

Harnessing Islamic Philanthropy for Equitable Early Childhood Care: A Sustainable Development Perspective in Malaysia

Mohd Faizal P. Rameli¹, Suhaida Mohd Amin²

¹Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Melaka, Kampus Jasin, 77300 Merlimau, Melaka, Malaysia

²Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Melaka Kampus Bandaraya Melaka, 110 Off Jalan Hang Tuah, 75350 Melaka, Malaysia

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90200006>

Received: 24 June 2025; Accepted: 01 July 2025; Published: 26 July 2025

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the transformative potential of Islamic philanthropy in enhancing Malaysia's early childhood care (ECC) system, with a particular focus on addressing entrenched social inequalities and promoting sustainable development. While ECC is recognized as a foundational pillar for long-term societal well-being, significant disparities persist in access, affordability, and quality, especially in rural and low-income urban communities. Despite ongoing governmental efforts, current models fall short in equitably serving marginalized populations. This study identifies a critical research gap in the integration of culturally embedded, community-driven financing mechanisms, namely Zakat (obligatory almsgiving), Sadaqah (voluntary charity), and Waqf (endowment) into ECC delivery frameworks. Islamic philanthropy, rooted in distributive justice and communal responsibility, remains underutilized in formal childcare development discourse and policymaking. Using qualitative content analysis of policy documents, academic literature, and regional case studies, the study identifies key intervention themes: financial sustainability, accessibility and equity, quality enhancement, and stakeholder collaboration. It further examines how digital innovations and participatory governance models can enhance transparency, efficiency, and impact. The findings suggest that Islamic philanthropy can play a strategic role in achieving Malaysia's national development goals and aligning ECC services with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study contributes to emerging literature on faith-based financing and offers policy recommendations for embedding Islamic philanthropic instruments within national ECC systems to build a more inclusive and resilient society.

Keywords: Islamic philanthropy, early childhood care, sustainable development, Waqf and Zakat, social equity

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood care (ECC) is a cornerstone of sustainable human development, shaping children's cognitive, emotional, and social foundations during their most formative years. In Malaysia, equitable and high-quality childcare services are vital not only for child well-being but also for fostering gender equity, boosting economic productivity, and achieving social cohesion (UNICEF Malaysia, 2021; Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2021; World Bank, 2020). However, despite concerted national efforts and policy reforms, the Malaysian ECC landscape remains marked by persistent inequalities. These disparities are most pronounced in rural and low-income urban areas, where access to affordable and quality childcare is severely constrained (Mohd Nizam Naqiyuddin et al., 2022; Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021; Hadiat et al., 2025).

The uneven distribution of childcare facilities, under-resourced centres, and untrained caregivers not only reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty but also inhibits women's labour force participation, thereby perpetuating socio-economic exclusion (Syahirah Mahmud & Nazrul Hazizi Noordin, 2024; Kassim & Shamsudin, 2019; ILO, 2021). These structural challenges point to a broader systemic failure in ensuring that all Malaysian children, regardless of socio-economic background, have an equitable start in life (UNICEF Malaysia, 2021; Syed Abdullah & Jamal, 2022).

This study addresses the critical need for sustainable and community-driven solutions to bridge these ECC

gaps. In particular, it explores the transformative potential of Islamic philanthropy—comprising Zakat (obligatory almsgiving), Sadaqah (voluntary charity), and Waqf (endowment)—as a culturally grounded mechanism for funding and delivering equitable childcare services (Indarningsih et al., 2025; Qaradawi, 1999; Kassim & Shamsudin, 2019). These instruments have historically played a role in education, poverty alleviation, and healthcare in Muslim societies, yet their integration into early childhood frameworks remains underutilized and understudied (Alam Taifur, & Ab Rahman, 2025; Hasan et al., 2020).

Therefore, this paper investigates how Islamic philanthropic mechanisms can be systematically mobilized to enhance ECC delivery in Malaysia, particularly in underserved communities. By using qualitative content analysis of policy documents, academic literature, and best practices, this study identifies faith-based interventions that align with Malaysia's National Childcare Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The paper contributes to both Islamic social finance literature and early childhood development scholarship by reframing Islamic philanthropy as a strategic instrument for sustainable and inclusive ECC reform.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic Philanthropy: Concepts and Instruments

Islamic philanthropy is a faith-based system grounded in ethical principles such as social justice, compassion, and collective responsibility. It encompasses mechanisms such as Zakat, Sadaqah, and Waqf that aim to redistribute wealth and support societal welfare (Qaradawi, 1999; Indarningsih et al., 2025; Abdullah & Nor, 2018). Unlike conventional philanthropy, Islamic giving is deeply rooted in religious obligation and the ethos of the Ummah, making it uniquely positioned to foster community-based development.

Zakat functions as a redistributive economic tool that alleviates poverty and reduces social inequality, while institutionalized collection and distribution systems in Malaysia enable Zakat bodies to channel funds to critical sectors such as education and healthcare (Kassim & Shamsudin, 2019; Hadiat et al., 2025). Waqf, on the other hand, offers long-term sustainability through perpetual endowments, which can finance public goods such as childcare facilities, caregiver training, and nutrition programs (Syahirah Mahmud & Nazrul Hazizi Noordin, 2024; Alam Taifur, & Ab Rahman, 2025; Abdul Khir, et al., 2025).

Current Challenges in Malaysia's Childcare Sector

The childcare sector in Malaysia continues to face deep-rooted disparities in both access and quality. Families in rural areas and lower-income urban neighborhoods often lack access to affordable and nearby childcare centers, pushing many to rely on informal, unregulated alternatives (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021; Mohd Nizam Naqiyuddin et al., 2022). This situation exacerbates existing gender inequalities, as caregiving responsibilities often fall disproportionately on women, impacting their career progression (ILO, 2021; Yerkes et al., 2024).

Quality inconsistencies are also a major concern. Many centers operate without trained staff or proper facilities, leading to substandard learning environments (Kassim & Shamsudin, 2019; UNICEF Malaysia, 2021). Although the Malaysian National Policy for Early Childhood Care and Education advocates for standardization and inclusivity, its implementation remains patchy and uneven (Kong, 2022; Syahirah Mahmud & Nazrul Hazizi Noordin, 2024).

Islamic Philanthropy and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Islamic philanthropy aligns closely with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10). Through the principle of *Maslahah* (public interest), Islamic philanthropic actions prioritize societal benefit, offering a moral and ethical framework that complements Malaysia's development agenda (Ahmad et al., 2021; UNDP, 2021). For example, *Zakat* funds can be strategically used to subsidize early childhood education for low-income families, while *Waqf* can finance long-term investments in child-friendly infrastructure (Abdul Khir, et al., 2025; Yerkes et al., 2024).

Best Practices and Global Case Studies

Several case studies illustrate the successful application of Islamic philanthropy in childcare systems across Muslim-majority countries. In Indonesia, the Al-Aameen Children's Care Center leveraged *Zakat* and *Waqf* contributions to offer free or subsidized childcare services, integrating Islamic education with holistic developmental programs (Indarningsih et al., 2025). Similarly, Malaysia's own Ma'ahad Al-Quran initiative combines early childhood education with religious instruction, supported by community-driven philanthropic efforts (Hamzah et al., 2024).

Other examples include Türkiye's *Cocuklarımız* program, which empowers local women to provide accessible childcare, and the *Merry Hearts* initiative in the Philippines, which supports children with special needs through tailored Islamic charitable support. These examples highlight the capacity of Islamic philanthropy to respond to both educational and socioeconomic needs, enhancing community resilience and social cohesion (Nik Syuhailah et al., 2022; Islamic Relief Malaysia, 2019).

Digital Innovation and Stakeholder Collaboration

Emerging technologies and collaborative governance models are critical for enhancing the impact of Islamic philanthropic initiatives. Blockchain and digital donation platforms have improved transparency and donor trust, while social media campaigns have expanded community engagement (Muhammad Mansur et al., 2025; Abd Jalil et al., 2023). Partnerships among government agencies, NGOs, and Islamic organizations ensure more effective allocation of resources and alignment with national development goals (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2021; Bahbibibi et al., 2021).

The involvement of diverse stakeholders-particularly community members-in planning and implementing childcare initiatives ensures cultural relevance, accountability, and long-term sustainability (Mohd Nor et al., 2024). Faith-based organizations can serve as key facilitators of awareness, training, and service delivery, contributing to both immediate childcare needs and broader social transformation.

Based on the five sub-sections of the Literature Review, a thematic conceptual framework diagram would be most effective. It can show how Islamic Philanthropy serves as a core mechanism to address challenges in Early Childhood Care (ECC) and align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through several channels as shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 illustrates the role of Islamic philanthropy (*Zakat*, *Sadaqah*, and *Waqf*) in addressing challenges in early childhood care through financial sustainability, institutional alignment, equity, quality enhancement, and digital innovation.

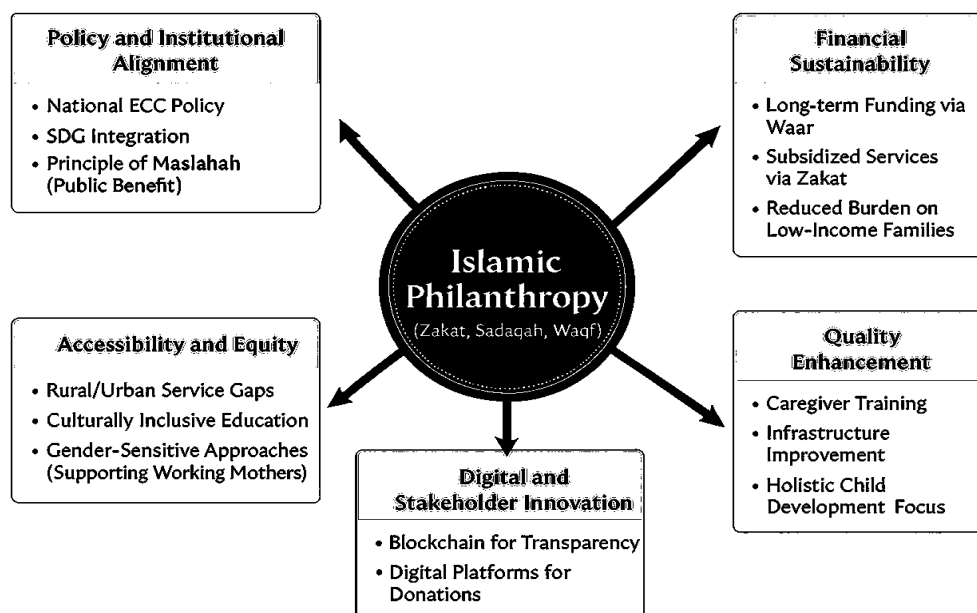


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework – Leveraging Islamic Philanthropy to Enhance Childcare Services in Malaysia

Despite Malaysia's growing interest in ECC reform and the expanding literature on Islamic philanthropy, few empirical or theoretical studies have addressed the intersection of these two domains. Existing works tend to examine Islamic giving in the context of poverty alleviation, education, or healthcare, but are rarely related to structured ECC delivery (Syed Abdullah & Jamal, 2022; Indarningsih et al., 2025). Moreover, Islamic philanthropic tools are often viewed as supplementary to state welfare, rather than as primary mechanisms for systemic reform.

This presents a significant research gap: the absence of a strategic framework that integrates Islamic philanthropic instruments into Malaysia's ECC policy landscape. While faith-based NGOs occasionally support early education initiatives, there is limited scholarly inquiry into how Zakat and Waqf can be institutionalized to support long-term childcare solutions that are financially sustainable, socially inclusive, and culturally relevant.

This study addresses this lacuna by positioning Islamic philanthropy as a strategic, scalable, and culturally embedded financing mechanism for equitable ECC in Malaysia. It explores how these instruments can be structured to deliver both operational funding and capital investment in childcare services. By aligning philanthropic giving with SDG targets—such as quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), and reduced inequality (SDG 10)—the study reframes Islamic philanthropy not merely as an act of charity, but as a driver of sustainable social transformation (UNDP, 2021; Ahmad et al., 2021; Juhro et al., 2025).

Furthermore, by drawing upon successful regional case studies from Indonesia, Türkiye, and the Philippines, this study illustrates how Islamic philanthropic models can be adapted to address Malaysia's unique demographic and policy context (Nik Syuhailah et al., 2022; Islamic Relief Malaysia, 2019). The conceptual framework developed herein offers a blueprint for multi-stakeholder collaboration, integrating Islamic social finance into national childcare strategies and community-level delivery systems.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design using content analysis to explore the integration of Islamic philanthropy into early childhood care (ECC) services in Malaysia. Given the cross-disciplinary nature of the inquiry—spanning Islamic financial instruments, social development, and public policy—qualitative content analysis provides a suitable method to systematically synthesize and interpret complex textual data (Krippendorff, 2018; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Data Sources and Sampling

The study relies on secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, government policy documents, NGO reports, and case studies published between 2015 and 2024. These sources were selected based on their relevance to three thematic pillars: (1) Islamic philanthropy and social finance tools such as Zakat, Sadaqah, and Waqf; (2) early childhood education and care practices in Malaysia; and (3) sustainable development and equity frameworks.

While the reliance on secondary data is a limitation, it is methodologically justified for several reasons. First, this exploratory study aims to map conceptual linkages between underexplored domains, namely Islamic philanthropic financing and ECC. Second, the topic intersects multiple policy areas, requiring a broader contextual synthesis before empirical testing. Lastly, high-quality secondary sources—such as reports by UNICEF, Islamic Relief Malaysia, and national agencies—offer rich, triangulated data reflecting stakeholder perspectives and operational models already in use (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2021; Islamic Relief Malaysia, 2019).

Inclusion criteria prioritized documents that addressed context-sensitive practices involving faith-based institutions, social equity outcomes, or culturally rooted ECC models. The diversity of sources also enhances the credibility of the analysis by capturing varied viewpoints and institutional experiences.

Analytical Strategy and Justification

The analysis followed a hybrid inductive-deductive coding approach (Elo et al., 2014). First, documents were

reviewed to extract recurring themes such as financial sustainability, accessibility, service quality, institutional alignment, and innovation. These categories were informed both by the literature and by Islamic ethical principles such as *Maslahah* (public interest) and *Maqasid al-Shariah* (objectives of Islamic law), which frame philanthropy as a moral and structural obligation in Muslim societies (Indarningsih et al., 2025; Qaradawi, 1999).

To contextualize the findings, the study drew upon the principles of *Maslahah* (public interest) and *Maqasid al-Shariah* (objectives of Islamic law), which frame philanthropy as a moral obligation toward communal well-being. These principles were employed as analytical lenses to evaluate how Islamic philanthropic mechanisms align with the goals of Malaysia's National Early Childhood Care and Education Framework and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Indarningsih et al., 2025; UNDP, 2021; Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2021).

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of findings, triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying data from multiple sources, including case studies from Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, and the Philippines. However, as a qualitative study based on secondary data, the findings are interpretive and may not capture the full scope of localized implementation challenges. Future research could benefit from empirical validation using interviews or surveys with childcare providers, philanthropic actors, and policy stakeholders.

Segments of text relating to policy frameworks, philanthropic interventions, digital innovations, and community engagement were highlighted and grouped under corresponding thematic nodes. Attention was also given to the socio-cultural relevance and operational challenges of applying Islamic philanthropy in Malaysia's diverse context.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE EMPIRICAL DIRECTIONS

The absence of primary data collection, such as interviews or focus group discussions, is acknowledged as a limitation, especially given the context-specific nature of religious philanthropy and childcare provision. However, this exclusion is intentional at this stage to establish a foundational framework through a conceptual and policy-oriented lens. Such groundwork is essential before operationalizing empirical tools in diverse field settings, which may vary in cultural sensitivities, religious governance, and service capacity.

Future research should build on this framework through mixed-methods designs, incorporating stakeholder interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, and surveys with philanthropic institutions, caregivers, and parents. Empirical validation would enhance understanding of practical implementation challenges, community receptiveness, and institutional constraints, especially in underrepresented regions.

In summary, this study offers a theoretically grounded, contextually informed, and policy-relevant analysis of how Islamic philanthropy can support equitable ECC in Malaysia. By synthesizing secondary data from diverse, credible sources, it lays the groundwork for subsequent empirical investigation and model testing in real-world settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine how Islamic philanthropy—through Zakat, Sadaqah, and Waqf—can be mobilized to enhance early childhood care (ECC) services in Malaysia. The analysis involved coding data from over 40 secondary sources, including journal articles, policy frameworks, NGO reports, and case studies. Thematic categories were derived inductively from patterns that emerged across these documents, then aligned deductively with the conceptual pillars of Islamic social finance and sustainable childcare development. These themes reflect not only descriptive trends but also interpretive insights into the mechanisms, challenges, and enabling factors that shape the intersection of Islamic philanthropy and ECC.

Four major themes were identified: (1) Financial Sustainability through Islamic Philanthropy, (2) Promoting Accessibility and Social Equity, (3) Enhancing Quality of Childcare Services, and (4) Innovation and

Stakeholder Collaboration. These findings are elaborated below with analytical depth to demonstrate how they were grounded in the data.

This study, through qualitative content analysis, identifies four major themes in the use of Islamic philanthropy to enhance childcare services in Malaysia. These themes underscore how Islamic philanthropic mechanisms, grounded in principles like *Zakat*, *Sadaqah*, and *Waqf*, can contribute significantly to reducing social inequalities and promoting sustainable development goals (Ahmad et al., 2021; Kassim & Shamsudin, 2019; UNDP, 2021).

Theme 1: Financial Sustainability through Islamic Philanthropy

A consistent theme emerging from the data is the role of Islamic philanthropy in ensuring long-term financial sustainability for ECC services. Sources analyzing *Waqf* models in Indonesia, Turkey, and Malaysia showed that endowment-based funding provides stable revenue streams for maintaining childcare facilities, staff salaries, and training programs (Syahirah Mahmud & Nazrul Hazizi Noordin, 2024; Alam Taifur, & Ab Rahman, 2025; Indarningsih et al., 2025). The case of the Al-Aameen Children's Care Center in Indonesia, for example, revealed how *Zakat* and *Waqf* contributions can reduce reliance on volatile public funding (Indarningsih et al., 2025).

The analytical insight here lies in identifying *financial autonomy* as a critical leverage point. Documents revealed that *Waqf* allows for asset growth while reinvesting returns into childcare infrastructure—a model aligned with *Maqasid al-Shariah* principles of community protection and public benefit (Qaradawi, 1999; Shaikh et al., 2017). The Ma'ahad Al-Quran initiative in Malaysia provides another example, showing how philanthropic trust funds can subsidize ECC costs for underprivileged families (Hamzah et al., 2024). The consistency of such data points across multiple sources justified their grouping under this financial sustainability theme.

Theme 2: Promoting Accessibility and Social Equity

Another major pattern in the reviewed data was the targeted use of *Zakat* funds to bridge ECC access gaps in underserved areas. Sources showed that low-income, rural, and minority communities are often bypassed by mainstream childcare development initiatives, creating intergenerational disadvantages (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021; Mohd Nizam Naqiyuddin et al., 2022; Hadiat et al., 2025). Reports from Islamic Relief Malaysia (2019) and UNDP (2021) emphasized that *Zakat* and *Sadaqah* schemes could strategically fill these gaps by subsidizing costs or directly financing the establishment of new centres.

Here, the deeper analytical finding is the redistributive potential of Islamic philanthropy. Textual segments coded under this theme emphasized not just economic disparity, but also cultural and gendered dimensions of accessibility. For instance, caregiving burdens falling disproportionately on women emerged as a consistent sub-theme (ILO, 2021; Yerkes et al., 2024), reinforcing the case for philanthropy-backed ECC models that reduce time poverty for mothers and enable female labour participation.

The Türkiye “Cocuklarımız” program and the Merry Hearts initiative in the Philippines—both documented in regional reports—serve as cross-contextual validations of this principle (Nik Syuhailah et al., 2022). These findings also underscore the alignment between *Zakat* distribution and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality), reaffirming the strategic relevance of Islamic social finance in social policy (Ahmad et al., 2021; Zubir Azhar et al., 2023).

Theme 3: Enhancing Quality of Childcare Services

While access is crucial, content analysis also highlighted quality disparities in ECC delivery, especially in terms of caregiver qualifications, physical infrastructure, and curriculum relevance (UNICEF Malaysia, 2021; Kassim & Shamsudin, 2019). Many reviewed documents criticized the commodification of private childcare services, which prioritize profit margins over developmental outcomes (Kong, 2022; Syahirah Mahmud & Nazrul Hazizi Noordin, 2024).

Philanthropic funding emerged as a countermeasure to these trends. Sources detailed how Waqf could be dedicated to upskilling caregivers, subsidizing Islamic pedagogical materials, and enhancing learning environments (Mohd Nizam Naqiyuddin et al., 2022; Bahbibí et al., 2021). The analysis here shows that Islamic philanthropy doesn't merely supplement service quantity—it actively improves service quality by addressing root causes of underperformance, such as staff burnout and lack of professional development.

Moreover, several sources advocated for culturally relevant curricula embedded with Islamic values, which enhance family trust in formal childcare systems (Kong, 2022; Al-Mansour, 2022). This theme demonstrates that quality enhancement through philanthropy is both a material and symbolic intervention, making ECC more appealing, legitimate, and accessible to Muslim communities.

Theme 4: Innovation and Stakeholder Collaboration

The final theme identifies how digital innovation and multi-actor collaboration amplify the impact of Islamic philanthropy in ECC. The rise of blockchain-enabled platforms, Islamic crowdfunding, and mobile donation apps has enhanced transparency and donor engagement (Muhammad Mansur et al., 2025; Abd Jalil et al., 2023). The reviewed literature shows how these technologies address longstanding trust issues in philanthropic distribution, an insight grounded in multiple NGO case reports and academic evaluations.

Furthermore, collaborative models involving NGOs, zakat institutions, government agencies, and private donors were frequently cited as enablers of successful ECC initiatives (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2021; Mohd Nor et al., 2024). Coding revealed a common pattern: philanthropic ECC projects were more sustainable when designed and governed through *participatory structures*, especially those involving community members in planning and oversight.

This finding aligns with global best practices in ECC governance, where cross-sector partnerships are shown to boost accountability and contextual relevance (UNDP, 2021; Bahbibí et al., 2021). In this light, Islamic philanthropy is not merely a funding tool but a platform for governance innovation in Malaysia's childcare landscape. Table 1 shows a summary of key results on Islamic Philanthropy and Childcare Enhancement

Table 1: Summary of Key Results on Islamic Philanthropy and Childcare Enhancement

Theme	Key Analytical Findings
Financial Sustainability	Zakat and Waqf provide long-term funding, reduce dependency on state subsidies, and support infrastructure and human capital investment in ECC.
Promoting Accessibility and Social Equity	Islamic philanthropy strategically bridges service gaps in low-income and rural areas, supports women's workforce participation, and aligns with social justice values.
Enhancing Quality of Childcare Services	Philanthropy funds support teacher training, Islamic pedagogy, and infrastructure improvement—addressing structural causes of service inequality.
Innovation and Stakeholder Collaboration	Digital tools improve transparency; multi-stakeholder partnerships ensure local relevance, increase scale, and enhance participatory governance in ECC services.

The thematic analysis illustrates that Islamic philanthropy holds considerable potential as a transformative mechanism in ECC reform, not merely as a charity vehicle but as a systemic enabler. Its alignment with Islamic values and SDG targets allows it to address multidimensional childcare challenges in Malaysia. The consistency of these findings across diverse sources strengthens the validity of the themes, while the identified gaps (e.g., quality variation, gender burden, sustainability) demonstrate where Islamic finance can play a catalytic role.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate how Islamic philanthropy, through instruments such as Zakat, Sadaqah, and Waqf, can be systematically mobilized to enhance the accessibility, quality, and sustainability of early childhood care (ECC) services in Malaysia. In addressing this objective, the research contributes to both the

academic and policy discourse by situating Islamic philanthropy not merely as a supplementary charity mechanism but as a strategic framework capable of addressing structural disparities in ECC provision. The study also aligns these religious instruments with Malaysia's national development agenda and global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those targeting poverty reduction, gender equality, and educational equity.

One of the key contributions of this paper lies in its conceptual integration of Islamic social finance with context-sensitive childcare strategies. Through a qualitative content analysis of policy reports, empirical case studies, and scholarly literature, the study offers a thematic framework that highlights four central areas where Islamic philanthropy can exert systemic impact: financial sustainability, accessibility and equity, service quality, and stakeholder collaboration. These findings provide a fresh lens for policymakers and development practitioners seeking culturally grounded and financially viable models of ECC reform, particularly in socioeconomically diverse and Muslim-majority settings.

At a theoretical level, the study bridges two traditionally separate literatures—Islamic philanthropy and early childhood development—by showing how faith-based financial instruments can support holistic child welfare. Practically, it identifies best practices and scalable models from Southeast Asia and beyond, offering guidance for zakat institutions, NGOs, and government bodies interested in applying Islamic philanthropic tools to ECC delivery. The study also offers a conceptual roadmap for integrating digital innovations and participatory governance models to enhance transparency and effectiveness in philanthropic childcare interventions.

However, the study is not without limitations. Its exclusive reliance on secondary data restricts direct engagement with on-the-ground actors and may overlook contextual nuances in the lived experiences of caregivers, parents, or philanthropic administrators. While the use of rich and triangulated textual sources provides strong foundational insight, empirical validation through fieldwork, such as interviews, ethnographic observation, or stakeholder surveys, is needed to test and refine the proposed framework. Additionally, the religious and socio-cultural specificities that shape philanthropic engagement may vary across regions, which limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the Malaysian context.

Future research should therefore prioritize empirical studies that explore how Islamic philanthropic interventions are implemented and received at the community level. Case studies of childcare centers funded by Zakat or Waqf, participatory action research with religious institutions, and impact assessments of philanthropic ECC programs can offer deeper insight into operational challenges and success factors. Moreover, comparative studies across Muslim-majority countries could reveal how different governance structures, religious interpretations, and funding mechanisms influence the effectiveness of faith-based childcare support systems. Special attention should also be given to gender-sensitive approaches and how philanthropic ECC programs can actively empower women as both caregivers and economic participants.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Islamic philanthropy offers a culturally resonant, ethically grounded, and financially sustainable approach to advancing equitable early childhood care in Malaysia. By aligning spiritual values with development imperatives, Islamic social finance can contribute meaningfully to Malaysia's vision for inclusive, resilient, and future-ready childcare services, while also offering a replicable model for other countries with similar socio-religious dynamics.

REFERENCES

1. Abdul Khir, M. F., Rahim, H., Fakhrunnas, F., & Mohd Zulkarnaini, S. (2025). Islamic social finance and SDG 2: Measuring the social impact of Islamic Religious and Malay Tradition Council in Perak State. *Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law*, 13(1), 134-146. <https://doi.org/10.33102/mjsl.vol13no1.1016>
2. Alam Taifur, M., & Ab Rahman, A. (2025). The Potential For Human Capital Development (HCD) Through Waqf Fund. *Online Journal of Islamic Management and Finance (OJIMF)*, 5(1), 96–113. Retrieved from <https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/OJIMF/article/view/60808>
3. Al-Mansour, M. A. H. (2022). Culturally Responsive Education in Early Childhood. *International Journal of Childhood and Women's Studies*, 2(3), 57-77. <https://doi.org/10.21608/ijcws.2022.313163>

4. Bahbibbi, R. Sopia, M. Y., & Jamilah, O. (2021). Local community involvement in Malaysian early childhood care and education centers. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 35(1), 143-157. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-05-2020-0259>
5. Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2021). Household income and basic amenities survey. Department of Statistics Malaysia. https://data.gov.my/data-catalogue/hies_state
6. Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107–115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x>
7. Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, 4(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633>
8. Hadiat, H., Janwari, Y., Hasanuddin, M., & Athoillah, M. A. (2025). Islamic Economic Solutions to Poverty and Inequality in Indonesia: Bridging Faith, Practice, Inflation, and the Balance of the Financial System. *Asian Journal of Islamic Studies and Da'wah*, 3(1), 68-90. <https://doi.org/10.58578/ajisd.v3i1.4541>
9. Hamzah, N. H., Ali, N. A., Kamri, N. A., Mohd Yusoff, M. Y., & Abdul Rahman, N. N. (2024). Empowering tahfiz education in Malaysia: Insights into the external factors driving parental preferences. *Asia Pacific Journal of Educators and Education*, 39(2), 5–37. <https://doi.org/10.21315/apjee2024.39.2.2>
10. Indarningsih, N., Siregar, S., Hasbi, H., & Jasman, Z. (2025). Encouraging Sustainable Development through ZIS: The Role of Islamic Philanthropy in Reducing Poverty and Enhancing Socioeconomic Welfare. *International Journal of Zakat*, 10(1), 54-79. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37706/ijaz.v10i1.598>
11. Islamic Relief Malaysia. (2019). Empowering communities through sustainable philanthropy initiatives. Islamic Relief Malaysia. <https://islamic-relief.org.my/>
12. Juhro, S.M., Syarifuddin, F., Sakti, A. (2025). Inclusive Welfare on the Role of Islamic Social-Public Finance and Monetary Economics. Singapore: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-0051-9_4
13. Kong, K. (2022). Early Childhood Education in Malaysia. In: Symaco, L.P., Hayden, M. (eds) *International Handbook on Education in South East Asia*. Springer International Handbooks of Education. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8136-3_13-1
14. Krippendorff, K. (2018). Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
15. Ministry of Health Malaysia (2021). CHILD HEALTH 2021-2030: A National Framework to Reduce The Under-5 Mortality and Support Child Growth & Development. Putrajaya: Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia. https://hq.moh.gov.my/bpkk/images/3.Penerbitan/2.Orang Awam/ 8.Kesihatan Kanak Kanak/2.PDF/19_child_health_2021-2030_-_a_national_framework_to_reduce_the_under-5_mortality_and_support_child_growth_development.pdf
16. Mohd Nizam Naqiyuddin, A. S., Nur Farah Ain, C. S., & Nur Atiqah Liyana, M. R. (2022). The Importance of Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education for Children Under 4-Year Old. *Journal of Education and Literacy Studies (JELS)*, 1(1), 13-20. <https://doi.org/10.37698/jels.v1i1.104>
17. Mohd Nor, A. R., P. Rameli, M. F., Akbar, A. A., Mohamad Rohana, N. A., & Johari, M. K. (2024). Enhancing Career Performance: Key Factors in Career Adaptability Among Aşnāf Faqīr. *Intellectual Discourse*, 32(2), 533–550. <https://doi.org/10.31436/id.v32i2.2083>
18. Muhammad Ikhlas, R., Abdul Muneem, Noor Naemah, A. R., & Abdul Karim, A. (2022). The Digitalized Zakat Management System in Malaysia and the Way Forward. *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum Dan Pranata Sosial*, 17 (1), 242-272. <http://dx.doi.org/10.19105/al-ihkam.v17i1.5365>
19. Muhammad Mansur, Addiarrahman, Dailani Ismail, Abdullah Rasyidi Al Ibrahim, & Muhammad Deni Putra (2025). Islamic Philanthropy in the Digital Era: The Role of Media and Culture in Spreading the Teachings of Generosity. *Asian Journal of Media and Culture*, 1(1), 74-92. <http://dx.doi.org/10.63919/ajmc.v1i1.20>
20. Nik Syuhailah, N. H., Zuraimi A. A., & Nurul Ashykin A. A. (2022). Do Childcare Centres Understand Parents? Looking From the Perspective of Parent Behavioural Intention. *Malaysian Journal of Consumer and Family Economics (MAJCAFE)*, 29(December), 448-482. <https://majcafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/PAPER18-MAJCAFE-VOL29a.pdf>
21. Qaradawi, Y. (1999). *Fiqh al-Zakat: A comparative study of Zakat regulations and philosophy in light*

- of Qur'an and Sunnah. (M. Kahf, Trans). Saudi Arabia: Scientific Publishing Centre.
22. Shaikh, S.A., Ismail, A.G., & Mohd Shafiai, M.H. (2017). Application of waqf for social and development finance. ISRA International Journal of Islamic Finance, 9(1), 5-14. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJIF-07-2017-002>
 23. Syahirah Mahmud & Nazrul Hazizi Noordin (2024). Constructive Collaboration in Ensuring Sustainability of Waqf Fund in Malaysia: A Case Study of myWakaf Initiative. Journal of Islamic Social Finance, Vol. 2 No. 2 ,1-17. <https://doi.org/10.31436/jislamicsocfin.v2i2>
 24. Syed Abdullah, S. F., & Jamal, I. H. (2022). Conceptual Analysis on Islamic Philanthropy: Towards A Contemporary Approach. Al-Qanatir: International Journal of Islamic Studies, 26(2), 143–152. Retrieved from <https://al-qanatir.com/aq/article/view/472>
 25. UNDP (2021). 2020 Human Development Report in Malaysia. United Nations Development Programme <https://www.undp.org/malaysia/news/launch-2020-human-development-report-malaysia>
 26. UNICEF Malaysia. (2021). Key Findings Living on the Edge Longitudinal study on post-COVID-19 impact assessment among low-income households in Kuala Lumpur. Putrajaya: United Nations Children's Fund, Malaysia. [https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/media/4626/file/Living %20on%20the%20Edge%20\(key%20findings\)\(ENG\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/media/4626/file/Living%20on%20the%20Edge%20(key%20findings)(ENG).pdf)
 27. World Bank. (2020). Malaysia Economic Monitor: Toward Inclusive Growth. World Bank Group. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/malaysia/publication/world-bank-malaysia-economic-monitor-december-2020-sowing-the-seeds>
 28. Yerkes, M.A., Besamusca, J., van der Zwan R., Andre', S., Remery. C., and Peeters, I. (2024) Gender inequality in work location, childcare and work-life balance: Phase-specific differences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. PLoS ONE 19(6): e0302633. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0302633>
 29. Zubir Azhar, Muhammad Kamil Kader Mydin, & Anwar Allah Pitchay (2023). Zakat Distribution Priorities in Malaysia: An Analytic Hierarchy Process Analysis. Asian Journal of Business and Accounting. 16(1), 69-87. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22452/ajba.vol16no1.3>