

Profit or Maslahah? Rethinking the Objectives of Islamic Business Management

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ABSTRACT

The dominance of profit-oriented thinking in modern business management raises fundamental questions concerning the objectives that distinguish Islamic business management from conventional management. This study aims to critically examine the position of profit in Islamic business management and analyze whether business objectives should be oriented toward maslahah as a broader framework encompassing economic, social, ethical, and spiritual interests. This research employs a library research method with a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach. The research focuses on academic and normative sources discussing Islamic business management, Islamic economics, maqasid al-shariah, maslahah, Islamic business ethics, and contemporary management. Data were obtained from relevant scholarly books, journal articles, and authoritative Islamic sources. The collected literature was analyzed through identification, categorization, interpretation, comparison, and synthesis to develop a conceptual understanding of the relationship between profit and maslahah in Islamic business management. The findings indicate that Islam does not reject profit as a legitimate objective of business activity. However, profit cannot be positioned as the sole or ultimate measure of business success. Profit must be obtained through lawful, ethical, and fair processes and should contribute to broader human and social welfare. Maslahah provides a broader framework for connecting financial performance with justice, trust, transparency, social responsibility, and sustainability. Therefore, Islamic business management requires a reorientation in which profitability remains important but is positioned within the broader objectives of maqasid al-shariah and maslahah. The study concludes that the distinctive character of Islamic business management lies not in rejecting profit but in ensuring that profit serves broader ethical and social objectives.

Keywords: Islamic Business Management, Profit Maximization, Maslahah, Maqasid al-Shariah, Islamic Business Ethics

INTRODUCTION

Business is an economic activity that plays an important role in fulfilling human needs, creating employment opportunities, distributing goods and services, and generating economic value. In modern management systems, business success is generally closely associated with a company's ability to generate profit. Profitability is considered an important indicator for assessing a company's ability to maintain its operations, invest in development, improve competitiveness, and provide returns to capital owners. Profit orientation is fundamentally understandable because companies require adequate financial resources to survive and grow. However, problems arise when profit is no longer regarded as one of several business objectives but becomes the dominant objective that controls the entire managerial decision-making process. An excessive focus on profit can create various problems when economic interests conflict with social and ethical interests. Pressure to achieve profit targets may encourage companies to pursue excessive cost-cutting, reduce workers' rights, employ manipulative marketing strategies, exploit resources, or ignore the consequences of business activities for society and the environment. Under such circumstances, financial success does not necessarily represent overall business success. A company may generate substantial profits while simultaneously producing inequality, social harm, or environmental damage. This

condition demonstrates that business success cannot be adequately assessed solely through financial indicators (Khatimah & Rudiyanto, 2025).

This issue becomes increasingly important when examined in the context of Islamic business management. Islam provides broad opportunities for trade and profit-making activities. The Qur'an distinguishes permissible commercial activities from prohibited economic practices, including *riba*. This demonstrates that obtaining profit is not inherently contrary to Islamic teachings. Muslims are permitted to engage in business activities and earn profits as long as those activities are conducted through lawful means and do not violate principles of justice. Therefore, Islamic business cannot be understood as a system that rejects economic profit. The more fundamental questions concern how profit is obtained, how it is utilized, and whether the pursuit of profit generates benefits or causes harm to other parties. From an Islamic perspective, economic activity cannot be separated from moral values. Business activities are part of human conduct and must consider the relationship between humans and God, between human beings themselves, and between humans and the environment. Principles such as *amanah*, justice, honesty, transparency, prohibition of fraud, and prohibition of unjust enrichment demonstrate that business processes contain a moral dimension that cannot be separated from their economic dimension. Consequently, Islamic business management is not merely concerned with how a company can generate profit efficiently and effectively, but also with how business activities can be conducted properly and produce broader benefits (Sulaeman et al., 2025).

The concept of *maslahah* is important in explaining the broader objectives of economic activity in Islam. *Maslahah* refers to benefit, welfare, and the realization of human interests while preventing harm. Within the framework of *maqasid al-shariah*, the protection and promotion of human welfare constitute important objectives of Islamic law. Therefore, business activities conducted within a Shariah framework should not be assessed solely according to their financial outcomes but also according to their benefits and consequences for human life (Hendarti & Harahap, 2025). Useful products, fair transactions, humane employment relationships, consumer protection, healthy wealth distribution, and environmental responsibility are among the dimensions that can be considered when assessing the *maslahah* generated by business activities. The concept of *maslahah* also provides an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the objectives of Islamic business management. If profit is positioned as the sole objective, Islamic business management becomes difficult to distinguish substantively from conventional business management, which also emphasizes efficiency, growth, and profitability. The distinctive character of Islamic business should not merely be found in the type of products offered or the use of Islamic labels, but also in how companies establish objectives, make decisions, treat stakeholders, manage resources, and evaluate business success. The development of the *halal* industry and Shariah-based businesses also demonstrates that Islamic identity increasingly possesses economic value. *Halal* labels, Shariah concepts, and Islamic values can become elements of marketing and business differentiation strategies. This development creates significant opportunities for the growth of Islamic business, but it also creates challenges. There is a risk that Islamic values may be used merely as marketing instruments without being accompanied by substantive changes in management practices. If this occurs, Islamic business may shift its orientation from creating *maslahah* toward generating profit through religious symbols and identity (Purnomo & Hidayati, 2026).

This issue demonstrates the importance of critically examining the objectives of Islamic business management. Discussions of Islamic business should not merely explain that business must be *halal*, honest, and trustworthy. A deeper analysis is required regarding the position of profit within the hierarchy of business objectives and the relationship between economic returns and *maslahah*. An important question is whether profit should constitute the primary objective of Islamic business or whether it should be regarded as one instrument

for achieving broader objectives. This study aims to analyze the position of profit in Islamic business management, examine *maslahah* as an orientation of business objectives, and analyze how the relationship between profitability and *maslahah* can be conceptualized within Islamic business management. The study is based on the argument that Islamic business does not need to reject profit but needs to reconsider the position of profit so that the pursuit of financial returns remains within the framework of *maqasid al-shariah* and contributes to broader benefits for stakeholders.

METHOD

This study employs a library research method with a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach. The use of library research is based on the conceptual nature of the problem under investigation, namely the objectives of Islamic business management, the position of profit, the concept of *maslahah*, and the relationship between economic interests and Islamic values. The research does not seek to test hypotheses through empirical data but rather to understand, compare, and critically analyze ideas developed in relevant scholarly and normative sources. The research data consist of academic and normative literature related to Islamic business management, Islamic economics, *maqasid al-shariah*, *maslahah*, and Islamic business ethics. The sources include academic books on Islamic economics and management, scholarly journal articles addressing Islamic business, *maqasid al-shariah*, *maslahah*, Islamic business ethics, and management theory, as well as relevant Islamic normative sources concerning trade, justice, trust, and economic responsibility. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the research topic, their contribution to conceptual discussions, and their academic or normative credibility (Haryono et al., 2024).

Data collection was conducted by identifying and examining relevant literature discussing business objectives, profitability, Islamic business ethics, *maslahah*, and *maqasid al-shariah*. The selected sources were studied critically to identify concepts, arguments, and perspectives related to the research problem. Relevant information was documented and organized according to thematic categories to facilitate comparison between different sources. The data were analyzed qualitatively through identification, categorization, interpretation, comparison, and synthesis. Identification involved determining the main arguments concerning business objectives and the position of profit within the selected literature. Categorization involved grouping the findings into themes related to profitability, *maslahah*, *maqasid al-shariah*, Islamic business ethics, stakeholder interests, and business sustainability. Interpretation was conducted to understand the meaning and relationship between these concepts. Comparison was used to examine differences between profit-oriented approaches in modern business management and business objectives from an Islamic perspective. Finally, synthesis was conducted to develop a conceptual argument concerning the appropriate position of profit within Islamic business management. This study does not employ a systematic literature review, PRISMA framework, or bibliometric analysis. Library research is used as an approach for obtaining, interpreting, comparing, and synthesizing ideas from relevant sources in a critical manner. Through this approach, the study seeks to develop a conceptual understanding of how profit and *maslahah* should be positioned within the objectives of Islamic business management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The findings indicate that profit has an important position in Islamic business activities. Islam does not prohibit individuals or organizations from obtaining profits through trade and business. Profit has an important economic function because it enables businesses to maintain their operations, compensate capital owners and employees, invest in development, and expand economic activities. Therefore, positioning profitability as one of

the objectives of Islamic business management is legitimate as long as the process of obtaining profit complies with Shariah principles. However, the literature examined indicates that profit cannot be positioned as the sole measure of business success. From an Islamic perspective, the method through which profit is obtained is as important as the amount of profit generated. Profit obtained through lawful transactions, transparent practices, honesty, and fairness differs fundamentally from profit generated through exploitation, manipulation, fraud, or prohibited transactions. Consequently, financial success in Islamic business must always be connected to the processes and ethical principles underlying the generation of such returns (Sulistiyowati et al., 2026).

The analysis also demonstrates that *maslahah* provides a broader perspective for understanding business objectives. *Maslahah* enables business activities to be evaluated not only according to the benefits received by the company but also according to the benefits received by consumers, employees, communities, and other stakeholders affected by business operations. A business that generates profit while simultaneously providing beneficial products, creating employment, providing fair compensation, maintaining product quality, and contributing positively to society possesses a stronger dimension of *maslahah*. Within this context, *maslahah* does not eliminate the need for profitability. Rather, it provides a framework for determining how profit should be generated and utilized. Companies still require profit to maintain business continuity, but the pursuit of profit must remain within ethical and Shariah boundaries. Consequently, profit and *maslahah* should not automatically be understood as conflicting objectives. The conflict primarily emerges when the pursuit of profit is conducted at the expense of human welfare, justice, or other fundamental values (Novida et al., 2026).

The synthesis of the literature further indicates that *maqasid al-shariah* provides a normative foundation for understanding broader business objectives. *Maqasid al-shariah* places the protection of fundamental human interests among the objectives of Islamic law. In business activities, this principle can be reflected through the protection of wealth, fulfillment of legitimate human needs, prevention of harm, protection of human dignity, and creation of a fair economic environment. Business therefore cannot be understood merely as a means of generating financial returns but also as an activity that has consequences for human welfare. The findings also indicate that a *maslahah*-oriented approach has important implications for how companies measure performance. Financial indicators remain necessary because businesses require financial strength to survive and develop. Nevertheless, such indicators need to be complemented by considerations regarding the quality of relationships with stakeholders, fairness in employment relationships, consumer protection, social responsibility, Shariah compliance, and environmental impact (Muzayyanah et al., 2026). The conceptual synthesis demonstrates a distinction between profit as a business objective and profit as the ultimate objective of business. Profit as a business objective is legitimate because financial returns are essential to business continuity. However, treating profit as the ultimate objective can create problems when managerial decisions are directed exclusively toward increasing financial returns without considering ethical and social consequences. In Islamic business management, profit is more appropriately understood as one component of broader value creation (Ihwanudin, 2026).

DISCUSSION

The debate concerning profit in Islamic business should be approached from a balanced perspective. Profit should not be regarded as an opponent of Islamic values. Islam recognizes the legitimacy of trade and profit as long as such activities are conducted through lawful means. Therefore, Islamic companies require profitability to maintain business continuity. Without sufficient financial returns, companies may face difficulties in paying employees, maintaining product quality, investing in innovation, fulfilling obligations to

capital providers, and generating economic benefits for society. The fundamental problem lies in the tendency to treat profit as an absolute objective. When profit becomes the sole measure of success, ethical considerations may lose their strategic position in managerial decision-making (Firdaus & Ahmad, 2023). Under such circumstances, decisions that maximize company returns may be regarded as successful even when they impose costs on other stakeholders. Islam does not support such an approach because economic benefits must be obtained through mechanisms that uphold justice and avoid harm. Islamic business therefore does not need to abandon profitability. What is required is a transformation in the way profit is understood. Profit should be considered one component of business success rather than the sole criterion controlling organizational decisions. Companies may pursue financial returns, but such returns must be generated through Shariah-compliant processes and contribute to broader human and social benefits. The concept of *maslahah* provides an important foundation for developing the objectives of Islamic business management. *Maslahah* allows business to be viewed from a broader perspective by considering the consequences of economic activities for human beings and society. In business, *maslahah* may be realized through the provision of useful goods and services, fair pricing, consumer protection, employment creation, equitable compensation, and corporate contributions to social welfare (Faisal, 2026).

Maslahah also establishes boundaries for profit-seeking behavior. Not every financial gain can automatically be considered beneficial from an Islamic perspective. If profit is obtained through deception, exploitation, manipulation, or prohibited transactions, it cannot be justified merely because it produces financial benefits for the company. This demonstrates the close relationship between economic outcomes and the processes through which those outcomes are generated. The concept has direct implications for management. Managers are not merely responsible for achieving financial targets but must also consider how decisions affect different stakeholders (Mursal et al., 2025). When setting prices, for example, a company should not consider only the maximum price consumers are willing to pay but should also consider fairness and reasonableness. When implementing labor efficiency measures, management should not evaluate decisions solely according to cost reduction but should also consider employee rights and welfare. *Maslahah* can therefore function as an ethical foundation for managerial decision-making. Profit and *maslahah* should not necessarily be understood as mutually exclusive objectives. Under certain conditions, profit can become a means of producing *maslahah*. A financially healthy company has greater capacity to improve product quality, create employment opportunities, invest in innovation, provide fair compensation, fulfill social responsibilities, and maintain business continuity. Profit can therefore contribute to broader benefits when it is properly generated and utilized. Conversely, an orientation toward *maslahah* can support long-term profitability. Companies that maintain consumer trust, treat employees fairly, preserve product quality, operate transparently, and avoid manipulative practices may have stronger foundations for building a positive reputation. Stakeholder trust can ultimately become an important form of capital for long-term business sustainability. *Maslahah* therefore does not necessarily contradict the economic interests of companies (Aisyah et al., 2022).

The difficulty arises when companies must choose between short-term financial gains and long-term social welfare. From an Islamic perspective, short-term profit should not become a justification for violating justice or generating harm. In such circumstances, *maslahah* provides an ethical boundary for managerial decision-making. Companies should consider broader consequences rather than focusing exclusively on immediate financial outcomes. The findings suggest that Islamic business management requires a reorientation of its objectives (Lestari et al., 2025). This reorientation does not mean abandoning modern management principles such as efficiency, productivity, innovation, strategic planning, and profitability. These principles remain necessary for companies seeking to compete effectively

in modern markets. However, their implementation needs to be placed within an Islamic ethical framework. In Islamic business management, efficiency should not simply mean reducing costs without limitation. Efficiency must also protect employee rights and product quality. Innovation should not be directed solely toward creating products that generate high market demand but should also consider their usefulness and consequences for society. Marketing strategies should not be evaluated only according to their ability to increase sales but also according to the accuracy and honesty of the information provided to consumers (Asrofi, 2025).

This reorientation ultimately changes the way business success is understood. Success should not be determined solely by the amount of profit generated but also by how that profit is obtained and how business activities affect stakeholders. A company capable of generating financial returns while maintaining justice, trust, transparency, social responsibility, and ethical conduct is more consistent with the objectives of Islamic business management. The concept of profit maximization requires critical examination when applied directly to Islamic business management. Profit maximization is generally based on the assumption that the best decision is the one that produces the greatest possible financial return. Within such a framework, other considerations may be treated as secondary as long as they do not significantly reduce profitability (Sencal & Asutay, 2021). Islamic principles establish stronger boundaries because not every method of generating profit is considered legitimate. If the profit maximization paradigm is adopted without modification in Islamic business, a contradiction may emerge between Islamic identity and managerial practice. A company may use Shariah principles in its products and marketing while continuing to use financial maximization as the primary basis for managerial decisions. Under such conditions, Islamic values may become reduced to a market identity rather than functioning as substantive foundations of management. This demonstrates that the distinction between Islamic and conventional business cannot be identified solely through product characteristics or corporate labels. A more fundamental distinction lies in the objectives, processes, and moral standards guiding decision-making. Islamic business should demonstrate that Islamic values have practical consequences for how companies treat consumers, employees, capital providers, communities, and the environment (Latifah, 2024).

A *maslahah*-oriented approach has strong relevance to stakeholder management. Companies do not operate in isolation but within social environments involving consumers, employees, suppliers, investors, regulators, communities, and the natural environment. Each managerial decision can benefit one group while creating risks for another. Islamic business management therefore needs to consider the balance of interests among different stakeholders. From an Islamic perspective, attention to stakeholders is not merely a strategy for improving corporate reputation. It is part of a moral responsibility associated with *amanah* and justice. Consumers have the right to accurate information, employees have the right to fair treatment, capital owners have the right to lawful returns, and communities have the right to protection from harmful business practices. This orientation is also closely related to business sustainability. Companies that focus exclusively on short-term profits may sacrifice resources and relationships necessary for long-term survival. Conversely, companies that consider stakeholder interests and maintain a balance between economic and social objectives may have stronger foundations for sustainable growth. In this context, *maslahah* can serve as a conceptual foundation connecting Islamic values with sustainable business practices (Harahap, 2025).

The discussion of profit and *maslahah* also has implications for corporate performance measurement. Financial indicators such as net profit, revenue, return on investment, and business growth remain important because they demonstrate the financial health of an organization. Nevertheless, such indicators are insufficient to capture the overall success of an Islamic business. Performance measurement in Islamic business should also consider Shariah

compliance, stakeholder relationships, fairness in employment, consumer satisfaction and protection, social responsibility, and environmental consequences. Such an approach enables companies to evaluate success not only in terms of how much financial value is generated but also in terms of the quality and distribution of the benefits produced by business activities. Accordingly, business success in an Islamic context should reflect a balance between economic performance and maslahah. This does not require the elimination of financial indicators but rather an expansion of the understanding of corporate success so that it reflects the broader objectives of Islamic principles (Bustomi et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that profit remains an important component of Islamic business management, but it should not be positioned as the sole objective or ultimate purpose of business activity. Islam recognizes the legitimacy of profit-making as long as profits are obtained through lawful, fair, transparent, and non-harmful practices. Therefore, the fundamental issue in Islamic business is not whether companies may generate profit but how profit is obtained and toward what broader objectives it is directed. The concept of maslahah provides a more comprehensive perspective for understanding the objectives of Islamic business management. Maslahah enables business objectives to be connected with human welfare, justice, trust, consumer protection, employee welfare, social responsibility, and sustainability. Within the framework of maqasid al-shariah, business activities should not merely generate economic value but also create benefits and prevent harm. The findings further indicate that profit and maslahah do not have to be treated as mutually exclusive objectives. Profit can become a means of producing maslahah when it is generated through Shariah-compliant processes and used to support business continuity and development. Conversely, a maslahah-oriented approach can strengthen long-term business sustainability by encouraging companies to build trust, maintain stakeholder relationships, preserve quality, and avoid practices that may damage corporate reputation and continuity.

Therefore, Islamic business management requires a transformation in the way business success is understood. Profitability remains an essential component of management because businesses require financial sustainability. However, profitability needs to be positioned within a broader framework so that the pursuit of profit does not undermine justice, trust, transparency, social responsibility, and human welfare. This reorientation is important if Islamic business is to be distinguished not merely through products and labels but through substantive differences in managerial objectives and practices. Ultimately, the question of “Profit or Maslahah?” should not be understood as requiring a choice between two mutually exclusive objectives. The more fundamental issue concerns the position of profit within the broader purpose of business. From the perspective of Islamic business management, profit should be understood as part of broader value creation and should remain connected to Shariah principles and human welfare. Business success can therefore be understood as the ability of a company to maintain economic viability while simultaneously generating benefits that are just, sustainable, ethical, and consistent with Islamic values.

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