and Cope (2007) descriptively analysed the literature concerning methodological information and geographical coverage when conducting an SLR exercise. The descriptive analysis of the current research is oriented on the studies above. Years of publication are also addressed, as they can show historical trends in publications. Essential aspects, namely, years of publication, countries where the studies are conducted and research approaches are reviewed carefully; the authors report them as demonstrated in Figures 3, 4 and 5.

Regarding the years of publication (Figure 3), a (1) pioneer research of the current study was published in 2008 (Dusuki, 2008), followed by an (1) article in 2010 (Sakai, 2010). From 2013 to 2015, an increasing trend was observed—two (2) articles in 2013 (Rahman and Dean, 2013; Ul-Hassan and Usman, 2013), three (3) articles in 2014 (Samad, 2014; Abdullah, 2014; Hassan, 2014) and five (5) articles were published in 2015 (Amalia and Mihajat, 2015; Abbas and Shirazi, 2015; Wulandari and Kassim, 2015; Hassan, 2015; Obaidullah, 2015). However, the number of published articles declined to three (3) in 2016 (Wulandari *et al*., 2016; Rozzani *et al*., 2016; Zulkhibri, 2016). Subsequently, it increased rapidly between 2017 and 2018—eight (8) articles in 2017 (El Ebrashi *et al*., 2017; Abdullah and Ismail, 2017; Aliyu *et al*., 2017; Rozzani *et al*., 2017; Shaikh, 2017; Sofi and Sumaira, 2017; Adewale and Haron, 2017; Ali, 2017) and nine (9) articles in 2018 (Mohd Thas Thaker, 2018; Alaro and Alalubosa, 2018; Ben Abdelkader and Mansouri, 2018; Afandi and Qurrota A'yun, 2018; Fianto *et al*., 2018; Handayani *et al*., 2018; Nik Azman *et al*., 2018; Maulana and Umam, 2018; Maulana *et al*., 2018). The year 2017 saw an explosive growth in the number of articles because in that year, G20 committed to advance financial inclusion worldwide (World Bank, 2018). Moreover, a (1) latest article was published in 2019 (Shafi and Reddy, 2019).

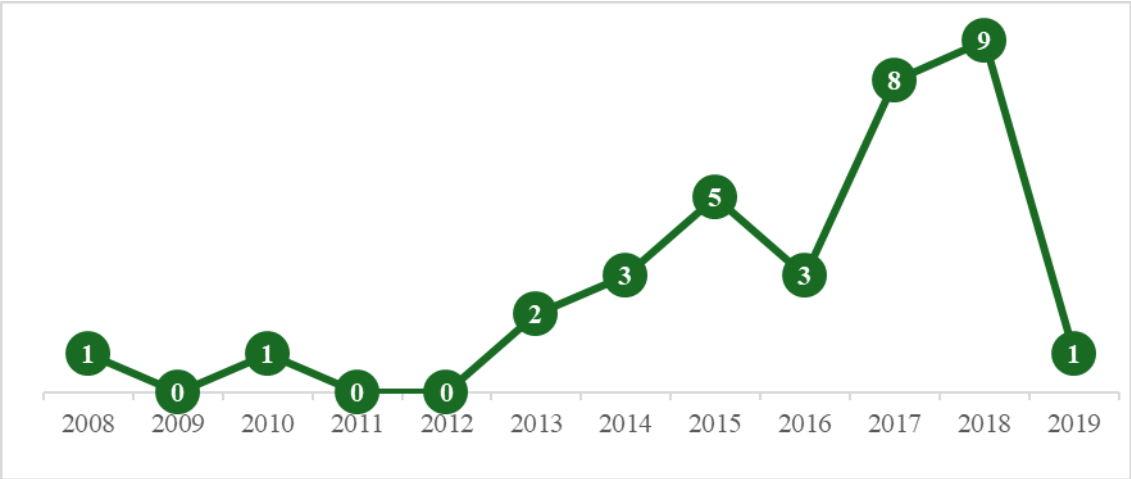

Figure 3. Years of publication

With regard to the research sample (Figure 4), nine (9) previous articles focused on Indonesian Islamic microfinance (Afandi and Qurrota A'yun, 2018; Fianto *et al*., 2018; Handayani *et al*., 2018; Maulana *et al*., 2018; Maulana and Umam, 2018; Wulandari *et al*., 2016; Amalia and Mihajat, 2015; Wulandari and Kassim, 2015; Sakai, 2010) , five (5) articles examined Indian Islamic microfinance (Shafi and Reddy, 2019; Hassan, 2015; Sofi and Sumaira, 2017; Samad, 2014; Hassan, 2014), four (4) past articles concentrated on Malaysian Islamic microfinance (Mohd Thas Thaker, 2018; Nik Azman *et al*., 2018; Rozzani *et al*., 2017; Rozzani *et al*., 2016), three (3) previous articles focused on Nigeria (Alaro and Alalubosa, 2018; Adewale and Haron, 2017; Aliyu *et al*., 2017) and two (2) on Pakistan Islamic microfinance (Abbas and Shirazi, 2015; Ul-Hassan and Usman, 2013). Moreover, one (1) article on Kenya Islamic microfinance (Ali, 2017), a (1) study on Egypt Islamic microfinance (El Ebrashi *et al*., 2017) and one (1) article on the Middle East and North Africa Islamic microfinance (Ben Abdelkader and Mansouri, 2018) were found. An (1) article by Obaidullah (2015) focused on cross-countries Indonesia, Sudan and Pakistan Islamic microfinance. Meanwhile, six (6) articles examined the role of Islamic microfinance in general (Abdullah and Ismail, 2017; Shaikh, 2017; Zulkhibri, 2016; Abdullah, 2014; Rahman and Dean, 2013; Dusuki, 2008).



Figure 4. Country setting where studies on Islamic microfinance and financial inclusion are conducted[4]

For the research approach (Figure 5), 61% of research or 20 articles from 33 relevant articles used qualitative design in conducting the role of Islamic microfinance towards financial inclusion research (Dusuki, 2008; Sakai, 2010; Rahman and Dean, 2013; Ul-Hassan and Usman, 2013; Abdullah, 2014; Amalia and Mihajat, 2015; Hassan, 2015; Obaidullah, 2015; Wulandari and Kassim, 2015; Rozzani *et al*., 2016; Wulandari *et al*., 2016; Zulkhibri, 2016; Abdullah and Ismail, 2017; Adewale and Haron, 2017; Rozzani *et al*., 2017; Shaikh, 2017; Sofi and Sumaira, 2017; Alaro and Alalubosa, 2018; Handayani *et al*., 2018; Mohd Thas Thaker, 2018). In addition, 36% (12 articles) applied quantitative design (Hassan, 2014; Samad, 2014; Abbas and Shirazi, 2015; Aliyu *et al*., 2017; Ali, 2017; El Ebrashi *et al*., 2017; Afandi and Qurrota A'yun, 2018; Ben Abdelkader and Mansouri, 2018; Fianto *et al*., 2018; Maulana *et al*., 2018; Nik Azman *et al*., 2018; Shafi and Reddy, 2019). Moreover, an (1) article or 3% of past research used mixed method (Maulana and Umam, 2018), as the authors combined the questionnaire method and interview method.

[4] World map is adopted from https://mapchart.net/world.html

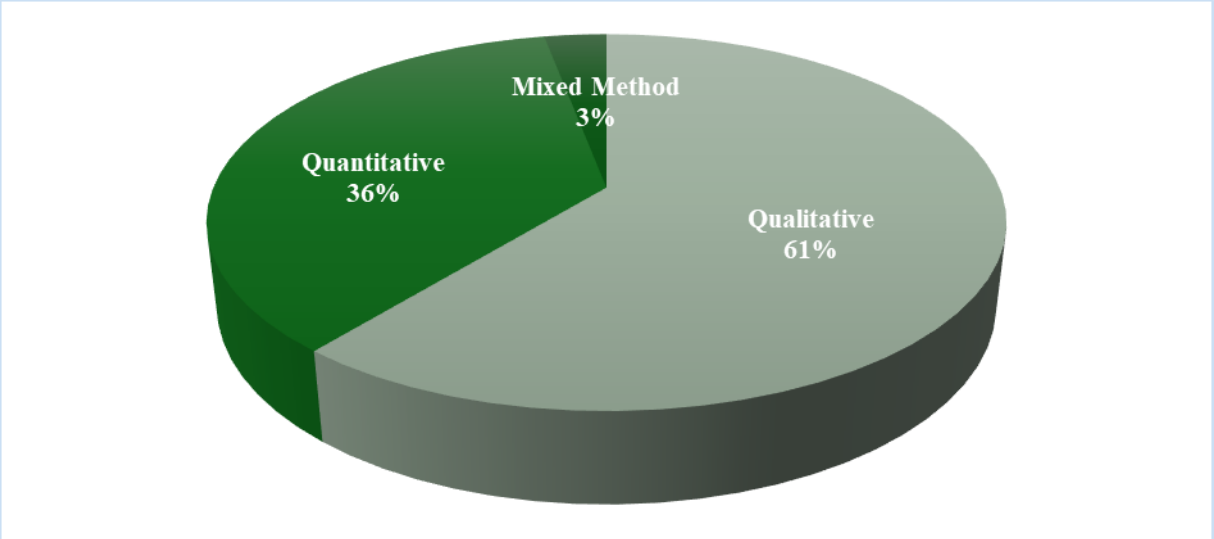

Figure 5. Research approach

Thematic Analysis: The Role of Islamic Microfinance in Promoting Financial Inclusion

In this study, thematic analysis is used as a process to gain data (Kashi and Mohamad, 2017). To conduct thematic analysis, the authors manually synthesis the findings from different research and frame them in terms of the role of Islamic microfinance. The first author independently decides the thematic finding, and this process is monitored by the second author to ensure transparency. Intensive reading on the role of Islamic microfinance in promoting financial inclusion research produces themes and sub-themes, namely, credit access (six sub-themes), saving facilities (four sub-themes), micro-*takaful* provision (three sub-themes) and funds transfer (one sub-theme), as presented in Table III.

Table III. The role of Islamic microfinance

Author/Sample	Role 1: Credit Access						Role 2: Saving Facilities						Role 3: *Takaful*		Role 4: Funds Transfer
	Purpose														
	Education	Health	Livestock/ Agriculture	Business	Housing	Emergency	Social Obligation	Food Security	Micro Enterprise	Pension	Health	Livestock/ Agriculture	Business	Remittances
Shafi and Reddy (2019) - India				/			/				/			/
Afandi and Qurrota A'yun (2018) - Indonesia				/										
Alaro and Alalubosa (2018) - Nigeria			/	/			/		/		/			/
Ben Abdelkader and Mansouri (2018) - MENA	/	/		/			/				/			/
Fianto et al. (2018) - Indonesia				/			/				/			
Handayani *et al*. (2018) - Indonesia				/			/				/			
Maulana *et al*. (2018) - Indonesia				/			/							
Maulana and Umam (2018) - Indonesia				/										
Mohd Thas Thaker (2018) - Malaysia				/										
Nik Azman *et al*. (2018) - Malaysia				/			/							

Author/Sample	Role 1: Credit Access						Role 2: Saving Facilities						Role 3: *Takaful*		Role 4: Funds Transfer
	Purpose														
	Education	Health	Livestock/ Agriculture	Business	Housing	Emergency	Social Obligation	Food Security	Micro Enterprise	Pension	Health	Livestock/ Agriculture	Business	Remittances
Abdullah and Ismail (2017) - General	/	/	/	/	/									
Ali (2017) - Kenya	/	/	/	/	/			/		/		/		/
Adewale and Haron (2017) - Nigeria							/							
Aliyu *et al*. (2017) - Nigeria				/			/							
El Ebrashi *et al*. (2017) - Egypt			/	/			/							
Rozzani *et al*. (2017) - Malaysia				/			/				/			/
Shaikh (2017) - General	/	/		/			/				/		/	
Sofi and Sumaira (2017) - India	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Rozzani *et al*. (2016) - Malaysia				/										/
Wulandari *et al*. (2016) - Indonesia				/			/						/	
Zulkhibri (2016) - General				/	/		/				/			/
Abbas and Shirazi (2015) - Pakistan				/					/				/	
Amalia and				/	/	/	/			/	/			/

Author/Sample	Role 1: Credit Access						Role 2: Saving Facilities					Role 3: *Takaful*		Role 4: Funds Transfer
	Purpose													
	Education	Health	Livestock/ Agriculture	Business	Housing	Emergency	Social Obligation	Food Security	Micro Enterprise	Pension	Health	Livestock/ Agriculture	Business	Remittances
Mihajat (2015) - Indonesia														
Hassan (2015) - India				/		/				/	/	/		/
Obaidullah (2015) - Indonesia, Pakistan, Sudan			/				/	/				/		
Wulandari and Kassim (2015) - Indonesia	/	/		/			/						/	
Abdullah (2014) - General				/			/				/			/
Hassan (2014) - India		/	/	/		/	/				/			
Samad (2014) - India	/			/			/			/	/			/
Rahman and Dean (2013) - General	/	/		/			/					/		/
Ul-Hassan and Usman (2013) - Pakistan				/			/				/			
Sakai (2010) - Indonesia				/			/							
Dusuki (2008) - General	/	/	/	/			/							
Total	**9**	**9**	**8**	**31**	**5**	**4**	**25**	**3**	**3**	**5**	**15**	**5**	**5**	**13**

Note: / indicates 1 score

Muslims come under the highest level of financial exclusion due to the interest-based deposit and credit system (Hassan, 2015). Although financial services are available, low-income Muslims may be voluntarily excluded from using microfinance because it contains the element of *riba'* that is prohibited in Islam (Maulana *et al*., 2018). Thus, Islamic microfinance is needed to fulfil the needs of the Muslim poor (Abid and Mohd Shafiai, 2017). Such needs vary and should be catered by different microfinance products. Different people have different needs, one may have the need of loans; and the other may have the need of savings (Sofi and Sumaira, 2017). Therefore, variety products of Islamic microfinance that serve the low-income people play an important role in promoting financial inclusion.

The analysis reveals the four roles of Islamic microfinance in promoting financial inclusion. Credit access can be categorised into six purposes, which are education financing, health financing, livestock or agriculture financing, business financing, home financing and financing for emergency. Saving facilities can be classified into four purposes, which are social obligation, food security, micro enterprise and pension. *Takaful* can be categorised into three purposes, namely, health *takaful*, livestock or agriculture *takaful* and business *takaful*. Funds transfer has one purpose, that is, transfer and remittance.

Based on the results, purposes such as business financing, saving for social obligation, health *takaful* and transfer play the most important services in promoting financial inclusion (Table III). Therefore, they are the well-known purposes that are needed by the Muslim poor. According to Zulkhibri (2016), providing the usage of Islamic financial products and services to serve low-income people can encourage financial inclusion. Hence, the next section discusses how Islamic microfinance promotes financial inclusion via the products that it offers.

(i) Credit Access

Although the government attempts to increase access to financial services, several poor people still have difficulties in accessing credit (Maulana *et al*., 2018) due to the fact that poor people fail to fulfil documentation requirements, have insufficient income, lack collaterals (World Bank, 2010); in addition, the Muslim poor are excluded from religious requirements (Tengku Abdul Rahman *et al*., 2018). By providing poor people with credit access, Islamic microfinance seems to promote financial inclusivity because it offers microfinance services by using various contracts that do not violate *shariah,* such as *qard al-*

hassan, *murabahah*, *bai bithaman ajil*, *ijarah* and *bai salam* (Obaidullah and Khan, 2008; Smolo and Ismail, 2011).

Credit access service offers clients the ability to borrow money for an agreement in exchange to repaying the funds with fees in the future. In general, microfinance serves various credit products, such as short-term, long-term and emergency loans (Sofi and Sumaira, 2017). In Islamic microfinance, the mainly demanded credit access service by the Muslim poor is financing for business. They use the money to start, grow and expand their business for achieving a stable livelihood. The Muslim poor also use credit access for basic needs, such as health treatments and children education expenditure, as they have excess money after taking financing from Islamic microfinance institutions (IMFIs).

Most poor people in the world are predominantly focused on agriculture (Maulana and Umam, 2018). Thus, they need agriculture financing to ensure their planting success. Financial services for raising small animals and dairy and livestock are also common in Islamic microfinance. Such finances are often received by women to help increase their assets (Ledgerwood and Earne, 2013). Furthermore, financing purposes for improving housing conditions and financing for emergencies are less demanded by the Muslim poor.

(ii) Saving Facilities

Poor people face difficulties in saving money through formal financial institutions because banks are typically limited in rural areas. Their income is also low and irregular, thereby increasing transaction costs. Moreover, banks may have complicated procedures and requirements that are difficult for poor people to meet, such as minimum balances (Frankiewicz and Churchill, 2011). These factors exclude poor savers from financial services.

Like their counterparts, the Muslim poor also prefer high returns in saving. However, they want the returns to be *halal*, suggesting an additional dimension to their needs. Thus, Islamic microfinance plays a critical role in bridging the gap (Obaidullah and Khan, 2008). In general, microfinance institutions provide various saving products, such as short-time deposit for food security, medium-time deposit for microenterprise and long-time deposit for pension plan, to cater different needs. Another factor is saving for the purpose of social obligation. For example, Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) uses a form of compulsory savings where borrowers are required to save a portion of the amount they borrow (Dusuki, 2008). That is,

Islamic microfinance uses mobilised savings from the society as its source of fund (Handayani *et al*., 2018).

(iii) Takaful

As indicated by World Bank (2017), 'low-income people live in risky environments, vulnerable to numerous peril-illnesses, accidental deaths and disabilities, property losses due to theft or fire, agriculture losses and disasters of natural and manmade varieties.' This statement implies that low-income people also need insurance to manage risks. However, commercial insurance companies tend to exclude high-risk persons or charge them higher rates than others. Micro-insurance, which is quite affordable for poor people, effectively becomes a complementary tool that helps poor people manage risks (Churchill, 2013). It generally strives to be inclusive because the sums insured are small, and a group pricing method is used.

In Islamic microfinance, one of the most highly demanded micro-*takaful* products among the Muslim poor is health *takaful*. It is a large demand because health problems cause high expenses for treatments. Moreover, most Muslim poor who work as farmers (Maulana and Umam, 2018) tend to demand agriculture *takaful* because they are concerned about drought, death of livestock and other agricultural risks. It generally covers crop failure and the death of livestock. *Takaful* in a business is demanded by small and medium-sized enterprises for reducing risks**.** Risks such as income fluctuations, human diseases, natural disasters and crop diseases encourage IMFIs to include micro-*takaful* services for serving the Muslim poor. Thus, most Muslim poor have *takaful* coverage with micro-*takaful* services.

(iv) Funds Transfer

The Muslim poor not only need credit access, saving facilities and micro-*takaful* but also convenient ways to transfer their money in this era of advanced technology. Obaidullah and Khan (2008) revealed that 'money transfer is a portion of migrant-worker earnings sent to family or other individuals in their place of origin'. This service can occur electronically or physically. In developed countries, individuals with accounts can conduct financial transactions electronically. However, in developing countries, poor people are trapped in the cash-only system. Therefore, they use alternative delivery channels through agents in their own community to allow poor people to access money transfer facilities (Lehman and Ledgerwood, 2013).

The fact that poor people who have relatives in other cities or countries face constraints to send and receive money (Obaidullah and Khan, 2008) is worrying. Thus, Islamic microfinance strives to be inclusive by providing micro-transfer facilities, which are efficient, economical and *shariah*-compliant to the Muslim poor, for sending money back home to family and friends.

By providing the justifications above, financial services from Islamic microfinance, such as credit access, saving facilities, *takaful* and funds transfer, seem to help the Muslim poor involved in the formal financial sector.

DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the authors discuss how the financial services offered by IMFIs, such as credit access, saving facilities, *takaful* and funds transfer, affect the lives of poor people. The discussion is divided into two aspects, namely, economic and social impacts.

Economic Impacts

By providing *shariah*-compliant financial services, Islamic microfinance helps improve the economic opportunities of the Muslim poor. This improvement can be proven by previous research on the impact of Islamic microfinance regarding economic improvements, which have been conducted in different parts of the world. Most of these studies found that Islamic microfinance can increase the income level, household asset, household consumption, household saving, improve business performance and expand the employment of its borrowers.

In Somalia, Xalane and Mohd Salleh (2019) found that from 65 borrowers in Mogadishu, 47.7% agreed and 13.8% strongly agreed that Islamic microfinance improves their monthly income. Moreover, more than half of the respondents said that Islamic microfinance increases their job opportunities. Bhuiyan *et al.* (2017) measured the impact of Islamic microfinance on the sustainable livelihood of the Islamic Bank Bangladesh Limited borrowers in Bangladesh. From the 195 borrowers in Sylhet and Chittagong Division, 68.7% of the respondents agreed that they use the excess of the financing from IMFIs for income generating activities. Consequently, they can increase their family income. In terms of the availability of savings, 64.6 % of the respondents said that they start saving from the monthly

income after joining Islamic microfinance. Their total asset has also increased compared with the last five years from USD 4553.87 to USD 8542.25.

The positive impact of Islamic microfinance is also proven in Pakistan. Mahmood *et al*. (2016) conducted research in Lahore city to observe the impact of Islamic microfinance on employment generation. A sample of 168 respondents was selected from three pioneering IMFIs, namely, Akhuwat Foundation, Farz Foundation and Naziran Yousaf Memorial Trust. The result demonstrated that IMFIs not only help in starting and extending the existing businesses of the borrowers but also help their families to become absorbed in their microenterprises. In Nigeria, Gumel *et al*. (2014) concluded that Islamic microfinance is a powerful tool in poverty alleviation because a significant improvement is observed in the household income and household assets of Islamic microfinance borrowers after taking financing from IMFIs.

Riwajanti (2014) explored the role of Baitul Maal wat Tamwil (BMT) Indonesia in economic development. A total of 179 respondents were selected from 11 BMT borrowers. The results showed that the annual household expenditure for food, clothing, transport and household utensils was significantly higher after financing (IDR 14,400,000) than the annual household expenditure before financing (IDR12,000,000). In terms of business performance, the annual sales of their business improved by IDR 36,000,000 (50%), net income improved by IDR 3,300,000 (23%) and an improvement was observed in the family borrowers involved in the business after joining BMT.

Social Impacts

The impact of Islamic microfinance not only improves the economic opportunities of the Muslim poor but also contributes to the improvement of their social conditions. Much previous research noted that Islamic microfinance has become an important tool to enhance the social well-being of its borrowers through improving their quality of lives, increasing health awareness, increasing education awareness, developing positive skills and improving their religious status.

Hayati and Khasanah (2019) analysed the role of Mitra Dhuafa Cooperative, Islamic microfinance in Indonesia in empowering rural microenterprise. Among the 100 members of Mitra Dhuafa Cooperative, they found a positive relationship between the level of capability of members and poverty alleviation. That is, the higher the level of member capability, the

higher the level of welfare in terms of health (nutrition and infant mortality), education (literacy) and quality of life (clean water, sanitation and home conditions). In Indonesia, Wulandari and Dzakiroh (2019) investigated the impact of Baitut Tamkin on the improvement of members' welfare. They found that Baitut Tamkin effectively develops the positive skills of its members by trusting and helping one another. Moreover, Baitut Tamkin helps improve borrowers' spiritual condition, that is, members start to recite *Asmaul Husna*, have knowledge about the interest rate, know how to practice *muamalah aqd* and calculate revenue sharing.

In Bangladesh, Bhuiyan *et al.* (2017) revealed that 86% of Islami Bank respondents have their own house for residence after taking financing from Islamic microfinance compared with 85% five years ago. In terms of borrowers' personal confidence improvement, the survey revealed that 43.53% of the respondents said that it has increased. Consequently, the borrowers used the financing for income generating activities without hesitation. Ahmad *et al.* (2017) investigated the impact of Islamic microfinance on two poor Pakistan cities (Multan and Lahore). The data were collected from the borrowers of Akhuwat and Wasil Foundations. The borrowers were asked about 16 religious activities, such as offering prayer, reciting the Holy Qur'an, observing fast and inviting people towards Islamic activities. From the 16 hypotheses, 12 religious activities were accepted, suggesting that Islamic microfinance significantly improves the religious status of the borrowers. The result indicated that 42.9% of the established borrowers (those who joined Islamic microfinance for more than one year) agreed that they always offer a prayer compared with 27.8% of the new borrowers (who joined less than one year). Approximately 80% of the established borrowers said that they have improved in Qur'an recitation compared with 63% of the new borrowers.

The positive impact of Islamic microfinance on the improvement of borrowers' social conditions is also proven in Malaysia. Alam *et al.* (2015) examined the role of Islamic microfinance based on the achievement of *maqasid al-shariah*. From 393 AIM borrowers, 70% agreed that their involvement in Islamic microfinance positively affects the level of knowledge in their family. Moreover, many of them can already send their children to school and higher education institutions.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study contributes significantly to the knowledge about the strategy of Islamic microfinance. Consequently, it provides an initial step for further advancing Islamic microfinance research, serving as a scientific knowledge base for guiding and encouraging future research efforts. The findings and the systematic review process of the study highlight the gap of certain significant areas that may be helpful for future research. Because of the descriptive findings, future researchers should examine the strategy of Islamic microfinance in regions where it has not been conducted yet, such as Central America, Eastern Europe, the European Union, North America, Oceania, South America, and the Caribbean. Regarding the research approach, future studies can consider more mixed methods and quantitative designs in conducting investigations because both benefit large populations. The results are valid, strong, and reliable to a great number of subjects.

Despite the enlightening character of the study, it comes with limitations. This searching process uses nine online databases and manual searching via the handpicking technique, thus may ignore contributions from other databases and techniques. Specifically, the study only includes research published in English, Malay, and Indonesian due to the authors' knowledge of the languages. However, no article published in Malay and Indonesian is retrieved from the nine selected databases. This study may also ignore contributions from sources such as books, proceedings, conferences, and systematic review articles because it only considers research articles as they are a primary source. Moreover, the findings must be supported with empirical research to come up with suitable models. Thus, future research should examine the role of Islamic microfinance empirically.

CONCLUSION

Although certain studies argue that the role of Islamic microfinance promotes financial inclusion, how this role encourages financial inclusion remains unclear. Thus, the purpose of the study is to provide a clear picture of the current role of Islamic microfinance in promoting financial inclusion and evaluate the existing literature systematically. The results of the systematic review and thematic analysis of 33 primary studies illustrate that Islamic microfinance has four main roles in promoting financial inclusion (credit access, saving

facilities, *takaful* and funds transfer). Therefore, providing the usage of Islamic financial products and services to serve the Muslim poor can encourage financial inclusion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study is part of the project titled 'The Role of Islamic Microfinance in Promoting Financial Inclusion' funded by Geran Inisiatif Penyelidikan 2019 (EP-2019-016).

REFERENCE

(* = included in the review)

*Abbas, K. and Shirazi, N. (2015), "The key players' perception on the role of Islamic microfinance in poverty alleviation", *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 244-267.

*Abdullah, R. (2014), "Al-Tawhid in relation to the economic order of microfinance institutions", *Humanomics*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 325-348.

*Abdullah, R. and Ismail, A.G. (2017), "Taking stock on the waqf-based Islamic microfinance model", *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 44 No. 8, pp. 1018-1031.

Abid, A. and Mohd Shafiai, M.H. (2017), "Islamic microfinance for rural farmers: a proposed contractual framework for Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia", *Jurnal Hadhari An International Journal*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 33-47.

*Adewale, A.A. and Haron, R. (2017), "Democracy and socio-economic inclusion in Nigeria: reducing the mutual exclusivity through Islamic microfinance", *Al-Shajarah*, Special Issue, pp. 1-26.

*Afandi, M. and Qurrota A'yun, I. (2018), "The forecasting of financial inclusion in East Java through Islamic microfinance institution: an autoregressive integrated moving average approach", *Journal of Developing Economies*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 38-52.

Ahmad, K., Adeyemi, A.A. and Khan, M.N. (2018), "Impact assessment of Islamic microfinance on the religious, ethical and social well-being of participants: a case study of Pakistan", *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, pp. 265-296.

Alam, M.M., Hassan, S. and Said, J. (2015), "Performance of Islamic microcredit in perspective of Maqasid Al-Shariah: a case study on Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia", *Humanomics*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 374-384.

*Alaro, A. and Alalubosa, A. (2018), "Potential of sharī'ah compliant microfinance in alleviating poverty in Nigeria: a lesson from Bangladesh", *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management,* Vol. 12.

*Ali, A.E.E.S. (2017), "The challenges facing poverty alleviation and financial inclusion in North-East Kenya Province (NEKP)", *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 44 No. 12, pp. 2208-2223.

Ali, A.E.E.S. (2015), "Islamic microfinance: moving beyond financial inclusion", *European Scientific Journal*, Vol. 11 No. 10, pp. 297-310.

*Aliyu, S., Mohd. Yusof, R. and Naiimi, N. (2017), "The role of moral transaction mode for sustainability of banking business: a proposed conceptual model for Islamic microfinance banks in Nigeria", *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 44, No. 12, pp. 2238-2256.

*Amalia, E. and Mihajat, M. (2015), "Micro financing products and business model of Islamic Micro Finance Institution (IMFIs) in Indonesia: lessons from Baitul Maal Muamalat (BMM)", *European Journal of Business and Management*, Vol. 17 No. 16, pp. 113-123.

*Ben Abdelkader, I. and Mansouri, F. (2018), "Performance of microfinance institutions in the MENA region: a comparative analysis", *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 46 No. 5.

Bhuiyan, A.B., Chamhuri, S., Ismail, A.G. and Omar, N. (2017), "The Islamic microfinancing contributions on sustainable livelihood of the borrowers in Bangladesh", *International Journal of Business and Society*, Vol. 18, No. S1, pp. 79-96.

Cochrane Collaboration. (2005), "Glossary terms in the Cochrane collaboration", available at: https://www.cochrane.org/. (accessed 15 December 2019)

Costa, E., Soares, A. and Pinho de Sousa, J. (2016), "Information, knowledge and collaboration management in the internationalisation of SMEs: a systematic literature review", *International Journal of Information Management*, Vol. 36 No. 4, pp. 557-569.

Churchill, C. (2013), "Insurance", Ledgerwood, J., Earne, J. and Nelson, C. (Ed.), The New Microfinance Handbook: A Financial Market System Perspective, World Bank, Washington, DC, pp. 249-270.

Devlin, J.F. (2005), "A detailed study of financial exclusion in the UK", Journal of Consumer Policy, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 75-108.

*Dusuki, A. (2008), "Banking for the poor: the role of Islamic banking in microfinance initiatives", *Humanomics*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 49-66.

*El Ebrashi, R., Salem, R., El-Kayaly, D. and El-Bassiouny, N. (2017), "What potentials does Islamic micro-credit have? an empirical investigation in the Egyptian context", *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 305-328.

Elsevier. (2020), "Historical depth", available at: https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus/how-scopus-works/content (accessed 10 January 2020)

*Fianto, B.A., Gan, C., Hu, B. and Roudaki, J. (2018), "Equity financing and debt-based financing: evidence from Islamic microfinance institutions in Indonesia", *Pacific-Basin Finance Journal*, Vol. 52, pp. 163-172.

Flemming, K., Booth, A., Garside. R., Tuncalp, O. and Noyes, J. (2019), "Qualitative evidence synthesis for complex interventions and guideline development: clarification of the purpose, designs and relevant methods", *BMJ Glob Health*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 1-9.

Frankiewicz, C. and Churchill. C. (2011), *Making Microfinance Work: Managing Product Diversification*, International Labour Organization, Geneva.

Gumel, G., Saad, N. and Kassim, S. (2014), "Assessing the impact of Islamic microfinance on poverty alleviation in Northern Nigeria", *Journal of Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance*, Vol. 10 No. 4, pp. 37-49.

Gusenbauer, M. and Haddaway, N. (2019), "Which academic search systems are suitable for systematic reviews or meta-analyses? Evaluating retrieval qualities of Google Scholar, PubMed and 26 other resources", *Research Synthesis Method*s, Vol. 11 No. 2, pp.181-217.

Haddaway, N., Collins, A. and Coughlin, D. (2015), "The role of Google Scholar in evidence reviews and its applicability to grey literature searching", *PLoS One*, Vol. 10 No. 9, pp. 1-17.

Halevi, G., Moed, H. and Bar-Ilan, J. (2017), "Suitability of Google Scholar as a source of scientific information and as a source of data for scientific evaluation-review of the literature", *Journal of Informetrics*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 823-834.

*Handayani, W., Haniffa, R. and Hudaib, M. (2018), "A Bourdieusian perspective in exploring the emergence and evolution of the field of Islamic microfinance in Indonesia", *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 482-497.

*Hassan, A. (2014), "The challenge in poverty alleviation: role of Islamic microfinance and social capital", *Humanomics*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 76-90.

*Hassan, A. (2015), "Financial inclusion of the poor: from microcredit to Islamic microfinancial services", *Humanomics*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 354-371.

Hayati, S. and Khasanah, M. (2019), The role of cooperatives in the SMEs empowerment in rural areas. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 226-232.

Higgins, S. (2016), "Meta-synthesis and comparative meta-analysis of education research findings: some risks and benefits", *Review of Education*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 31-53.

Kashi, A. and Mohamad, A. (2017), "Does musharakah mutaniqisah converge with bai bithamin ajil and conventional loans?", *International Journal of Law and Management*, Vol. 59 No. 5, pp. 740-755.

Kempson, E. and Whyley, C. (1999), *Kept out or opted out? Understanding and Combating Financial Exclusion*, Policy.

Kitchenham, B. and Charters, S. (2007), "Guidelines for performing Systematic Literature reviews in Software Engineering Version 2.3", *Engineering*, Vol. 45 No. 4, pp. 1051.

Ledgerwood, J. and Earne, J. (2013), "Credit", Ledgerwood, J., Earne, J. and Nelson, C. (Ed.), The New Microfinance Handbook: A Financial Market System Perspective, World Bank, Washington, DC, pp. 213-230.

Lehman, J. and Ledgerwood, J. (2013), "Payment Services and Delivery Channels", Ledgerwood, J., Earne, J. and Nelson, C. (Ed.), The New Microfinance Handbook: A Financial Market System Perspective, World Bank, Washington, DC, pp. 271-298.

Leyshon, A. and Thrift, N. (1995), "Geographies of financial exclusion: financial abandonment in Britain and the United States", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 312–341.

Mahmood, H.Z., Abbas, K., Fatima, M. and Asghar, S. (2016), "Does Islamic microfinance go beyond the self-employability? An appraisal from Lahore, Pakistan", *Journal of Creating Value*, Vol. 2 No. 2, 268-286.

Mallett, R., Hagen-Zanker, J., Slater, R. and Duvendack, M. (2012), "The benefits and challenges of using systematic reviews in international development research", *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 445-455.

Mangas-Vega, A., Dantas, T., Merchán Sánchez-Jara, J. and Gómez-Díaz, R. (2018), "Systematic literature reviews in social sciences and humanities: a case study", *Journal of Information Technology Research*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 1-17.

*Maulana, H., Razak, D. and Adeyemi, A. (2018), "Factors influencing behaviour to participate in Islamic microfinance", *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 109-130.

*Maulana, H. and Umam, K. (2018), "Identifying financial exclusion and Islamic microfinance as an alternative to enhance financial inclusion", *International Journal of Islamic Business and Economics*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 99-116.

*Mohd Thas Thaker, M.A. (2018), "A qualitative inquiry into cash waqf model as a source of financing for micro enterprises", *Isra International Journal of Islamic Finance*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 19-35.

Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., Altman, D.G. and The PRISMA Group. (2009), "Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: the PRISMA statement", *PLoS Med*, Vol. 6 No. 7, pp. 1-28.

Nabi, M., Islam, M.A., Bakar, R. and Nabi, R. (2017), "Islamic microfinance as a tool of financial inclusion in Bangladesh", *Journal of Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance*, Vol. 13, pp. 25-53.

*Nik Azman, N., Kassim, S. and Adeyemi, A. (2018), "Analysing ar-rahnu in the context of informal credit market theory: evidence from women micro-entrepreneurs in Malaysia", *Isra International Journal of Islamic Finance*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 237-250.

*Obaidullah, M. (2015), "Enhancing food security with Islamic microfinance: insights from some recent experiments", *Agricultural Finance Review*, Volume 75 No. 2, pp. 142-168.

Obaidullah, M. and Khan, T. (2008), *Islamic Microfinance Development: Challenges and Initiatives*, Islamic Development Bank, Jeddah.

Okoli, C. (2015), "A guide to conducting a standalone systematic literature review", *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, Vol. 37, pp. 879-910.

Petticrew, M. and Roberts, H. (2006), S*ystematic Reviews in the Social Sciences: A Practical* Guide, Blackwell Publishing, Malden.

Pittaway, L. and Cope, J. (2007), "Entrepreneurship education a systematic review of the evidence", *International Small Business Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 5, pp. 479-510.

*Rahman, R. and Dean, F. (2013), "Challenges and solutions in Islamic microfinance", *Humanomics*, Vol. 29 No. 4, pp. 293-306.

Riwajanti, N.I. (2014), "Exploring the role of Islamic microfinance institution in poverty alleviation through microenterprises development, a case study of Islamic Financial Cooperative (BMT) in Indonesia", *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, Vol. 7, pp. 49-66.

*Rozzani, N., Mohamed, I.S. and Syed Yusuf, S.N. (2016), "Technology for Islamic microfinance's disbursement and repayment system", *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 43 No. 12, 1271-1283.

*Rozzani, N., Mohamed, I.S. and Syed Yusuf, S.N. (2017), "Risk management process: profiling of Islamic microfinance providers", *Research in International Business and Finance*, Vol. 41, pp. 20-27.

*Sakai, M. (2010), "Growing together in partnership: women's views of the business practices of an Islamic savings and credit cooperative (Baitul Maal wat Tamwil) in Central Java, Indonesia", *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 412-421.

*Samad, M. (2014), "Islamic micro finance: tool for economic stability and social change", *Humanomics*, Vol. 30 No. 3, pp. 199-226.

Shaffril, H., Abu Samah, A., Samsuddin, S.F. and Ali, Z. (2019), "Mirror-mirror on the wall, what climate change adaptation strategies are practiced by the Asian's fishermen of all?", *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 232 No. 2019, pp. 104-117.

*Shafi, K,M.M. and Reddy, D.M.R. (2019), "Viability and practices of interest-free microfinance in the state of Kerala: an analytical study based on customers' perceptions towards products, services and operational methods", *IIMB Management Review*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 350-367.

*Shaikh, S. (2017), "Poverty alleviation through financing microenterprises with equity finance", *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 87-99.

Shinkafi, A.A., Yahaya, S. and Sani, T.A. (2019), "Realising financial inclusion in Islamic finance", *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 143-160.

Smolo, E. and Ismail, A.G. (2011), "A theory and contractual framework of Islamic micro-financial institutions' operations", *Journal of Financial Services Marketing*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 287-295.

*Sofi, F. and Sumaira. (2017), "Microfinance and poverty alleviation: a conceptual framework with special emphasis on J&K region", *Asia-Pacific Journal of Management Research and Innovation*, Vol. 12 No. 3 & 4, pp. 271-281.

Tranfield, D., Denyer, D. and Smart, P. (2003), "Towards a methodology for developing evidence-informed management knowledge by means of systematic review", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 207-222.

Tengku Abdul Rahman, T.H., Shahimi, S. and Mohd Noor, S. (2018), "Does Islamic banking promote financial inclusion among women in OIC countries?", paper presented at the Proceedings of the 6th Asean Universities International Conference on Islamic Finance (AICIF), 14-15 November, Manila, Philippines.

*Ul-Hassan, M. and Usman, M. (2013), "Building the entrepreneurship through non-banking institution: an empirical study on the contribution of GEAR for economic development in Islamic way", *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research*, Vol. 15 No. 10, pp. 1353-1362.

Web of Science Group. (2020), "Web of Science: confident research begins here", available at: https://clarivate.com/webofsciencegroup/solutions/web-of-science/ (accessed 10 January 2020)

Whittemore, R. and Knafl, K. (2006), "The integrative review: update methodology", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 52 No. 5, pp. 546-553.

World Bank. (2010), "Improving access to financial services in Indonesia", available at: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/448491468257952510/pdf/520320v10Revis1BLIC10a2f1summary-en.pdf (accessed 30 September 2019)

World Bank. (2018), "Financial inclusion is a key enabler to reducing poverty and boosting prosperity", available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/financialinclusion/overview (accessed 30 September 2019)

*Wulandari, P. and Kassim, S. (2015), "Issues and challenges in financing the poor: case of Baitul Maal wa Tamwil (BMT) in Indonesia", *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 216-234.

*Wulandari, P., Kassim, S., Sulung, L. and Putri, N. (2016), "Unique aspects of the Islamic microfinance financing process", *Humanomics*, Vol. 32 No. 3.

Wulandari, R. and Dzakiroh, H. (2019), "Do Islamic microfinance practise descrease the level of three aspects of poverty", *Iqtishadia*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 87-100.

Xalane, M.A.E. and Mohd Salleh, M.C. (2019), "The role of Islamic microfinance for poverty alleviation in Mogadishu, Somalia: an exploratory study", *International Journal of Management and Applied Research*, Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 355-365.

Younger, P. (2010), "Using Google Scholar to conduct a literature search", *Nursing Standard*, Vol. 24 No. 45, pp. 40-46.

*Zulkhibri, M. (2016), "Financial inclusion, financial inclusion policy and Islamic finance", *Macroeconomics and Finance in Emerging Market Economies*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 303-320.

Appendix

Table IV. The search string of the nine databases

Database	Search String	Frequency
Main		
Emerald Insight	("islamic microfinance") AND ("financial inclusion" OR "access to finance") AND (role OR function)	57
Oxford Journals	all = islamic microfinance and financial inclusion and role	30
Sage	for [[All "islamic microfinance"] OR [All "islamic micro finance"] OR [All "islamic micro-finance"] OR [All "islamic microcredit"] OR [All "islamic micro credit"] OR [All "islamic micro-credit"] OR [All "shariah microfinance"] OR [All "shariah micro finance"] OR [All "shariah micro-finance"] OR [All "shariah microcredit"] OR [All "shariah micro credit"] OR [All "shariah micro-credit"] OR [All "shariah compliant microfinance"] OR [All "shariah compliant micro finance"] OR [All "shariah compliant micro-finance"] OR [All "shariah compliant microcredit"] OR [All "shariah compliant micro credit"] OR [All "shariah compliant micro-credit"] OR [All "shari'a microfinance"] OR [All "shari'a micro finance"] OR [All "shari'a micro-finance"] OR [All "shari'a microcredit"] OR [All "shari'a micro credit"] OR [All "shari'a micro-credit"] OR [All "sharia microfinance"] OR [All "sharia micro finance"] OR [All "sharia micro-finance"] OR [All "sharia microcredit"] OR [All "sharia micro credit"] OR [All "sharia micro-credit"] OR [All "pembiayaan mikro"] OR [All "mikrokredit syariah"] OR [All "mikro kredit syariah"] OR [All "mikro-kredit syariah"] OR [All "mikro shariah"] OR [All "mikro syariah"] OR [All "kewangan mikro syariah"]] AND [[All "financial inclusion"] OR [All "financial inclusivity"] OR [All "inclusive finance"] OR [All "access to finance"] OR [All "rangkuman kewangan"] OR [All "akses kepada kewangan"] OR	2

Database	Search String	Frequency
	[All "inklusi kewangan"]] AND [[All "role"] OR [All "function"] OR [All "contribution"] OR [All "participation"] OR [All "peranan"] OR [All "fungsi"] OR [All "peran"] OR [All "kontribusi"] OR [All "partisipasi"]]	
Science Direct	("islamic microfinance") AND ("financial inclusion" OR "access to finance") AND (role OR function)	11
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("islamic microfinanc*" OR "islamic micro financ*" OR "islamic micro-financ*" OR "islamic microcredit" OR "islamic micro credit" OR "islamic micro-credit" OR "shariah microfinanc*" OR "shariah micro financ*" OR "shariah micro-financ*" OR "shariah microcredit" OR "shariah micro credit" OR "shariah micro-credit" OR "shariah compliant microfinanc*" OR "shariah compliant micro financ*" OR "shariah compliant micro-financ*" OR "shariah compliant microcredit" OR "shariah compliant micro credit" OR "shariah compliant micro-credit" OR "shari'a microfinanc*" OR "shari'a micro financ*" OR "shari'a micro-financ*" OR "shari'a microcredit" OR "shari'a micro credit" OR "shari'a micro-credit" OR "sharia microfinanc*" OR "sharia micro financ*" OR "sharia micro-financ*" OR "sharia microcredit" OR "sharia micro credit" OR "sharia micro-credit" OR "microfinanc*" OR "micro financ*" OR "micro-financ*") AND ("financial inclusion" OR "financial inclusivity" OR "inclusive finance" OR "access to finance") AND ("role" OR "function" OR "contribution" OR "participation"))	67
Web of Science	TS = (("islamic microfinanc*" OR "islamic micro financ*" OR "islamic micro-financ*" OR "islamic microcredit" OR "islamic micro credit" OR "islamic micro-credit" OR "shariah microfinanc*" OR "shariah micro financ*" OR "shariah micro-financ*" OR "shariah microcredit" OR "shariah micro credit" OR "shariah micro-credit" OR "shariah compliant microfinanc*" OR "shariah compliant micro financ*" OR "shariah compliant micro-financ*" OR "shariah compliant microcredit" OR "shariah compliant micro credit" OR "shariah compliant micro-credit" OR "shari'a microfinanc*" OR "shari'a micro financ*" OR "shari'a micro-financ*" OR "shari'a microcredit" OR "shari'a micro credit" OR "shari'a micro-credit" OR "sharia microfinanc*" OR "sharia micro financ*" OR "sharia micro-financ*" OR "sharia microcredit" OR "sharia micro credit" OR "sharia micro-credit" OR "microfinanc*" OR "micro financ*" OR "micro-financ*") AND ("financial inclusion" OR "financial inclusivity" OR "inclusive finance" OR "access to finance") AND ("role" OR "function" OR "contribution" OR "participation"))	53
Wiley Online Library	"(“islamic microfinance” OR “islamic micro finance” OR “islamic micro-finance” OR “islamic microcredit” OR ”islamic micro credit” OR “islamic micro-credit” OR “shariah microfinance” OR “shariah micro finance” OR “shariah micro-finance” OR “shariah microcredit” OR “shariah micro credit” OR “shariah micro-credit” OR “shariah compliant microfinance” OR “shariah compliant micro finance” OR “shariah compliant micro-finance” OR “shariah compliant microcredit” OR “shariah compliant micro credit” OR “shariah compliant micro-credit” OR “shari’a microfinance” OR “shari’a micro finance” OR “shari’a micro-finance” OR “shari’a	16

Database	Search String	Frequency
	microcredit" OR "shari'a micro credit" OR "shari'a micro-credit" OR "sharia microfinance" OR "sharia micro finance" OR "sharia micro-finance" OR "sharia microcredit" OR "sharia micro credit" OR "sharia micro-credit" OR "microfinance" OR "micro finance" OR "micro-finance" OR "pembiayaan mikro" OR "kewangan mikro syariah" OR "kewangan mikro syari'ah" OR "mikro shariah" OR "mikro syariah" OR "keuangan mikro syariah" OR "keuangan mikro syari'ah") AND ("financial inclusion" OR "financial inclusivity" OR "inclusive finance" OR "access to finance" OR "rangkuman kewangan" OR "akses kepada kewangan" OR "inklusi kewangan" OR "kewangan inklusif" OR "akses keuangan" OR "inklusi keuangan" OR "keuangan inklusif") AND ("role" OR "function" OR "contribution" OR "participation" OR "peranan" OR "fungsi" OR "peran" OR "kontribusi" OR "partisipasi")" anywhere	
Supplementary		
Dimensions	("islamic microfinance" OR "islamic microfinance" OR "islamic micro finance" OR "islamic micro financing" OR "islamic micro-finance" OR "islamic micro-financing" OR "islamic microcredit" OR "islamic micro credit" OR "islamic micro-credit" OR "shariah microfinance" OR "shariah microfinance" OR "shariah micro finance" OR "shariah micro financing" OR "shariah micro-finance" OR "shariah micro-financing" OR "shariah microcredit" OR "shariah micro credit" OR "shariah micro-credit" OR "shariah compliant microfinance" OR "shariah compliant microfinance" OR "shariah compliant micro finance" OR "shariah compliant micro financing" OR "shariah compliant micro-finance" OR "shariah compliant micro-financing" OR "shariah compliant microcredit" OR "shariah compliant micro credit" OR "shariah compliant micro-credit" OR "shari'a microfinance" OR "shari'a microfinance" OR "shari'a micro finance" OR "shari'a micro financing" OR "shari'a micro-finance" OR "shari'a micro-financing" OR "shari'a microcredit" OR "shari'a micro credit" OR "shari'a micro-credit" OR "sharia microfinance" OR "sharia microfinance" OR "sharia micro finance" OR "sharia micro financing" OR "sharia micro-finance" OR "sharia micro-financing" OR "sharia microcredit" OR "sharia micro credit" OR "sharia micro-credit" OR "microfinance" OR "microfinance" OR "micro finance" OR "micro financing" OR "micro-finance" OR "micro-financing" "pembiayaan mikro" OR "mikrokredit syariah" OR "mikro kredit syariah" OR "mikro-kredit syariah" OR "mikro shariah" OR "mikro syariah" OR "microbanking" OR "kewangan mikro") AND ("financial inclusion" OR "financial inclusivity" OR "inclusive finance" OR "access to finance" OR "rangkuman kewangan" OR "akses kepada kewangan" OR "inklusi kewangan") AND ("role" OR "function" OR "contribution" OR "participation" OR "peranan" OR "fungsi" OR "peran" OR "kontribusi" OR "partisipasi")	69
Google Scholar	allintitle: ("islamic microfinance") AND ("financial inclusion")	1