

Franchised Pre-School Education Business in Kuala Selangor District: The Turning Points of Malay Female Entrepreneurs

¹Md. Rosli bin Ismail, Khatipah Abdul Ghani, Norhayati Mohd
Zin, Rita Wong Mee Mee, Lim Seong Pek

Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, Universiti Selangor (UNISEL), Malaysia

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Abstract

The equilibrium of demand and supply relationship between the Malay middle class parents (demand) and the private pre-school educational entrepreneurs (supply) has made it as a sustainable business today. Hence, the main objective of this study is to describe the venture of Malay female entrepreneurs into franchised pre-school education business. The qualitative method approach was applied through observation and in-depth interviews with each of the Malay female entrepreneurs under study. The data was analyzed and narrated descriptively. The results show that there is the interplay between the Malay female entrepreneurs and the Malay middle class parents. The Malay female entrepreneurs contribute significantly to the Malay middle class social reproduction at pre-school level.

Keywords: Middle Class, Entrepreneur, Franchise, Pre-School, Young Children.

Introduction

The development of pre-school education is holistic, integrated and balance with a well consideration because the experience in the pre-school education centres determines their future both social and economic development. Sarikaya and Coskun (2015) stated that the education, which is taken during preschool period, can be seen as making an investment for future life. As such, the existence of private pre-school education centres (inclusive of private pre-school education centres under franchise/licensing) is equally important as it is likely a different route for the Malay middle class parents to ensure their children will not be left behind in accessing to pre-school education.

Therefore, many more private pre-school education centres have been opened up in various residential areas nowadays especially in new developed townships throughout Malaysia. Dahari and Ya (2011:115) stated that "...parental choice can be considered as one of the market indicators for pre-school business and the pre-school operators need to understand their customers' expectation of the service provided". As a result, it has become common that the Malay middle class parents would try their best to ensure that their children

receive good quality of pre-school education in order to materialise their (the middle class parents') own aspiration and expectation which lead to middle class social reproduction.

Franchising

In this study, the term franchise is defined as an individual or a corporation who is the founder of a private pre-school educational centre and has his/her own educational programme. The definition of franchising is an arrangement, which the manufacturer or sole distributor of a trade-marked product or service gives exclusive rights of local distribution to independent retailers. In return, the franchisee (the person who purchases the franchise) pays royalties and conforms to standardized operating procedures (Robert, Micheal and Dean, 2010:413). In order to develop own brand as a private pre-school educational centre and expand the business, the franchisor (the owner) grants a franchisee (who has intention to be as a private pre-school provider or an entrepreneur in this study) the rights to run a private pre-school educational centre under a franchise business. The location, royalty fees, initial investment etc. are agreeable by both parties, i.e. franchisor and franchisee.

The most visible and popular is the chain of private pre-school education centres which are mushrooming, inclusive of but they are not limited to Smart Reader Kids (SRK), Q-Dees (QD), CEC Real Kids (CEC), Krista, Genius Aulad (GA), Children Islamic Centre (CIC) and The Little Caliph. As private pre-school education centres under franchise/licensing have become more commercialised lately, the nature of business also has become more competitive and struggling.

Hence, the objective of this study is to assess the venture of Malay female entrepreneurs into private pre-school education business in the district of Kuala Selangor, Selangor Darul Ehsan. This involves an examination of entrepreneurial traits namely motivational factors, capital investment and entrepreneurial skills.

Parents' Preference of Pre-school Education

Pre-schooling children education in a school is not only about teaching and learning session but it is more how they learn to socialize and interact with peers. School is considered as the second agent of socialization as, while family and home as the prime agent of socialization. Parents' participation and involvement in their children education are crucial in their early learning development. A study by Dahari and Ya (2011) focused on factors that influence parents' choice of pre-school education. The main objective of this study was to determine the important factors that influence the selection for the choice of pre-school among parents in Malaysia. This study utilised a survey approach by distributing a set of questionnaire to 162 parents (N=162) in the Klang Valley and who were in the age range of 23 to 47 years old.

The findings revealed that Malay parents considered brand name, private-run, are important, besides safety and security, quality of teaching, cleanliness and religious values/teaching. Partly ethnic background, religion, occupation and household income also influenced their choice. The shortfall of this study is that the number of participants was relatively small and as such this study could only be generalised to this particular group. The study can be considered as one of the market indicators for pre-school business that the pre-school operators need to understand their customer's expectation of their service.

Hashim and Sundani (2014) conducted a case study on factors that drive parents to enroll their children into the Islamic private school. This case study was conducted at Al-Amin Islamic Primary School in Gombak. There were fifty (N=50) respondents involved in this study by completing a survey questionnaire. An open-ended interview was done by interviewing the school principal in-depth for further elaboration. Factors that drive parents to enrol their children into the private Islamic school in this study could be categorised into four; (i) school location and accessibility (total mean score: 3.28), (ii) religious goal/Islamic orientation (total mean score: 4.23), (iii) socialization/environment (total mean score: 4.02), (iv) parental awareness and parenting skills (total mean score: 4.07).

The findings revealed that religious orientation and seeking more Islamic knowledge were the most important factors. In terms of perception, although academic achievement was not proven to be outstanding, parents were satisfied with their children's overall achievement like the improvement in Quranic recital and memorization, Islamic personality (*syaksiah*) and the content of the curriculums were perceived as excellent.

Methodology

A case study was used as the research design, and the qualitative method approach was applied through observation and in-depth interviews with six (N=6) Malay female entrepreneurs under study in the district of Kuala Selangor, Selangor Darul Ehsan. The data was analyzed and narrated descriptively which focused on the turning point of venturing into the pre-school education business. These six informants (N=6) were each coded accordingly, i.e. (SRK) for Smart Reader Kids, (CEC) for CEC Real Kids, (QD) for Q-Dees, (CIC) for CIC, (GA) for Genius Aulad, and (LC) for Little Caliph (LC). As this study is a purposive sampling, the finding of this study does not represent the whole population of pre-school education centres in Selangor Darul Ehsan.

Findings

The turning point here is defined as the changes of from being a salaried employee into an entrepreneur or running own business. In details, it is about what make these Malay female entrepreneurs changed their careers and devote themselves fulltime in this pre-school education business. Having analyzed the profile of the key informants, it is noticeable that the Malay female entrepreneurs have had worked for other employers or attached to some organizations for a few years before they decided to devote their time and passion in the field of pre-school education.

Table 1 is a summary of the six (N=6) key informants' turning points in pre-school education business. In summary, all key informants have equal characteristics on two turning points, i.e. (i) passion and patience, and (ii) loving children. According to (LC):

"I have a passion for the pre-school educational industry and love kids so much. My husband is actually also in the same industry who teaches at one of local universities. He trains teacher-students in the field of pre-school education. Therefore, I think it is easy for us to discuss issues related to pre-school education together. I chose this particular franchise because it meets my requirements, which is English-Islamic pre-school education. I would say that this industry is very challenging".

Loving and caring about children as a turning point is an important element as the researcher believes it is a 'pre-requisite' requirement in venturing themselves into the educational business. According to (CIC):

"I used to have a spa business. Although educational business does not generate as much money as in other businesses, I guess. In fact, that (making maximum profit) is not our priority. No doubt, it has risks but we calculated the risk. The most important is for the sake of children. I love children, have a passion for teaching and do not have problems dealing with children and parents. My husband pushed me to do (an educational) business through this particular franchise. Besides that, the founder of this franchise is a friend of us."

Table 1
Summary of Key Informants' Turning Points

| Turning Points | 1 (SRK) | 2 (CEC) | 3 (QD) | 4 (CIC) | 5 (GA) | 6 (LC) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------|-------------|
| Passion and patience | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Love children | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Meeting own requirement | | | | | x | x |
| Spouse's support | | | | x | | x |
| Effective system | x | | | | x | |
| In line with educational background | | x | | x | | |
| For the sake of children | x | | | x | x | |
| Continuous reward from Allah | | | | | x | |
| Business potential | | | x | | x | |
| Partnership | | x | | x | | |
| N-Ach (*) | Strong need | Receive feedback | Receive feedback | Calculated risks | Work alone | Challenging |
| Elements | | | | | | |

Other characteristics of the turning points for the six key informants in venturing the education business are, inclusive of (i) meeting their own requirements, (ii) spouse's support, (iii) effectiveness of the franchised system, (iv) in line with educational background, (v) for the sake of the children, (vi) continuous rewards from Allah, (vii) business potential, and (viii) partnership. It is obviously noted that the turning points which leads to their interest does not derive from the purpose of profit-oriented or making money in this industry.

Conclusion

The Malay female entrepreneurs under study used to work with some organizations before they decided to venture into the pre-school education business. Although, most of them did not have a qualification in the early childhood education field, they were adamant to proceed. With abundance of work experience and passion for educating young children have provided them a head start in the pre-school education business. Franchise type of education business was their choice to start a business as private pre-school educational entrepreneurs due to good brand name, English medium as well as strong in Islamic foundation. The private pre-school educational tuition fees were quite expensive, but the return in terms of quality control, environment, teaching and learning (T&L) approaches and so forth were worth for money.

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¹Corresponding Author

Md. Rosli Bin Ismail

Email: mdrosli@unisel.edu.my

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