

Philanthropy Education: Children and The Gift of Giving

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Abstract

The act of philanthropy encourages men to preserve relationships with God, humans, and other living creatures, towards sustained peace and harmony. Given its advantages, Islamic advocacy and guidance on philanthropy as the basis of Islamic charity, can be found in numerous verses of the Holy Quran and Prophetic traditions. Be that as it may, philanthropy is commonly associated with adulthood, specifically adults who have attained maturity and financial stability. This paper offers a different insight by emphasizing the importance of philanthropy education towards children. The earlier children are taught on the gift of giving, the more it becomes a matter of practice and habit that continues into adulthood. Using a qualitative research methodology, this paper uses secondary sources to gain a broader understanding on the linkage between philanthropy and children. This paper first explores Islamic perspective on philanthropy which includes the modes and advantages. This is followed by highlighting the importance of inculcating philanthropy values among children which benefits include encouraging positive value and attitude, enhancing the ability to understand others, developing social problem-solving skills, and building charitable citizens. Finally, it presents recommendations grounded on five important principles on how children philanthropy education can be improved via education and family institutions.

Keywords: Philanthropy, Education, Children

Introduction

Islam teaches respect to other human being and living creatures, and encourages men to preserve relationships with God, human and the world creatures, towards sustained peace and harmony. Islam has given men instructions from the Quran and the Prophetic traditions to direct man's daily activities for that reason. Philanthropy can shape the preservation of the relationships when those fortunate lend their hands to the poor and needy. Detailed guidance on philanthropy as the basis of Islamic charity (Samiul, 2001), can be found in the Quran and Prophetic traditions. Numerous verses elaborate the great advantage which awaits individuals who engage in various forms of philanthropy. For instance, in Surah al-Baqarah

verse 261; “the example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies His reward for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing” (2:261). The verse reflects on the multiplication of rewards when one involves in philanthropic activities.

Adults are deemed to be more involved in philanthropic activities due to their physical capacity, maturity and financial stability. However, to inculcate philanthropy as a positive habit and behaviour, it is best for it to be taught as early as possible upon children. There are various studies done on the motivating factors, importance, and impact of philanthropy among adults but studies on its relationship with children are still lacking. Not only children are the future leaders of the next generation, they are also part of the population of the country. In Malaysia for example, it has been reported that children consisted of 22.3 percent of the population for the year 2021. The positive effects of philanthropy will not only affect the individuals, but the nation as well.

This paper seeks to unfold the importance of philanthropic education for children by presenting three objectives of the study. The first objective is to examine the Islamic perspective on philanthropy which includes the modes and advantages. The second objective is to identify the importance of inculcating philanthropy values among children and its beneficial outcomes. The third objective is to provide recommendations on how children philanthropy education can be improved via education and family institutions.

Methodology

Content analysis is a method of analysing documents. Content analysis allows further understanding of issues from the obtained data via deductive or inductive approach, depending on the objective of the researcher (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Content analysis has been commonly used in various fields especially for the initial stage of study by categorising data for meaningful interpretation which can direct a researcher to the prevalent gap, or opportunities for future research. In addition, content analysis also has been commonly used to build up models, conceptual explanation, description of a phenomenon and guide to action (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Based on the literature, content analysis has been performed in numerous studies related to philanthropy. Ji & Wei (2022) study the advertisement messages from philanthropy organisations, while Anna et al (2022) study educational philanthropy in Australian public schools. Another study by Sharifah & Ikmal (2022) conceptualises philanthropy based on contemporary approach.

In this study, content analysis is performed to conceptualise the importance of teaching philanthropy at early age, and methods to encourage the children to engage in such activities. Content analysis is a suitable approach as philanthropy has been commonly focused on adults with income and capacity to give financially or non-financially (www.theconversation.com). For that purpose, relevant literatures are retrieved from reliable sources to inductively conceptualise educating philanthropy among children. Consequently, relevant methods to encourage philanthropy will be deduced from the literature as well.

Results and Discussion

Philanthropy in Islam

In Islam, philanthropy can be attained via several modes, either compulsory or voluntary. Zakat is a compulsory mode of philanthropy which is the fourth pillar in Islam, meant to serve eight categories of Muslims in need; the faqir (poorer than the poor), poor,

amil (zakat collectors, muallaf (those inclined to Islam), fisabilillah (those who fought or preaches in the name of God), gharim (under debt), ibnu sabil (travellers), and riqob (slave or under duress).

The compulsory of zakat can generally be divided into two types; zakat al-fitr and zakat on property. Besides zakat, there are other modes of voluntary Islamic philanthropy including sadaqah, waqf, hibah and infaq.

From the perspective of economy, various modes of Islamic philanthropy can be referred to redistribution channels, which may result in equilibrium in income among the society. The function of distribution in the economic system refers to the method by which income and wages are paid to owners of production – land, labour and capital. For instance, labour will get paid, land will produce and capital will generate profit or dividends. However, Islam has modes of redistribution which helps to balance the gap between rich and poor via system of redistribution. As a Muslim, he has the responsibility to help others in need through the redistribution channels; sadaqah, waqf, hibah and infaq. According to Widiyanti (2015), Islamic concept of redistribution reflects justice from three elements; fair in the distribution of economic resources, the distribution of income of the factors of production, and the distribution among community groups (the rich and poor), which may create peace and harmony among the nation.

Thus, Islamic philanthropy does not only target economic justice, but there are other spiritual advantages promised by Allah to those who involved in the philanthropic activities. Among them is the multiplication of reward by 700 for each giving as mentioned in Surah al-Baqarah verse 261. Similarly, Allah guarantees those who help others will be compensated and maintained their sustenance, as decreed in Surah Saba verse 39; “Surely God gives abundant or limited provisions to whoever He wills of His servants. And whatever you spend in charity, He will compensate you for it. For He is the Best Provider.” (34:39). Indeed, the Quran also mentioned that in the sustenance that is bestowed, there are other’s rights which should be distributed via zakat and other modes of Islamic philanthropy by the economic agents; “and in their wealth there was a rightful share fulfilled for the beggar and the poor (51:19)”.

As summarised by Qurratul (2015), the implication of Islamic philanthropy is twofold; from the perspectives of philanthropists and the recipients. Philanthropists can strengthen their humanity and faith by eradicating materialism, greed, and stinginess. They can also cultivate peace of mind and purify their property. Islamic giving also helps the beneficiaries achieve a better and more successful life while dispelling jealousy and doubt in the belief system. Thus, Islamic philanthropy is significant and should be encouraged towards all Muslims including the young ones through education at early age.

The Importance of Philanthropic Education for Children

Educating children to become philanthropists or to love the act of giving is one of the important components of children’s social development. Children as a part of a global community not only have to be protected, but also need to be nurtured so that they recognize their potential to live well with others (Carpendale & Lewis, 2020). Healthy parenting style and effective social education are vital to build up children’s emotional and spiritual intelligence to become more sensitive to the needs of others (Fonseca, 2019; Zhuravlova & Chebykin, 2021).

However, the current situation, which is heavily influenced by technology and the usage of the internet has weakened the touch of humanity in children’s social connection (Phillips

& Tyler-Merrick, 2021). One way to restore this touch of humanity is to get the children involved with philanthropical work or the act of giving. Children or students who are involved as philanthropists have a more balanced and unified personal well-being (Idris & Abd. Mukti 2017; Syahida et al., 2022). More specifically, children who are nurtured by the act of giving enjoy important these benefits, namely

a) Positive Value and Attitude

Children's engagement in philanthropic activities can provide them with opportunities to develop empathy and collaborate in groups. They will engage in meaningful relationships with their peers which allows them to improve their social skills. They also found to be less involved in disciplinary problems and attend school more consistently which leads to academic success positive well-being (Fonseca, 2019; Williams-Brown & Mander, 2020).

b) Ability to Understand Others

The experience of engaging in philanthropic activities broadens children's perspective to understand other people's point of view. Children gain more mental and emotional maturity through comprehending other people's perspectives. They will also be capable of dealing with challenging situations with compassion and empathy. These qualities indirectly help children to enhance other skills such as communication and leadership (Carpendale & Lewis, 2020, Frydenberg et al., 2022).

c) Develop Social Problem-Solving Skills

Children who participate in the philanthropic activities are also more inclined to be proactive and take action to address the identified issues in the society. Helping others can boost emotional intelligence. Furthermore, children may work more efficiently in groups and make more friends. This positive development encourages children to think critically and creatively. Through social problem solving also, children develop the ability to (i) to observe and recognize the existence of a problem, (ii) to define and determine goals to be accomplished to solve the problem, (iii) to plan and implement strategies and (iv) evaluate strategies (Rosli, 2014; Carpendale & Lewis, 2020).

Children who are involved in the act of giving develop higher self-esteem and are more capable of making good decisions. They also are willing to take responsibility, and act independently. They are better in coping with stressful situations and have the ability to handle positive and negative emotions and are more socially competent (Zhuravlova & Chebykin, 2021).

d) Building Charitable Citizens

Children are the future assets of a nation in which the foundation of their individual soul is vital for a harmonious society. Philanthropic education opens an avenue to children to be exposed to the opportunities to enhance the community. The emphasize is to enable children to understand the way a philanthropic action can be done rather than what is the philanthropic action (Body, et al., 2020). In addition, Philanthropic education is able to foster social justice-oriented individuals and that raising children who can "participate and think about the fundamental causes of problems and principles of justice" is essential for a fair, just, and democratic society (Westheimer, 2015).

Therefore, philanthropic education should be considered as a significant mean to promote holistic well-being and the sense of humanity for children from the early years to adulthood.

Recommendations for Children Philanthropic Education

Education to shape pupils into philanthropic individuals can be analogous to growing a tree that produces many fruits. This can be referred to the description of a tree which is mentioned in the Al-Quran (Ibrahim: 24-25): "Have you not considered how Allah presents an example, [making] a good word like a good tree, whose root is firmly fixed and its branches [high] in the sky? It produces its fruit all the time, by permission of its Lord. And Allah presents examples for the people that perhaps they will be reminded."

A tall and healthy tree grows from strong roots. Strong roots represent the belief in Allah SWT and other pillars of iman. Like planting a tree, the education process also needs gradual, progressive and systematic approach which involves putting out the best effort as causes to get the greatest results (El-Moslimany, 2018). For human beings, the greatest effort should be exerted in the early phases. If nurturing process is done well during this phase, the later years will run more smoothly.

Five important principles in teaching children to become a philanthropist are

1. Tauhid as a basis

Good deeds should be performed with sincere intention for Allah SWT. Although there are many advantages derived from philanthropic work, parents and teachers should remind themselves and their children that doing good should be based on faith in Allah SWT and follow the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. The conviction in the existence of Allah SWT and his attributes of All Loving and Merciful is an affirmation that should be repeated to children on a regular basis (Aisha, 2009). This belief in Allah SWT instils the confidence of doing good only to be rewarded by Allah SWT, and the children are encouraged to strive for good deeds even if they do not receive rewards and praise from others. Sincerity in obeying Allah SWT will purify the soul and develop an Islamic personality within the children (El-Moslimany, 2018).

2. Perspective on Human Beings

To shape the attitude of philanthropy, there are some beliefs about human beings that need to be explained to children. Although there are various types of human characters, it is important to teach children that humans (i) are social beings who are brothers descended from Prophet Adam AS, (ii) have the potential for intellect and feelings to live together and (iii) have compassion towards others (Nazirah et al., 2020). Feeling sympathy for others comes naturally to children. Children will innately want to help and give to others when they see them in need. With this belief, children are raised to perceive themselves as one of society's most significant groups. Children regard themselves as capable of doing something that helps to the betterment of the humanity (Aisha, 2009). They will learn the sense of unity, and to love and be kind in living with other human beings. Furthermore, children will recognise that good changes will happen via cooperation and community connection (Nizam et al., 2020).

3. Parents and teachers as model

Parents, siblings, and peers are the people who have the huge effect on personal development during childhood (Rosli, 2014; Fonseca, 2019). As a result, parents and teachers

must strive to create a healthy atmosphere and environment at home and at school. Parents and teachers should be role models in terms of language, facial expressions, attentive listening, empathy, and willingness to help so that children may replicate it when responding in a circumstance that happens. Children derive many of their ideas about roles and values from significant individuals with whom they interact and have close relationships (Phillips et al., 2021).

4. Providing Concrete Examples

Parents and instructors must provide concrete examples that are easy for children to comprehend while instilling and modelling philanthropic behaviour. A specific illustration might be provided by commenting on issues close to the experience of children (Ann El-Moslimany 2018). It will help children learn the consequences of their actions, whether good or harmful. A concrete example can also be followed by a reflection and discussion. Parents and teachers may emphasize the benefits when serving others such as having peace of mind, more friends, and a better life for everyone (Idris & Mukti 2017).

5. Meaningful experiential learning

Experiential learning for children in undertaking philanthropic activities should be offered. Social and emotional development depends on the experience of a person. Through appropriate programs, parents and teachers may offer context and situation that provide opportunities for children to do philanthropy work (Syahida et al., 2022; Williams-Brown & Mander, 2020). Children can save money, clothing, and toys to donate to people in need. They can take part in fundraising campaigns and activities to educate people about being kind to others. They can send letters and organize protests against injustice and discrimination. Children should be taught to dedicate their talents and resources to Allah's service which give them value, purpose and direction in life (Aisha, 2009; Ann El-Moslimany, 2018).

These five principles will help the children to treat others with kindness and concern as a way to demonstrate their gratitude to Allah SWT. They also will use all the blessings such as ability, skills, time, wealth and intelligence to assist those in need to please Allah SWT.

Conclusion

Philanthropy has a high potential in accelerating changes to resolve social, economic, and environmental issues of a country. In order to encourage a more active involvement in philanthropy, the practice of philanthropy itself needs to be changed to be more inclusive than the current adult-centric philanthropy. Most importantly, it must be emphasized that for a philanthropic evolution to begin, we need children. Children are naturals at philanthropy and it is unfortunate if the opportunity to guide, educate and empower them is lost. The five principles of philanthropic education for children encapsulated this paper may serve as a guideline on how the act of giving may be taught whether through education or family institution.

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