

ZAKAT AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY OF URBAN POOR CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the zakat distribution to the poor Muslim children in the urban area of Lembah Kelang, Malaysia for assisting them achieving equity in education. The methodology used in this research was qualitative study conducted through interview and document analysis with Lembaga Zakat Selangor (LZS) and Majlis Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan (MAIWP), the formal organizing bodies for Zakat management in Selangor and Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya. The findings show that zakat has been distributed to improve the educational equity for the urban poor and needy Muslim children by providing education inputs in the forms of i) learning and study materials, (ii) school related personal needs, (iii) adequate living and learning facilities and (iv) morale or motivation support. As a results, most of the children experienced improvement in their academic performance, increment of school entry rates among young children and reduction of dropout rates for those in both the primary and secondary level of schooling. Overall, this study highlighted the role of zakat institution to support government in handling the issue of educational equity particularly for the Muslim poor children in urban area. As an implication, this research has upgrades the level of zakat institution in assisting government to realize the education policy and further provide the Muslim urban poor children with better academic opportunities in their life.

Keywords: *Zakat, Equity, Education, Urban poor, Children*

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INTRODUCTION

Zakat has a great role in building the Muslim community covering various aspects of life such as economy, education, law and many more. It is a form of instrument used to eradicate poverty by transferring wealth from the rich to the poor society. In education, zakat plays a big role in providing educational opportunities to children from poor families to enable them to get the education they deserve. The key issues of concern to Malaysian in particular, and the world, is the issue of educational equity which is focused on providing fair opportunities in education for every child. As a Muslim majority country, zakat is seen as a source of funding that can assist the government in improving educational opportunities for the Muslims, especially to the poor. It is a mechanism to help the Muslim society in addressing various social issues while uplifting the eminence of Islam.

Zakat is identified as an obligatory religious tax imposed to various categories of Muslims' assets such as income and physical assets. Thus, zakat is distributed to the identified eight groups of recipients for the benefit of their living needs including education. Education for the poor and needy children has always been among the priority to the institution of zakat or the zakat council whose role is to distribute zakat to Muslim society. Zakat is given as a financial support to children from poor families to enabling them to acquire basic education from pre-school, primary school, secondary school as well as for higher education in universities or colleges. In Malaysia, the issues of urban poverty still affected the growth of social development (Mok, Gan and Sanyal, 2007). The urban poor communities are not only suffering from inadequate income but also the basic education for their children. Evidence consistently shows that students from poor families are less likely to perform as compared to the students from middle to high income families (KPM, 2014).

The educational equity has been sets by government as one of five aspirations for the Malaysia education system towards the year 2020. It is targeted that improvement in equity could bring 50% reduction in achievement gap of students due to differences in urban-rural context, socioeconomics factor and gender factor (KPM, 2013). As stated in Malaysia Education Development Plan 2013-2025 or PPPM, the supporting principles that should be coordinated for handling the issue of socio-economic status are through the distribution of more financial assistance by government such as Poor Students' Trust Fund or KWAPM and also by private sectors and community (KPM, 2013). The success of zakat institutions in improving the academic performance also has been proved in the past several years. For example, Lembaga Zakat Selangor (LSZ) also has reported that the total of 2,436 of poor and needy children previously sponsored by them has been offered to further study at Bachelor degree level in public higher institutions in Malaysia in the year 2012 (LZS, 2013).

At the global level, the issue of equity is an element of major concern to world organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The main goals of the education equity policy are 1) basic accessibility to education for poor children 2) quality education in line with the policy to develop human capital; and 3) education management that can provide the best education for them (UNGEI, 2010). Therefore, this research was carried out with the aim to explore the role of zakat in improving educational equity of Muslim urban poor children in Malaysia. Specifically, the objectives of this research are: (i) to identify the types of zakat assistances to improve educational equity of Muslim urban poor children in Malaysia and (ii) to find the implications that zakat have on the education outcomes of the Muslim urban poor children.

This research is significant to many parties, especially the government that consent on the way to improve the policy of educational equity. As a Muslim majority country, the zakat system was identified as important tools to improve the welfare of Muslim society particularly the urban poor children who directly receive the fund assistance from zakat. For the zakat management institutions themselves, this study could highlight their significant contribution in balancing the gap of socio-economic status and widening the opportunity for the Muslim urban poor children to receive the necessary education. In addition, this article also discusses the suggested necessary actions for zakat management institution to improve the fund distribution for education in order to be more effective. Overall, this article will be preceded by an introduction, followed by a literature review discussing theory and concepts related to educational equity, research methodology, findings and discussion and the final conclusion of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Zakat for education

Zakat is one of the pillars of Islam which is obligatory to all Muslims. Besides that, zakat plays a significant role in building the Islamic social system whilst improving the economy of Muslims in its own way. Zakat has been defined in *Shari'a* (Islamic law) terms as giving out part of specific property to *asnafs* (group of recipients) who fulfils the conditions as set in the *Shari'a* legislation. Quran has stated about the obligation for Muslims to give out zakat. The forms of zakat in Islam are Zakat Fitrah (Personal Zakat) and Property Zakat; which includes zakat on income, business revenue, savings, gold, silver and stocks (al-Qaradawi, 1978).

There are eight groups of zakat recipients, called the '*asnaf*' which their conditions has been mentioned in the Quran. They are those who are *fakir*, *miskin*, *amil*, *muallaf*, *riqab*, *gharimin*, *fisabilillah* and *ibnus saabil*. *Fakir* refers to people who do not have sufficient income for themselves and depended on others to support them. While *miskin* refers to those who have the physical ability to obtain the basic necessities to live but not fully sufficient. Meanwhile, *fisabilillah* are the ones who strive for and are involved in work to spread and uphold Islam. All of the *asnaf* groups are those who are eligible to receive zakat as has been determined by the council or the board that manages the zakat with respect to each particular state (al-Qaradawi, 1978).

Education is one of the channels to distribute zakat which aims to provide opportunity to the needy children to gain education. Malaysian history tells us that the education sector, especially *madrasahs* (religious schools) relies highly in zakat as the economic sources (Hefner, 2009). In this context, the education taken into account is not only ones covering religion-oriented education per-se, but also those covering various disciplines important to mankind including medicine, science and technology. As recorded in the state of Selangor, a sum of RM110,995,862 zakat fund have been spent for the *fisabilillah asnaf* for the purpose of education (LZS, 2013). Zakat given out to them not only provide the basic needs for their studies, but also increase their potential to further their studies higher in order to improve overall standard of living for the Muslims in every field. According to Azman Ab Rahman and Siti Anwar Martiah (2014), zakat distributed out by the zakat authority to aid the poor *asnaf* in education be it for primary, secondary or tertiary levels can be considered very comprehensive. However, the zakat distribution for education should be re-evaluated from time to time due to the constant improvements in the education sector thus requiring new approaches in line with the current requirements in the development of education.

There are several forms of zakat assistances channelled to the poor to assist in education (LZS, 2014). Among these are direct financial assistance, financial assistance to purchase stationery and necessities for school, financial assistance to further their studies at higher education institutions, as well as scholarships for their studies. In addition, there are also zakat channelled to private religious schools and Islamic centres that really required financial assistance. These institutions are justified to receive assistance with having students mostly from the poor and needy families. Other forms of assistance are to finance the additional classes / tuition for the poor students and finance assistance for their means of transportation to school, for example, bicycle purchase for the student.

Equity in education

There has been many definitions given to help people understand the concept of educational equity. Despite the many different forms used to explain it, educational equity is an attempt to provide fair opportunities to all children in order to acquire education comparable to their level of capacity and capability. Odden and Picus (2000) explains that educational equity is the justice that should be practiced on educational institutions funded by government through fair distribution of financial support. Furthermore, educational equity is also understood as a condition where the principle of equality is practiced to manage the financing of education, regardless of differences in demographics (Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani, Saedah Siraj, Norfariza Mohd Radzi and Adnan Basar, 2010).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has highlighted the differences in the definition and concept of educational equity given by different scholars (ACU, 2011). Every party gave different opinion and views regarding the true meaning of educational equity according to a few main principles; equity is justice, equity is achieving the minimum requirement, and equity is the indicator of excellence. The society at general mostly understand and accept the definition of equity as justice. It ensures that social and personal shortcomings do not become a barrier to achieving their maximum potential in education. Besides that, equity is also understood as the minimum level that must be acquired in education be it in getting basic necessities for learning or equality in getting particular levels of education.

In line with the previous definition, Levin (2003) also illustrates that according to public policy regarding equity, the differences in wealth, income, power and possession should not be the cause for the differences in the level of education attained by individuals. In broader sense, Opheim (2004) also suggests that equity is not just a question of the opportunity provided through education system, but it is also closely linked with the actual results from the diversity of educational options that exist and what different students may achieve from the education system. Therefore, it can be concluded that educational equity is an attempt to provide a balanced and equal opportunity for all students to get basic education and to optimize their education potential. It provides means for the creation of a successful human beings regardless of any limitations they might have be it in social or economics context.

Principle of equity in education

Equity in education is based on the Theory of Justice which was inspired by John Rawls in 1971 and later refined in 1975 and 1999 (Rawls, 1999). The theory which was known as the theory of 'Justice as Fairness' is comprised of two main principles, namely the Principle of Liberty and the Principle of Equality. In general, the theory introduced by Rawls aims to solve the issue of fair distribution to the public. It prioritizes the principles of freedom and justice which is also linked to the social contract. Among the main elements in the Theory of Justice is fairness, objectivity, equality of opportunity, elimination of poverty and freedom. The theory was originally criticized, especially by political philosophy experts which led to some reforms a few years later.

The first principle of justice stresses the need for every individual to have the rights for freedom as everyone else does. In the context of a country, this includes the freedom to vote, to speak in public and gather, to own personal property as well as a few other forms of freedom. The second principle highlighted the concept of fair equality of opportunity and the Difference Principle to regulate inequalities. The principle is based on the issue of differences that requires restructuring of the imbalances that exists in the social and economic factors. A lot of priorities and benefits should be given to the less fortunate members of the society whilst positions or vacancies should be opened to all parties to maintain a fair opportunity to all.

Educational equity is among the vital part of education policy with broad adoption. In contrast to equality which refers to an equal or similar treatment to all, equity is understood as the concept of providing students with the necessary assistance that should be received. Thus, measuring equity is complex and requires procedures and a lot of efforts. Different context claimed for different intervention based on the needs and expectation of the final education outcomes. In education, the concept of equity is achieved when every student receives the same access to education and are be able to achieve the objectives of education.

There are two forms of equity in education, 'horizontal equity' and 'vertical equity'. Horizontal equity is measured by looking at the differences or imbalances in the distribution of finances. It can be achieved when students within the same criteria of groups receive the same total distribution without any differences in their provisions. Vertical equity on the other hand refers to the differences that exists between every student and every school. Thus, equity can only be achieved if disproportion issues are resolved with appropriate aids. Vertical equity is qualitative in nature and is more difficult to measure as compared to horizontal equity which is more common to be implemented.

In practice, horizontal equity is easier to be measured and monitored for improvements. Among three of the main criteria for measuring horizontal equity are the level of enrolment, expenditure on each student and the

student-teacher ratio. Horizontal equity ensures that students facing the same condition and situation would receive similar benefits in education and consequently are able to receive the same level of education. In other words, horizontal equity minimizes or eliminates any gaps existing on the access to education, resources for learning as well as education quality.

However, with the existence of a more comprehensive data and information, the second equity principle which is the vertical equity could be implemented. Students should be treated accordingly to ensure for fulfilment of their different needs thus, enabling them to perform as any other students. This principle helps reduce any imbalances that could have been caused by external factors relating to socio-economics, geographical, political, gender differences and others. Any area of imbalances existing among the students will be tackled appropriately such as by providing staff with specific training and expertise, after-school programs such as extra classes and other efforts as deemed necessary.

METHODOLOGY

In order to fulfil the research aim, qualitative method has been adopted by conducting the semi-structured interview and document analysis. Qualitative research method enables deep exploration for obtaining comprehensive findings to achieve the research objective (Creswell, 2013). As listed in the earlier section, the objectives of the research are to find the types of zakat assistances, the implications that zakat has on the education outcomes of the Muslim urban poor children and to give suggestion on improvement in the zakat distribution. Therefore, the qualitative study is believed to be the best way to maximize the data to be analyzed into a useful findings and contributions. The researcher conducted in-depth face-to face interviews with 14 respondents guided by the interview protocol. The interview protocol has been validated by two experts in the related area before the interview session. The content was further improved in order to facilitate the understanding of the participant and increase the reliability of the interview method.

This research was carried out in the state of Selangor and Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya which reflected the largest and most developed urban states in Malaysia. Therefore, the research involved the zakat management institution in Selangor known as Lembaga Zakat Selangor (LZS) and the zakat management institution of the Federal Territories known as Majlis Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan (MAIWP). The interview session were conducted with two officers in charge of the education sector in LZS and the other two officers from MAIWP. The four participants are the one who are at the top position in the education unit and are capable of describing and explaining the zakat distribution for education by their institutions. In addition, the interview session were also conducted with ten recipients of the zakat for education and categorized as the urban poor children. Five of them are the residents of the hostel under management of LZS named as Baitul Hasanah whereas the other five are the poor children lived in the hostel of Darul Kifayah orgaized by MAIWP. The lists of participants are presented in the following Table 1:

Table 1

Profile of participants for interview.

Participants	Gender	Position, Zakat institutions	Age
Participant 1	Female	Zakat education officer, LZS	50
Participant 2	Female	Zakat research officer, LZS	48
Participant 3	Female	Zakat basic education officer, MAIWP	38
Participant 4	Female	Zakat higher education officer, MAIWP	42
Participant 5	Female	Children 1, MAIWP	12
Participant 6	Male	Children 2, MAIWP	14
Participant 7	Female	Children 3, MAIWP	16
Participant 8	Female	Children 4, MAIWP	15
Participant 9	Male	Children 5, MAIWP	16
Participant 10	Female	Children 1, LZS	12
Participant 11	Male	Children 2, LZS	17
Participant 12	Male	Children 3, LZS	12
Participant 13	Male	Children 4, LZS	13
Participant 14	Female	Children 5, LZS	17

In addition to interview session, the research was also carried out through document analysis. The document analyzed were the monthly bulletins published by both the zakat management institutions that reported the activities and events organized by them involving the collection and distribution of zakat funding to all the eight categories of zakat recipients. Besides that, the analysis were also done to the book of annual reports published by LZS and MAIWP. Researcher decided to analyze the previous annual reports for the consecutive years of 2013, 2014 and 2015. In addition, the statistics related to zakat distribution to education sector were also analyzed based on information published in the website of LZS and MAIWP. Thus, the multiple resources of data enable in-depth qualitative study and useful findings till the point of saturated data collection.

During the interview sessions, data was recorded by MP3 recorder to facilitate the transcribing process. Then, the researcher then take several hours to read the supporting documents and analyzed the relevant information simultaneously. The interview transcripts then being analyzed manually to get the answer for the research objectives. It involved the coding process and the identification of certain themes and categories based on all interview transcripts obtained through the interview sessions (Burnard, 1991). Furthermore, the data gathered from document analysis support findings from the interview sessions. The monthly bulletins, annual reports and statistics primarily provide evidence on the type of education input contributed by the zakat fund. Researcher gained better understanding not only on the types of contributions, but also the amount and the specific programmes organized by the zakat management institutions to improve educational equity of the Muslim urban poor children.

FINDINGS

Data gathered from interview and document analysis have been analyzed through qualitative analysis to answer the research objectives outlined in this research. Based on the analysis, the findings are presented as follows:

The types of zakat assistance to improve educational equity of Muslim urban poor children in Malaysia.

Based on the analysis, the contributions of zakat considered as the education input for the poor children are categorized as i) learning and study materials, ii) personal needs, iii) adequate facilities and iv) morale/motivation support.

i) Learning and study materials

The group of children are supplied with school books required by their respective schools, which includes writing books, exercise books and any books related to their study. In addition, they are also provided with the

necessary learning materials such as school bags and stationeries to fully prepared them with the learning process. This type of assistance is given annually and particularly ready within the first three months of the year. Any other school necessities required throughout the year could be fulfilled by using stipend or scholarship given by LZS or MAIWP on a monthly basis. As mentioned by respondent DK 2:

Education assistances that we received are such school uniform, one set per person, shoes, and stationeries then, they give writing books, even more. We just kept the extra ones to be used next year.

ii) School related personal needs

The zakat management institutions of LZS and MAIWP also provide the poor children with two sets of school uniform individually at the beginning of the education year. It includes both the uniform for the national schools and the religious education schools. In addition, they also provides the necessary attires for the Physical Education class and also the uniform of the extra-curricular activities. With these assistances, the poor children could obtain the similar necessities as any other students regardless of the socio-economic status of their parents . They are ready to go to schools with enthusiasm and involve in all school curricular and extra-curricular activities in a positive and supportive environment. The respondent DK3 stated that:

It means that annually, in the early of schooling year, they will give us school uniform, shoes, complete attire, include name tag, school badge, tie and all...

iii) Adequate facilities

As mentioned in the earlier part of this article, the identified poor and needy children in the area of Selangor and the two Federal Territories are offered to stay in hostels managed by the zakat management institution named as Baitul Hasanah (Selangor) and Darul Kifayah (Federal Territories). The hostels give opportunity for the poor children to live in better environment with secured learning facilities monitored by selected wardens who act as guardian, teachers and also counsellors. The hostels are equipped with furnished bedrooms, bathroom, activity rooms, library, classes, food hall and also basic sports facilities such as football field and badminton courts. Those poor children are entitled to use all the provided facilities until they completed their study at form five of secondary school.

In addition, the children are also provided with bus transportation for them to go and back from schools and for attending certain events or functions outside their hostel. For some children who are not staying in hostels but considered to be the zakat recipient, they also receive bicycle per individual to be used as school transportation. This assistance certainly help the poor and needy children to go to schools and give equal opportunity for them to attend the teaching and learning activities. They even are able to joint many extra-curricular activities handled by schools and fulfilled their daily schedule with good and beneficial activities. This point is supported by one of the officer, ZO1:

Overall, we provide fund for spectacles, provide bicycles, assistances for school transportation, the bicycle is for who do not used public transportation, then we give them..

The student DK2 also stated that:

Facilities in this hostel are such we can go to school by bus. Foods are all fully prepared.. This hostel also has public phone. Our hostel are considered large, comfortable...

iv) Morale/motivation support

v)

The data also showed that the poor children are provided with additional or tuition classes to help them improve their academic performance. The tuition classes were set up by LZS and MAIWP in addition to the daily learning at government school with the cost incurred using the zakat fund. Generally, the children who are weak in academic performance are identified to ensure that they are capable to reach their potential besides

motivates them to be successful for the benefit of their future. In addition, the zakat fund was also allocated for the provision of motivation courses usually handled during school holiday. The motivation programs were generally targetted for children who are going to sit for the national examination in year 6, form 3 and form 5. One of the students, DK1 mentioned that:

Here, there are various events... such as.... motivational programs, outside people came and gave talk. We also have camp for that.

Another effort coordinated by the zakat management institutions are the incentives in the form of reward allocated for the children identified to be excellent in their academic performance. The students usually will received scholarships or monetary incentives to be used in the following year as an appreciation of their effort and outstanding performance. These incentives were given annually and believed to be the mechanisms to boost the children motivation and sense of competitiveness as other ordinary students in schools. As agreed by one of zakat officer ZO3:

In addition, we also involved with programs organized by MAIWP such as Excellent Student Awards, other events, awarded by Minister, so many events that we are really full of that.

Implications that zakat has on the education outcomes of the Muslim urban poor children.

The educational equity should be measured not only from the provision of the educational input but the outcome of the education received by the children. In this research, the outcomes of the education gained by the poor children were identified based on the zakat financial support. Specifically, the outcomes were in the form of increment in school entry rates, reduction of school dropout rates and improvement in academic performance.

i) Increase school entry rates

Obviously, the zakat financial support brings hope to the children of a poor families thus enable them to start their primary education at the age of 7 years old as proposed by the Education Ministry of Malaysia. The poor children are supported through out their primary and secondary education and equipped them with the necessary schooling needs such as books, uniforms and many more. The burdens of the parents have been reduced and the children are no longer tied with the need to find money for their living expenses. This condition realized the real meaning of educational equity as they are standing at the similar level as any other children. Participant DK5 mentioned that:

My mother only work for herself, not for funding my study... then I stay here, in hostel.

ii) Reduce school dropout rates

In relation to the education outcome of the increase in entry rates, the provision of zakat also has ensure a stable financial assistance to the poor children. Their schooling expenses are guaranteed thus reducing the issue of absenteeism due to poverty or financial inability. All the necessary materials were funded using zakat fund at the beginning of the year in addition to pocket money and transportation facilities for them to go to schools. Furthermore, students living in hostel are also stringently monitored by the warden. Any sick children are properly treated by them to ensure that they are capable of attending schools and any co-curriculum activities.

Obviously, the zakat financial assistance has helped the poor and needy children to complete their basic education needs. Most of them were able to complete their studies until form 5 and sit for the necessary national public examination of Malaysia Certificate of Education or Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). Zakat has managed to assist government to ensure basic knowledge and relevant skills for their nation and be prepared to be the workforce for the country. Even the high achievers in academic are further provided with scholarship for them to pursue the tertiary education by the zakat management institutions. As mentioned by student BH5:

If I am at home, I will not... Only then I am here, I am able to manage myself, I am able to study.

iii) Improve academic performance

Interview with the student participants indicated that most of students particularly who stayed in hostels experienced increment of academic performance. They got better grades in examination with some of them were able to get excellent results in the national public examination. The ability to learn in similar conditions as other ordinary student has created a positive attitude among them. The good learning environment in hostel also created enthusiasm for them to be excellent in their study with support gained from friends and wardens. They even felt motivated to reach at their full potential in their effort to get the rewards contributed by LZS and MAIWP for excellent students. As mentioned by one student, BH2 and DK4:

OK, my academic, as I mentioned before, it increase steadily, I seems not to lower. If it happen, that only because I am lazy.

My performance for this year has improved... here, we have preparation class at night, we have to study.

DISCUSSIONS

In response to the first research objective, zakat manages to improve the educational equity of the urban poor children based on four main themes that are learning and study materials, school related personal needs, adequate facilities and morale/motivation support. These findings supported the ideas brought by OECD (2008) that the provision of basic schooling needs should support and engage those who struggle at school as well as those who excel. Based on this fact, zakat was proved as a mean to provide a sustained physical and financial assistances to various parties in educations including students, teachers and scholars (Mohammed B. Yusoff, 2011). The education inputs such as textbooks, learning materials, facilities and parents and community supports are also considered among the important inputs for ensuring students' education quality in future (Scheerens, 2004).

The results show that zakat has been able to improve the education of the Muslim urban poor children based on three main education outcomes that are increase of school entry rates, reduction of dropout rate and the improvement of academic performance among them. As mentioned by Sherman and Poirier (2007), the achievement of test scores are considered as the outputs related to the short-term results of schooling and should be used as a measures of equity. Improvement in school composition and school process could bring impact to students' academic performance (Alegre and Ferrer, 2010; U.S Department of Education, 2013). In relation to that, the Muslim social security is partly attributed to the zakat distribution for education which is resulted in increased productivity and better level of education (Patmawati Hj Ibrahim, 2008). This finding also obviously support the government aspirations in both PIPP 2006-2010 and PPPM 2013-2025 that aimed for reduction in education gap and the ultimate improvement of educational equity (KPM, 2006; KPM, 2013).

As presented in the previous discussion, zakat has successfully provided sufficient input for the poor children to get a proper education, which further resulted in good educational outcome. These conditions have actually improve the education level of Muslim in Malaysia and help government to realize their aims in Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia (PPPM) 2013-2025. In addition, it is suggested for the children to be equipped with technological learning aids to further enhance the effectiveness of zakat contribution to the poor children. This suggestion was in line with the aim listed under the Education Dvelopment Master Plan 2006-2010 which plan for the reduction of digital gap among students (KPM, 2006). Gorski (2005) has also highlighted the need for eliminating the digital divide due to differences in races, gender, socioeconomic status and many more.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

As a conclusion, the zakat fund has play major role in improving educational equity of the Muslim poor children particularly in the urban cities of Malaysia. The distribution of zakat to the poor and needy children managed to provide them with important education input such as learning and study materials, personal schooling needs, adequate facilities such as transportation and hostel and even the necessary morale and motivation support for them to learn properly similar to other children. The effectiveness of the zakat distribution was also explored in terms of the effect of the financial assistance and the education outcome gained by the children. The findings revealed that the Muslim urban poor children were succeed to increase the school entry rates, reduce absenteeism among them, reduction in the dropout rate and also the increase in their academic performance

As an implication, educational equity specifically in Malaysia which consists of Muslim majority could be improved through a more systematic distribution of zakat by putting the objective of the education system in mind. Zakat not only cater the Muslims need to get basic assistance for education, it also allows the Muslims to optimize their learning potentials to the highest level. Improvement of educational equity is measured by the ability of zakat to assist government in providing the input and resources for education, to establish a good education environment as well as assistance to the poor children to achieve success in their education. The distribution of zakat also does not merely assist the *asnaf* to meet their necessities, it also contributes to the national education system in achieving educational equity which is a fundamental policy in education development in most countries worldwide. In line with the goal of 'Education for All' inspired by UNESCO, zakat is seen as a supporting instrument which can assist the Muslims society in improving their level in education. It opens a vast opportunity for Muslim countries to solve this key issue in education and ultimately become a role model to other countries in the world.

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