

DETERMINANTS OF MUSLIM WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS VENTURE INTO ISLAMIC FRANCHISED PRESCHOOL EDUCATION BUSINESS IN SHAH ALAM, SELANGOR, MALAYSIA: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Muslim women are dominating the Islamic preschool industry, and their involvement is critical for the development of Muslim children. It is important to answer the research question of what the determinants are for Muslim women entrepreneurs in the Islamic preschool education business, as it can shed light on the motivations and factors that contribute to the success of the industry. It is notable that the women interviewed in the study did not have qualifications in preschool education but were still determined to proceed with their ventures. Their passion and patience, love for children, and meeting their own requirements were among the determinants that led to their interest in the industry. The Islamic curriculum and the business model of the franchise system were also determinants that contributed to the effectiveness of their businesses. It is also important to note that the women in the study were not primarily motivated by profit or making money in the industry. Instead, they believed in the continuous rewards from Allah and the positive impact that their work can have on Muslim children. Overall, the findings of the study suggest that passion, love for children, and a desire to meet

personal and religious requirements are important determinants for Muslim women entrepreneurs in the Islamic preschool education business. These motivations, along with the effective franchise system and strong support from spouses, contribute to the success of the industry and its positive impact on Muslim children.

Keywords: Muslim women entrepreneurs, Islamic preschool, education business, Muslim.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the experience in the preschool education centers impacts their future both social and economic growth, the development of preschool education is comprehensive, integrated, and balanced with careful thought. According to Muammer Sarikaya and Eda Coşkun (2015), preschool education can be seen as an investment in a child's future. Because it is likely a different route for Muslim middle-class parents to ensure their children won't be left behind in accessing preschool education, private preschool education centers (inclusive of private preschool education centers under franchise or licensing) are equally important.

As a result, many private Islamic preschool education centers are spread across different residential areas, notably in newly created townships around Malaysia. Parental choices are viewed as one of the market indicators for preschool business, and preschool operators need to understand their customer's expectations of the service provided (Zainurin Dahari and Mohd Sabri Ya, 2011). To fulfil their expectations and aspirations, which in return, lead to the social reproduction of the Muslim middle-class, they now frequently do their utmost to ensure that their children obtain high-quality Islamic preschool education. Many Islamic private preschool educational centers are mushrooming and the operators of those preschools are dominated by Muslim women.

This study defines a franchise as an individual or a corporation that is the founder of a private preschool educational centre and has their own educational programme. The definition of franchising is an arrangement in 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, & Dean, 2010:413).

To develop their own brand as a private preschool educational centre and expand the business, the franchisor (the owner) grants a franchisee (who has the intention to be a private preschool 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 noticeable and well-known is the growing network of private Islamic preschool education facilities, including but not limited to Genius Aulad (GA), Children Islamic Center (CIC), and The Little Caliph. Private preschool education centres that are franchised or licenced have recently become increasingly commercialised, which has increased competition in the industry and made it more difficult to survive.

Muslim women are more likely than Muslim males to be entrepreneurs in Malaysia, as was already established, especially in the field of Islamic preschool education. While some business owners in the preschool education sector lack the necessary credentials, they are tenacious and willing to take chances in this dynamic sector. There will be a quality problem with the preschool education provided if this condition persists.

This study aims to examine the determinants of Muslim women entrepreneurs who venture into the Islamic preschool education business in Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan. Hence

this study addresses one research question: What are the determinants of Muslim women entrepreneurs who venture into the Islamic franchised preschool education business in Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Preference for Pre-school Education

Pre-schooling children education in a school is not only about teaching and learning sessions but is more about how they learn to socialize and interact with peers. School is considered the second agent of socialization, while family and home as the prime agent of socialization. Parents' participation and involvement in their children's education are crucial in their early learning development. A study by Zainurin and Mohd Sabri (2011) focused on factors that influence parents' choice of preschool education. The main objective of this study was to determine the important factors that influence the selection for the choice of preschool among parents in Malaysia.

The findings revealed that Malay parents considered the brand name "private-run", to be 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 generalized to this particular group. The study can be considered as one of the market indicators for preschool business that the preschool operators need to understand their customer's expectations of their service.

Che Noraini Hashim and Faisal Sundani (2014) conducted a case study on factors that drive parents to enroll their children in Islamic private schools. 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 enroll their children into the private Islamic school in this study could be categorized 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 achievements like the improvement in Quranic recital and memorization, Islamic personality and the content of the curriculums were perceived as excellent.

2.2 Involvement of Women in Small-Medium Enterprises

Roomi, Rehman and Henry (2018) look at the normative setting for women's business in Pakistan. The normative context and lived experiences of women entrepreneurs were investigated in regard to the impact of socio-cultural beliefs and attitudes on their entrepreneurial career choices using a qualitative approach. The results imply that a complex interaction of socio-cultural forces both drives and shapes women's entrepreneurial career decisions. Pakistani women business owners utilise their

agency to negotiate gender norms in the home and in society, and they employ religious justifications to support their ventures. This study opens up new research directions by providing insightful information about how informal (socio-cultural) institutional variables affect women's entrepreneurial engagement. The study adds to the body of knowledge on women's entrepreneurship by examining it from the standpoint of a Muslim developing nation.

Mahajar and Yunus (2012) explore the involvement of women in small-medium enterprises (SMEs) in Temerloh, Pahang. Whether interest, life impulse, having the necessary skills and environment influence any relationship with women's involvement in the business. Quantitative data were collected via a questionnaire distributed amongst 130 women entrepreneurs. The result shows that interest, life impulse, having necessary skills and environmental influence has a significant positive correlation with women's involvement in the business. It is interesting to note that hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicated that the four dimensions of independent variables, (interest, life impulse, having necessary skills and environment) influence a significant relationship and influence with women's involvement in business.

Another study was done by Hossain, Naser, Zaman and Nuseibeh (2009) on variables that affect the growth of women's entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. The study used quantitative and qualitative analyses of potential factors, including age, education, socio-cultural context, motivation, market knowledge, business idea, enterprise creation, advocacy and decision-making, enabling environment, and financing, that may have an impact on the growth of women entrepreneurs. The

results showed that women encounter obstacles in every phase of starting their own businesses. The key elements influencing women's decision to start their own businesses are the need for financial independence and decision-making, the availability of start-up funding, knowledge and skills, and parental responsibilities. However, the regression analysis showed that the primary variables influencing women's decisions to start their own enterprises include advocacy, involvement in women's organizations, decision-making (self-fulfillment), and expertise. However, the findings showed that religion had little impact on the growth of women entrepreneurs.

3. METHODOLOGY

A case study was used as the research design, and the qualitative method approach was applied through observation and in-depth interviews with three Muslim women entrepreneurs under study in Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan. The data was analyzed and narrated descriptively. In this study, three Islamic franchised preschools have been selected i.e., Genius Aulad (GA), Children Islamic Centre (CIC) and The Little Caliph in Shah Alam area. As this study is a purposive sampling, the finding of this study does not represent the whole population of Islamic franchised preschool education centres in Selangor Darul Ehsan.

4. DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

This section is divided into two parts: profile of the key informants, and narrative analysis.

4.1 Profile of the Key Informants

There are three key informants involved in this study and below are their profiles.

Key Informant 1:

Datin Syarifah (not her real name) of CIC is 41 years old. She graduated from the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) with a Bachelor of Economics and Management in 1996. A year later, she took up a Diploma in Education (Commerce & English) and she has been teaching at a secondary school in Shah Alam since 1997. She is married and she has four children - the youngest is 10 and the eldest is 16. Her husband is an entrepreneur. Besides this educational business, she also has her own spa, which caters for Muslim women.

Key Informant 2:

Afiqah (not her real name) of GA is 34 years old and hailed from Batu Pahat. She is married with three children (two boys and one girl). She obtained his first degree in Syariah, Fiqh and Usuludin (University of Malaya), Diploma of Education in Islamic Studies and Arabic. Her spouse is a system analyst. Previously, she was a lecturer at Kolej Professional MARA, Beranang until 2008. After that, she was self-employed as a training consultant. So, the total of her work experience is 10 years. He has been involved in this industry since 2011.

Key Informant 3:

Aira Alisyah (not her real name) of LC is 31 years old. She is married but without having any children yet. She obtained her first degree in Accounting, UiTM and currently she is about to

complete a master's in forensic accounting. Before involving in the preschool education field, she worked as an Account Executive for 5 years in Johor Baharu. She quit the job and thought of having her own business. She has been running this business for 3 years. Her husband was the one who encouraged her to open a preschool educational center as he is a lecturer in Preschool Education at one of the local private universities.

4.2 Narrative Analysis

In this section, the narrative analysis is derived from in-depth interviews with the key informants.

All the key informants had a turning point when they made changes from being salaried employees into an entrepreneur or running their own businesses. In detail, it is about what makes these Muslim women entrepreneurs change their careers and devote themselves full-time to this preschool education business. It is noticeable that Muslim women entrepreneurs have worked for other employers or been attached to some organizations for a few years before they decided to devote their time and passion to the field of preschool education.

The obvious determinants for them to venture into the preschool education business are passion and patience, as well as loving children. According to key informant 3:

“...I have a passion for the preschool educational industry and love kids so much. My husband is actually also in the same industry and teaches at one of the local universities. He trains teacher-students in the field of preschool education. Therefore, I think it is easy for us to discuss issues related to preschool 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”.

Key informant 3 has a passion for the preschool educational industry and loves working with children. Her husband shares her passion and is actively involved in the field as well. Having a partner who understands her work can be very beneficial, especially when it comes to discussing issues and brainstorming ideas. It's interesting that she has chosen a franchise that specializes in English-Islamic preschool education. It's important to have a clear understanding of her target market and what their needs are, and it seems she has done her research in this area. The preschool educational industry can be very challenging, as it involves working with young children who require a lot of patience and attention. It's important to have a strong passion for the work and a commitment to providing high-quality education to the children in her care.

Loving and caring about children as an important determinant is believed a 'pre-requisite' requirement in venturing into the educational business. According to key informant 1:

“...I used to have a spa business. Although the educational business does not generate as much money as other businesses, I guess. In fact, that (making a 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 ours.”

Key informant 2 emphasizes that she has a passion for teaching and loves working with children. While the educational business may not generate as much profit as other businesses, she prioritizes the welfare of the children and their education over financial gains. Running any business involves some level of risk, but it's important to carefully calculate and manage those risks to minimize their impact. She has taken the time to assess the potential risks associated with her educational business. Having a supportive partner can be a great asset when starting a new business, and her husband encourages her to pursue this venture. Additionally, having a friend as the founder of the franchise can provide valuable insight and support as she navigates the educational industry.

In the meantime, while key informant 2 was agreeable with the other two key informants, she added that she applied Islamic teachings as her determinant for her be in the educational business. She said:

“...As we know, when a Muslim dies, he/she leaves three things behind i.e., ‘sadaqah’ (alms), ‘ilm’ (knowledge), and pious children. I like education and would like to have continuous ‘jariah’ (deeds) and gain continuous rewards from Allah. There is a big potential in this business (dealing with small children) which many people do not see. The returns are good. I have been in business for 4 years and it is really good. Besides that, I like the educational system that is implemented in this franchise, which meets my requirement. I like children and have a passion for this industry. I am a person who likes to work alone as I know I can do it better”.

The statement highlights the strong connection between education and the Muslim faith, with the belief that the pursuit of knowledge and education is a continuous act of worship that can bring rewards and blessings from Allah. The entrepreneur also recognizes the potential of the Islamic preschool education industry and sees it as a means of leaving a positive impact and gaining continuous rewards. Key informant 2's preference for working alone indicates a self-reliant attitude and a strong belief in her abilities. Their passion for the industry, love for children, and alignment with the educational system implemented by the franchise are also important factors that have influenced her decision to pursue this business. Overall, the statement reflects the motivations and values of Muslim women entrepreneurs in the Islamic preschool education industry, highlighting their desire to leave a positive impact and gain continuous rewards while pursuing their passion and working towards their goals.

It seems that the three Muslim women entrepreneurs who were interviewed were motivated to enter the Islamic franchised preschool education business due to their passion for education, their love for children, and their desire to leave a positive impact on the world. They also mentioned that the franchised system met their personal requirements in terms of investment, Islamic curriculum, and business model. Additionally, the women received support from their spouses in terms of moral and financial assistance. It is important to note that these entrepreneurs were not solely driven by the desire for profit or financial gain.

5. CONCLUSION

Before venturing into the preschool education business, the Muslim women entrepreneurs under study worked with various organizations. Despite the fact that none of them had a certificate in early childhood teaching, they were all determined to continue. They have a head start in the preschool education market due to their extensive job experience and love for educating young children. Because of the good brand name, English medium, and strong Islamic foundation, they chose to start a business as private preschool educational entrepreneurs with a franchise style of the education business. In conclusion, the drivers of entering the franchised preschool education industry are not profit-driven but rather driven by passion and patience, a love for children, gaining tremendous support from their spouses and the effectiveness of the franchised system and the application of Islamic teaching that fulfils their specific needs. This study is significant to all stakeholders – Muslim parents and children, teachers and Muslim women entrepreneurs.

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