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## EDUCATIONAL EQUITY FOR MALAYSIAN URBAN POOR MUSLIM STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims at determining the contribution of zakat in improving educational equity of Muslim urban poor students in Malaysia. This research was carried out based on quantitative methodology using a survey questionnaire on a sample of 462 urban poor students. The students were recipients of full assistance from zakat institutions in the cities of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and state of Selangor. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics of Spearman correlations and Kruskal-Wallis H test. Based on analysis, respondents were highly agreed that zakat funds had contributed to the input, process and output of their education. A moderately strong correlation was found between input from zakat and the education output of the poor students ( $r = 0.598, p < 0.05$ ) similar with the correlation between education process provided by zakat and the education output of the poor students ( $r = 0.604, p < 0.05$ ). There was no significant difference in education output of the poor students for five categories of family members' highest level of education [ $\chi^2(4, N = 462) = 5.412, p = 0.05$ ]. The study highlighted the contribution of zakat in improving educational equity among Muslim urban poor students. It is also emphasized the role of zakat institutions in assisting the government in implementing education policy and providing better opportunity for education of urban poor students.

**Keywords:** Zakat, Equity, Poor, Students, Education, Malaysia



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## INTRODUCTION

Education has been traditionally recognized by many countries as the social welfare provided by government and instrument for creating human capital that can contribute to national economic well-being. Therefore, the issues of access, equality, equity and quality of education have always been the focus of debates in the education sector to ensure a specific level of achievement in education (Bottani & Benadusi, 2006; Castelli, Ragazzi & Crescentini, 2012). Large disparities in education indicators could result in “inequity” in education that needs attention from policymakers and researchers (Sherman & Poirier, 2007). Evidence consistently shows that students from poor families have lower academic performance as compared to students from middle to high income families (Ministry of Education, 2014). Through time, these issues have not been the attention of the government only, but become the focus of the whole society responsible for driving the country to face the challenging world in the future (Rahimi, Noraini, Loh, Selvaranee & Norjoharuddeen, 2008).

Malaysia is one of the developing countries committed to preparing an excellent level of education and achieving the world agenda of ‘Education for All’ (Ministry of Education, 2013). Therefore, equity in education has been the concern of the higher authorities to ensure that at least all children are equipped with a minimal level of education with the main focus on literacy and numeracy (Ministry of Education, 2013). Policy implementation has been basically under the responsibility of the government with the recent strategy included under the Malaysia Education Blueprint or *Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia (PPPM) 2013-2025*. It is projected that Malaysia will be able to achieve educational equity in the near future and prepare the whole society with the necessary basic education (Ministry of Education, 2014).

The Education Development Master Plan (2006-2010) also focuses on bridging the gap between urban and rural education achievements, which is largely due to socio-economic factors (Ministry of Education, 2006). The Ministry of Education has been working toward improving the infrastructure and educational facilities in rural areas and continuously upgrading the assistance distribution system for the poor students, special needs students and minority group students. The ministry is also working on increasing the student enrolment rate and reducing the risk of drop-outs to ensure that education can be enjoyed by all children regardless of their personal and family background (Ministry of Education, 2013).

As a country with Islam as an official religion, there are other opportunities that could provide ways in increasing the educational equity specifically for the Muslim students. Zakat, which is one of the five pillars of Islam acted as the financial fund that could assist in providing social welfare to the Muslim community (Azhana bt Othman & Abd Halim Mohd Noor, 2012; Muhamad Soleh Nurzaman, 2011). The money received from zakat contributors should be strictly distributed in accordance to the Islamic principles with education as among the main focus of zakat distribution (Patmawati Hj Ibrahim, 2008). Basically, the poor and needy students deserved a specific amount of funds essential for their education such as tuition fees, books and other resources to ensure that they receive education similar to other children. Therefore, zakat has provided opportunity for children in society to reach educational equity and further assist government in implementing the related education policies (Selangor Zakat Board, 2014a).



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Overall, this study examined the contribution of zakat to educating urban poor students based on the input, process and output of their education. It could help the zakat institutions to upgrade the fund distribution that comprehensively cover the student needs to ensure the targeted education achievement and equity for all. This article is organized with the introduction as the first part, followed by literature review, conceptual framework, methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion, including the implications and suggestions for future research. Specifically, this article aimed at examining the role of zakat in improving the educational equity of Muslim poor students in Malaysia. Thus, the objectives of this study are: (a) To find the students' perception on the contribution of zakat in improving their education; (b) To find the relationship between input and process of education contributed by zakat with the students' education output, and (c) To find differences in students' education output from zakat contributions based on differences in highest education background of family members.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Zakat*

Zakat plays an important role in providing financial aid specifically in a Muslim community. When implemented well, it could serve as the main instrument of social safety net for the government (Toor & Nasar, 2004). This is because it is independent from the government budget. Although the concept of zakat is from Islam as a religion and is mostly implemented in Muslim populated countries, the zakat concept can be adapted from Islam as an ideology that can also be implemented in a non-Muslim community in the quest for a welfare state (Dean & Khan, 1997).

Zakat itself refers to a religious obligation imposed on all Muslims in which they give a specific proportion of their disposable income to be distributed among the eight categories of recipients (*asnaf*). It is one of the five Islamic pillars, which means it is of utmost importance to a Muslim (Dean & Khan, 1997). Zakat can be sourced from personal income, business profits, savings and much more. One of its spiritual aims is to purify the wealth of a person (Ahmad Nadzri, Abd Rahman, & Omar, 2012). Zakat should not be confused with charity or donation as zakat is considered compulsory and there are specific guidelines with regard to amount of payment, and types of recipients unlike charity or donation. As a basic guideline, a small percentage of 2.5% zakat is due from the disposable income of any productive wealth that an individual owns that exceeds an established minimum value.

In Malaysia, zakat is administered under the jurisdiction of the respective state Islamic council (Ahmad Nadzri, Abd Rahman, & Omar, 2012; Azman Ab Rahman, Mohammad Haji Alias, & Syed Mohd Najib Syed Omar, 2012). Each state has its own zakat authority in charge of collection and fund disbursement (Mohammed B. Yusoff, 2011). However, they do support each other in terms of sharing the best practices to be adapted in their state based system. Each state has a few officers based in each district to ease collection and distribution (Mohammed B. Yusoff, 2011). Even in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, teachers are selected from certain schools to identify and manage distribution for poor and needy student recipients in that particular school. The zakat management institutions will manage the list of recipients to ensure fair and timely financial assistance especially during the beginning of the year.



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Zakat are distributed to eight categories of zakat recipient or known as *Asnaf*. The eight categories are *fakir* (needy), *miskin* (poor), *aamil* (zakat caretaker), *muallaf* (newly converted Muslim), *riqab* (one who wants to free self from slavery), *ghaarimin* (one who is in debt), *fisabilillah* (one working in the path of Allah) and *ibnus sabil* (one stranded in journey) (Ahmad Nadzri et al., 2012). Zakat distributed for the poor and needy usually constitutes the majority of the funds and they are normally provided through two schemes: a monthly contribution to cover basic expenses as well as a rehabilitation grant that they can use to start a business or by providing market demanded skills to prepare them for employment thus helping them become self sufficient (Toor & Nasar, 2004). This is also the reason why, in Malaysia, the children of the poor and needy gets education sponsorship from the zakat funds to pursue education until completion of high school.

### ***Zakat for Education Purposes***

In Malaysia, zakat management is decentralized to each of the State Islamic Council (Mohamad Uda Kasim, 2005; Patmawati Hj Ibrahim, 2008). For example in the state of Selangor, it is known as Lembaga Zakat Selangor (LZS) or Selangor Zakat Board whereas in Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, it is named as Majlis Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan (MAIWP) or Islamic Council for the Federal Territory. According to Selangor Zakat Board, their current strategy on alleviating people from poverty is through educating the second generation (Selangor Zakat Board, 2014a). They are now more focused on making sure the children in the poor and needy family are able to complete the minimum education. This will help them secure better job or career opportunities. Recently, zakat has increased distribution proportion for education purposes. However, with the increased provisions, a more refined division of the distribution must be created to ensure the result from the students learning is equitable with the amount being spent on them (Selangor Zakat Board, 2014b).

Zakat is known in Islamic economics as a source of funding to combat poverty. Zakat's purpose is to help someone to move from being a dependent to being independent. On a school level, zakat is usually given to two categories; the *fakir* and the *miskin*. Recent observations show that, most of the children from these two categories face problems at home. Due to lack of financial ability, some of them are unable to go to school even to be excellent in education. Most of them could not afford basic schooling necessities such as school uniforms, stationery, and books. Some of them do not have a conducive learning environment at home. Canada's education history between 1993 to 1996 has shown us that decreasing education funds may result in increased child poverty (Maynes & Foster, 2000).

In Malaysia, most students get the opportunity to learn at a highly reduced school fee in government schools. This has been implemented to aid parents following the Compulsory Education Policy Sect. 29A, Education Act 1996 (Act 550) which was implemented on January 2003 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). The only expenses they might incur would be for co-curriculum activities, and the personal expenditures on school uniforms, stationery and lunch. Despite that, due to family poverty, some parents still faces difficulties sending their children to school. Thus funds and special aid are given to these poverty stricken families to enable their children to acquire the minimum education. According to Selangor Zakat Board (2014a), they did provide financial aid for school fees, basic school necessities, and scholarships as education aid for poor and needy students.

In order to justify the effectiveness of the education fund, we shall consider two factors; adequacy and equity (Knoepfel, First, Della Sala, & Ordu, 2014). Adequacy refers to students' accessibility to education. In other words, in spite of their financial deficiency, they are given support to have access to adequate resources for education at the very least minimum level. Equity on the other hand is the closest in meaning to being fair and just.



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In Islam, being fair and just does not mean 'equal', however it means giving the rights to the deserving ones. We can consider the 'rights deserved' as personal deficiencies that are uncontrollable by them but when supported by others, it allows them to perform as well as others. When the students have access to sufficient resources, then they are able to perform properly in their studies.

### ***Equity in Education***

Based on the principles and theories underlying the concept of education equity, there are generally five main goals of equity targeted to students (Solis, 2000). Among it is the achievement of academic success and learning outcomes as targeted for the students. Besides that, education equity aims for inclusivity as well as fair and equal access to education. The next main goal is fair and equal treatment in the learning process and a similar opportunity for all children to receive basic education. Finally, education equity also aims at providing balanced and sufficient educational resources for students.

Many suggestions and measures have been put forward by different parties to further enhance the core basis of the education equity concept, particularly at the international level. Some efforts include financial and non-financial aspects such as re-enforcement of government policies, educational management and some other significant elements. In Malaysia for example, the issue of education equity is still seen as a problem related to the education policy itself and the bulk of it is put on the responsibility of the government. With the launch of a few national education policies such as the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013-2025), the Education Development Master Plan (2010-2015), and the Economic Transformation Programme, basic education for children is secured in government schools to ensure necessary literacy skills are acquired. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) for instance, touches the equity principles by working on narrowing the difference in achievement levels between urban and rural students through various programs involving the ministries of education, state education departments and district education offices (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

At the international level, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2008) suggested identification of children with drop-out cases and providing more systematic aid for them to reduce unnecessary class repetition in particular levels. In addition, they also proposed strengthening the relationship between parents and the schools especially for families with low economic status. Other steps include an immediate response to the growth of community size and providing more fitting education platforms for minority groups such as immigrants, indigenous people and the less fortunate. In terms of financial support, the main focus should be on providing the basic necessities for learning to all, especially at the pre-school level as it is the first step in education. There should also be direct assistance to those who are really in need.

Efforts toward achieving educational equity can be in the form of individual resources allocation, school-based resources allocation, or through programs run by various stakeholders in education (Castelli, Ragazzi, & Crescentini, 2012; Leon & Valdivia, 2015). For certain western countries, equity can be achieved when services or aid provided are determined by the tax collected nationally instead of by the current economic position of the locality or the state. It is also known as taxpayer equity or wealth neutrality (Sherman & Poirier, 2007). Some objectives outlined by the government in order to achieve fiscal balance in the country is 1) to neutralize the variance existing in the fiscal position of each school, 2) to eliminate the variance in fiscal effort between all schools, and 3) to improve the existing variance for student educational needs.



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Based on an educational equity simulation model by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), three key elements deserve attention in order to improve educational equity (Wils, Naidoo, Patrinos & Nguyen, 2013). These elements claimed attention by the zakat management authorities to help enhance the quality of zakat distribution and thus help the government realize the education policies that lead to educational transformation. The three key elements mentioned are the input and educational resources, the learning process and quality educational outcomes. These three elements are closely linked to each other and have to be treated well in order to achieve the desired education aims.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The research framework of this study was based on the theory of equity and the framework for measuring the equity of the school finance system. Equity in education is based on the Theory of Justice which was originated from 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. The content of the theory guarantees the right of each person to have basic liberty and the social and economic positions for own advantages. In addition, The Framework for Measuring the Equity of School Finance System was originated by Berne and Stiefel (1984) and further refined by Baker and Green (2008) in the research on conceptualizing and measuring educational equity. The ideal focus was to have the inputs distributed equitably which were frequently measured in dollars. Nevertheless, in other cases the idea of equity goes further than that which covers along the education process and the related context. These then led to more comprehensive ways of measuring of equity that finally includes the output or outcome that students gain based on the measurement for the equity in input and the process of their education.

Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study consists of three main variables that are input of education, process of education and the outcome of education. Input and educational resources refer to any resources necessary to equip students for the learning process. Therefore, resources such as books, stationery and any materials that aid their learning process are considered basic necessities required by all students to ensure they gain proper access to the learning process. Their ability to properly join the learning process will also enable them to obtain the necessary basic education opportunity as do other children. Financial aid or scholarships can also be provided to be spent on their school uniforms, transportation to school, lunch pocket money, and any form of aid that can assist in acquiring basic education.

The learning process or the transformation process refers to the provision of quality teaching and the ability to create learning sessions that allow effective learning. Thus, equity in the learning process can be realized if less fortunate children are able to have access to the same quality learning experience as other children. In this context, the learning process aspect could cover a comfortable learning atmosphere, access to motivation, proper learning time and any form of contribution that can improve the learning experience. It is an added value to the success rate of students and allows them to enjoy a fair and equitable education opportunity.

A variety of educational outcomes constitute part of the goal of a quality education system. In terms of equity, it refers to the ability of students to achieve the best in education without having personal, financial or social status as a stumbling block for their success.



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This includes ensuring they are able to go further and acquire the highest level of education equivalent to their ability to learn. For this reason, some educational outcomes that can be a measure to its success are overall success in academic and co-curriculum activities, the reduction of drop-out rate and the opportunity to pursue higher level education. The students should be able to enjoy all of these rights to education. The conceptual framework is presented in the following Figure 1.

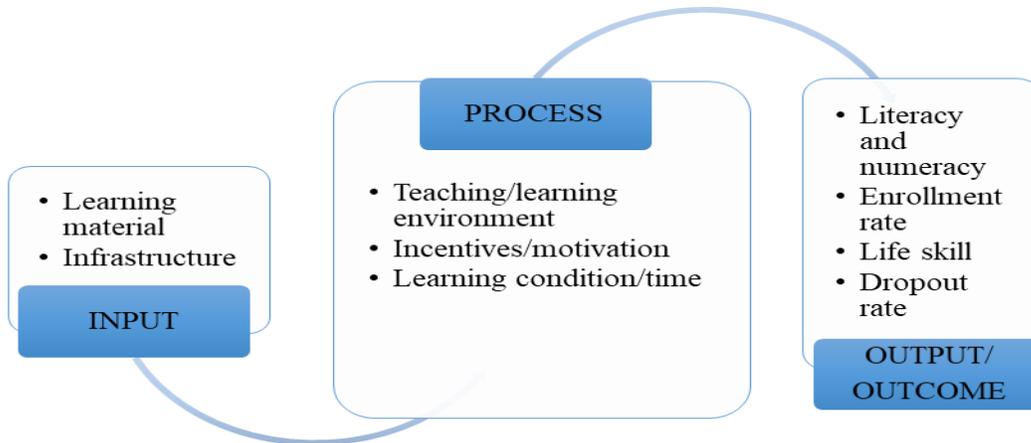


Figure 1. Conceptual framework. Adapted from Berne & Stiefel (1984) and Baker & Green (2008).

## METHOD

Based on the outlined research objectives, quantitative study has been employed through the use of questionnaire. The population of the study are the Muslim poor students located in an urban city of Selangor and Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya, and who received full assistance from zakat institutions. Students receiving full assistance from zakat institution of Selangor are allocated in specific hostel organized by Selangor Zakat Board whereas students sponsored by zakat institution of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya were placed in hostels located in Kuala Lumpur. The total population of students residing in both hostels amounted to 490 students. We then decided to take the whole population as the sample and questionnaires were distributed to all of them. However, only 462 students completed the questionnaires and returned them during field work for data analysis.

The questionnaire was developed based on the Framework for Measuring the Equity of School Finance Systems as proposed by Berne and Stiefel (1984) which then adapted with the concept of vertical equity discussed Baker and Green (2008). Vertical equity highlighted the requisites for students to be equipped with the necessary education input, process and output/outcome suitable to their needs. There are four sections in the questionnaire; section A on respondent's demography, section B - input/ sources of education from zakat, section C - process of education provided by zakat and section D - the output of education. The respondents were required to answer the questionnaire based on 5-point Likert-scale that indicated their agreement with the statement that consists of 1= highly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree and 5= highly agree.



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The instrument of this research was validated by two experts in education finance. Pilot test had been carried out with 30 student recipients of full assistance from zakat institution with similar criteria as zakat institutions in Selangor and Federal Territory. Data from the pilot test were analyzed using the method of internal consistency to confirm the instrument reliability. Based on the data, the Cronbach alpha was .932, indicating high reliability of the instrument items.

In order to do the fieldwork, research has obtained permission from the Executive Manager of both zakat institutions. All students in the hostels were gathered and the questionnaires were distributed to them manually. The students were also given ample time to fill up the questionnaire based on their perceptions of the input, process and output of education that they obtained from the zakat fund. Some 462 completed questionnaires were received from the students out of the total 490 for both hostels. Then, data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS software of descriptive and inferential statistics using non parametric test of Spearman correlation and Kruskal-Wallis. This is because of the ordinal scale in the questionnaire and the non-normal distribution of data as proven by the normality test. Based on the tests of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk, the null hypothesis was rejected with value of significance level less than 0.05. The results of descriptive and inferential statistics analyses are presented in the following section according to the objectives of this study.

## RESULTS

This section presents both the descriptive and inferential analyses. It begins with the demographic data of respondents followed by analysis and findings for the three listed research objectives. The following Table 1 shows results for the demographic data.

Table 1  
*Demographic Data*

	Demographic details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	7-12 years old	89	19.3
	13-15 years old	252	54.5
	16-17 years old	121	26.2
Sex	Male	190	41.1
	Female	272	58.9
Race	Malay	459	99.4
	Chinese	1	0.2
	Indian	2	0.4
Highest education level of family members	Primary school	20	4.3
	Form 3 (secondary school)	34	7.4



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	Form 5 (secondary school)	207	44.8
	Diploma/ Form 6 (secondary school)	117	25.3
	Bachelor/Masters Degree	84	18.2
State	Selangor	247	53.5
	Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur	172	37.2
	Federal Territory of Putrajaya	4	0.9
	Others	39	8.4

Based on the analysis, the largest group of respondents was from the age of 13 to 15 years old who were studying in lower secondary schools. More than half of the respondents are female students with the highest percentage from Malay community. Based on the results, most students came from the family that completed their study at Form 5 of secondary school. The second largest respondents were from family having members with Diploma or Form 6 education.

### *Students' Perceptions on the Contribution of Zakat in Improving Their Education*

The following Table 2 shows the findings of students' perceptions on the contribution of zakat in improving their education based on the input of education, process and the outcome of education. The interpretation of the mean for the 5-point Likert scale are based on (i) 1.00-1.80 = Very low, (ii) 1.81-2.60 = Low, (iii) 2.61-3.40 = Moderate, (iv) 3.41-4.20 = High, and (v) 4.21-5.00 = Very high (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004).

Table 2  
*Zakat Contribution for Input, Process and Output for Education*

Elements	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
Input	4.12	0.6218	High
Process	3.51	0.8505	High
Output	4.10	0.6915	High

As indicated in Table 2, the respondents agreed that zakat had contributed to the input of their education with mean of 4.12. Furthermore, they agreed that zakat has assisted in their education process with the mean of 3.51 whereas the output of education stated the mean of 4.10. Based on the results, the respondents strongly agreed that zakat financial support has provided them with input of education together with learning process and context necessary for the achievement of their education output. These results specifically indicated the importance of zakat in improving the educational equity of the urban poor students.



*Relationship between Input and Process of Education Contributed By Zakat with the Students' Education Output*

The analysis of Spearman Rho has been applied due to the non-normal distribution of data and the use of ordinal scale questionnaire in this research. From the analysis of Spearman Rho in Table 3, it is found that there is moderately strong significant correlation between input from zakat and the education output of the poor students ( $r = .598, p < 0.05$ ). Relatively, the increase in the education input by zakat could bring moderate improvement in the education output of the students. Therefore, the zakat contribution for the provision of students' input should be incorporated with other supporting factors such as personal factors or others to ensure maximum academic achievement of the students.

Table 3  
*Relationship Between Input from Zakat with the Students' Education Output*

			Input	Output
Spearman's rho	Input	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.598**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	462	462
	Output	Correlation coefficient	0.598**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	462	462

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Furthermore, based on the results of Table 4, a moderately strong significant correlation was found between education process provided by zakat and the education output of the poor students ( $r = 0.604, p < 0.05$ ). Relatively, the increase in the education process provided by zakat could bring moderate improvement in the education output of the students. Similar to the factor of education input, students have to consider other contextual factors such as school learning environment in support of the education process provided by zakat. The zakat management institution works to support the required good environment particularly after the school hours other than the teaching and learning context in the classroom settings.



Table 4  
*Relationship between process with the students' education output*

			Process	Output
Spearman's rho	Process	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.604**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	462	462
	Output	Correlation coefficient	0.604**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	462	462

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

***Differences in Students' Education Output from Zakat Contributions Based On Various Highest Education Backgrounds of Family Members***

The following Table 5 displays differences in students' education output from zakat contributions based on various highest education background of family members

Table 5  
*Differences in Students' Education Output from Zakat Contributions Based on Highest Education Background of Family Members*

	Highest level of education	N	Mean rank
Output	Primary school	20	175.28
	Form 3 (secondary school)	34	211.88
	Form 5 (secondary school)	207	230.93
	Diploma/ Form 6 (secondary school)	117	238.67
	Bachelor/Masters Degree	84	244.23
	Total		462

Table 5 shows the result of Kruskal-Wallis to test for any differences in students' education output from zakat contribution based on various highest education background of family members. The result indicates that there is no significant difference in the output of education of the poor students for five categories of family members' highest level of education background [ $\chi^2(4, N = 462) = 5.412, p < 0.05$  with a mean rank of 175.28 for education level of primary school, 211.88 for Form 3 (secondary school), 230.93 for Form 5 (secondary school), 238.67 for Diploma/Form 6 (secondary school), and 244.23 for education level of Bachelor/Masters Degree. Specifically, it shows that the families' level of education did not significantly influence education output of the poor students. These could probably due to the similar input and living environment provided by zakat institutions in the hostel. The differences in families' education background could bring minor impact to the students' overall academic achievement.



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## DISCUSSION

In terms of education input, zakat has significantly contributed various forms of assistance including educational resources and financial funds. For the poor and needy students, they directly received assistance from the zakat institutions on a continuous basis as long as their families are eligible for that. The efforts toward achieving equity by providing education input were in parallel with efforts done by many countries in the world (Castelli, Ragazzi, & Crescentini, 2012; Leon & Valdivia, 2015; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008). All of the education assistance comes with the aim to ensure that they will have opportunity to obtain the basic education, reducing the family's financial burden and provide opportunity for them to reach the highest possible level of education (Mohamad Uda Kasim, 2005). Basically, the poor and needy students will receive the school tuition fees, school uniforms, stationery and even the writing books for their learning purpose. Some of them are also offered to stay in hostels built by the zakat management (Selangor Zakat Board, 2013a). In addition, zakat management also provides several courses such as the one related to academic and motivation for the students to equip themselves with relevant knowledge (Selangor Zakat Board, 2014b).

In addition to the personal education assistance to the poor and needy students, zakat management has also contributed to providing a good learning environment for the students. This was done through establishing hostels for the poor students usually between the age of 9 to 17 years. The hostels are provided with classrooms for the students to study and to do their homework with the monitoring of a group of wardens acting as teachers and guardians for them. In addition, the hostels are also equipped with library for students to get access to additional knowledge through contemporary learning aids and tools (Selangor Zakat Board, 2013b). As agreed by Solis (2000) it is believed that a good learning process will also contribute to good education outcome in addition to the education resources.

Zakat fund has been identified to contribute a positive outcome to the education of poor students. This effort actually is consistent with the effort done by government in Malaysia to ensure that all children are provided with equal opportunity to access education (Ministry of Education, 2013). Basically, among the main education outcomes is the increase in the enrolment rates in national schools. This is important as poverty has been the main issue limiting the children's opportunity to join schools and further lessen the effort for them to increase their family economic status in future. In relation to the increase in enrolment rates, the rate of literacy and numeracy among children has also been increased as more children are able to learn the basic education in the national school through the zakat assistance. All these findings also supported previous literature on the outcome of educational equity (Khan, 2014; Sherman & Poirier, 2007; Wils, Naidoo, Patrinos & Nguyen, 2013).

Based on the objectives of this study, it is important for the education practitioners and all stakeholders to look into the relationship between education input and outcome so as to evaluate the effectiveness of input provided by zakat fund. Even though many other factors contribute to the students' education outcome, there is still certain significant proportion of zakat involvement that brings opportunity for them to get better education. In addition, it is also important to recognize the relationship of good learning process with the education outcome of the students. As for the zakat provision, the students live in a supportive hostel environment under the supervision of selected teachers and zakat management staff and are provided with proper facilities and learning needs. The academic resources besides any other electronic media are easily accessible in the library for student use. The students also learned to be independent, self-disciplined and develop other positive attitudes by living in a good social environment.



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Living in the good community provides opportunity for them to enhance various living skills that eventually motivate and prepare them for future excellence. The positive correlation between input and process with education outcome were highlighted in many studies before (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008; Sherman & Poirier, 2007).

This study also found no differences in the education output of the poor students based on differences in the highest level of education of their family members. In other words, their academic performance is not affected by the education background of their parents or siblings. As all students receive similar education input from zakat fund and live together in the same environment, they actually have equal opportunity and access to education with only minor differences probably due to personal factors. It highlighted the significant attribute of education input and process towards producing students with good academic achievement particularly for the low socio-economic group. This is in line with the summary done by Goodall et al. (2010) from previous studies that found weak correlation between parental indicators of income level with the education outcome of their children. Nevertheless, this finding was in contrast to several earlier studies that show positive connection between parental education background and the children's academic performance (Stafford, Lundstedt, & Lynn, 1984).

## IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, zakat managed to improve educational equity of the students from the urban poor families by providing them with necessary education input and supporting their learning environment. In other words, zakat has been used to increase opportunity for the poor and needy students to gain access to education and further enhanced their potential to be excellent similar to other children. This is in line with the original concept of educational equity that highlighted two essential dimensions of fairness and inclusion. Fairness guarantees that personal and social circumstances should not be the barrier to education while inclusion ensures a basic minimum standard of education for all such as the literacy skills of reading and writing.

Generally, educational equity is measured based on three components that are input of education, process of education and also the final output or outcome. Both the input and process of education contributed by zakat has certain influences on the final education outcomes of the poor students. The distributed zakat fund become the input for the poor and needy students in the form of scholarships, education sources such as tuition fees, books, uniforms, stationery and several more. In addition, zakat has also improved the education process by enhancing the quality of learning context through the provision of hostels, libraries and motivational surroundings. Then, the final focus of the educational equity is the final output and outcome of the education in the form of student success in gaining the necessary knowledge and skills. Specifically, zakat enables the poor students to gain minimum educational opportunity and reduces the absenteeism and dropout rate.

By implication, zakat as one of pillars of Islam plays a significant role in a Muslim majority country such as Malaysia to reduce poverty and to balance the economic welfare in society. The provision of zakat fund to the poor students has assisted government in implementing an education policy that seeks equity and fair access to education for all children. The educational resources grant opportunity for the poor urban students to improve their educational outcome regardless of differences in their family education background. Education for the needy should become the responsibility of various stakeholders including communities, societies and related non-governmental organizations in support of quality education. This is to ensure equality of opportunity in education is provided for all children so that they can optimize their potential to become productive human capital to the nation.



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