

The role of grandparents in grandchildren totality development

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Generally, parents who go to work would prefer their children to be with their grandparents due to blood relationship, trust, and experience. Such parenting service could become more essential when they could not find responsible housemaids or child minders. However, grandparents' personal characteristics and family demographic influence grandchildren nutrition attitudes, emotional well-being, lifestyles, learning activities, and social skills. Furthermore, grandparents do shape the grandchildren's behavior and educational performance in school. Based on the literature reviewed, academic research about grand-parenting influence on grandchildren development in Malaysia seems to be very limited; hence, this study aimed to give an insight into grandparents' contribution to the grandchildren's development in the country by applying the qualitative method approach to analyze data collected from twenty participants from two Malaysia states, namely, Ipoh and Wilayah Persekutuan. The analysis result indicated that grandparents do shape the grandchildren's educational performance in schools. In fact, how the grand-parenting role is played has had an imperative impact on the lifestyle of grandchildren academically, socially, and emotionally. In this study, the grandparents' influence on grandchildren is obvious in the following aspects; religious thought and morality, communication and social interaction, culture and superstition, academic and skill development.

Keywords: Grandparents; grandchildren; education; religion and superstition.

Introduction

Education is presumed to be a life transforming exercise which helps to complete individual personality growth. Education preserves the basic structure of society by conserving all worthwhile basic values in institutions, by transmitting them to the next generation, and by renewing culture afresh whenever degeneration, stagnation, or loss of values occur. Indeed, education aimed at changing all aspects of the human being.

According to Ashraf (1995), education should not be confused with instruction and asserts, because instruction merely trains an individual or a group to achieve efficient performance in some tasks. Our educational system today is producing experts in the

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field of knowledge, but failed to produce good personality that is balanced in both aspects simply because, man has replaced the meaning of instruction for education. Whitehead (1861) posits that the educational system should aim at producing men who possess both culture and expert knowledge in some special directions. Further, changes in society over the last two decades decrease the proportion of cultural interaction and family relationship with young children where both parents are in the paid workforce (Policy Brief, 2010).

These have strongly led to the failure of the world educational system to produce men who possess culture, expert knowledge, and moral values. Also, these have led to changes in roles and responsibilities of many grandparents. The changes shape the total life of children and demands superior intelligence and profound experiences of the grandparents (Strassmann & Garrard 2011). Past studies on the same subject are numerous, but each of the studies just dealt with narrow aspects of children's development and education. However, less of these studies have examined the role of grandparents in the grandchildren's educational development comprehensively. In a different way, the present study aimed to: a) investigate the role played by grandparents in influencing the grandchildren's development in aspects of religious thought and morality, communication and social interaction, culture and superstition, academic and skill development, b) find out how the grandparents monitor the grandchildren's study activities in the house.

Accordingly, religion is one of the major resources used to generate meaning in life. An individual's religion involves not only a set of beliefs, but also an involvement in a community of like-minded others (Fletcher, 2004). It is an avenue that connects human being with superior beings. Religiosity is always accompanied with a set of beliefs and values. For centuries, societies have looked to religious institutions as a primary source of values, morals, and ethics (Lannaccone, 1995). The life of the grandparents turns to golden human resource when they renounced the world moderately, when they hope to meet Allah, their creator, or God, with serenity of mind, when they are more religious and polite than before. During this period, they serve as a core role model to balance the growth of grandchildren's personality as emphasized above. Sheridan et al. (2011) argue that grandchildren can be protected from behaviour problems in three ways. First, grandparents may prevent obstacles to healthy development by providing their grandchildren with safe shelter and basic child care when parents are incapacitated from substance misuse. Second, they may promote their grandchildren's positive social-emotional development through supportive relationships. Third, they may promote social competence through enjoyable leisure activities with healthy adults and non-delinquent peers.

In addition, communication and social interaction are twin concepts that portray how human being relates to one another. Grandparents' experiences with different types of people in life have enabled them to master how human beings behave and know how to relate with different kind of people. The grandparents transmitted this quality to their grandchildren by telling stories and old tales (Dowshen, 2009). Nevertheless, Teek et al. (2009) assert that communication would be relatively difficult to achieve as a result of tight schedules or lack of technology use by extended family members. In the area of social interaction, grandparents could take their grandchildren for religious or cultural outing to enhance their social interaction and communication. The grandparents with their wealth of experience in life could serve as an effective communication avenue for left-behind grandchildren (Jia & Tian 2010).

Some grandparents use superstition to scare children away from filthy behaviour, equally it is used to encourage good behaviour. Grandparents provide cultural heritage for their grandchildren through stories and discussion. They also take their grandchildren to cultural activities indicating that the grandparents serve as the preserved cultural heritage resource for generations (Dawson 2009; Vyse, 2000). Grandparents make a substantial contribution to the academic development of their grandchildren. They do not only monitor their homework, but also influenced the literacy and language development of the grandchildren (Jessel et al. 2011; Ferguson & Ready 2011). Niuma and Murray (2013) emphasized on interactive learning approach since it provides learners with learning opportunities by evoking their learning needs and helping them to adjust themselves when necessary to better meet learning requirements. Interactive and participation learning process lead learners to cooperative skills, sharing learning ideas, and modeling. Equally, grandparents also transfer some skills to their grandchildren through observable practicing. Some of the skills are knitting, woodworking, or cooking (Dowshen 2009; Jingxiong et al. 2007). Therefore, the role of grandparents in the development of their grandchildren is very enormous, and it is presumed to be effective due to the fact that they care and nurture their grandchildren with interest, love and affection.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore the roles played by grandparents in educating their grandchildren. This form of research technique is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, judgments, and behaviours of a particular population (Moten, Abdul Rashid 1998; Patton 1990; Marshal 7 Rossman 1995) Twenty grandparents were selected from three cities in Malaysia. The cities are Ipoh, Tanjung Malim, and Wilayah Persekutuan. Ipoh and Tanjung Malim cities were situated in Perak state while Wilayah Persekutuan is known as Malaysia's business capital city. Voluntarily, the respondents were selected and participated in this study to indicate their practices on how they engaged in nurturing their grandchildren in areas of religious, morality, communication, socialization, superstition, academic, and skill development. The grandparents were selected based on the belief that the participants were the right people to be interviewed. They have practical and valuable experiences towards children and grandchildren nurturing. Besides, they enjoy morality status and high-quality communication skills of their own native language. Due to the above reasons, I felt that those grandparents have unique information about grandchildren's development in various aspects.

The interview technique was used in this study to collect data, whereby, the selected grandparents were interviewed. The conversations from the interviews was recorded using video and MP3 recorders which were later listened to repeatedly, transcribed, and read as well, to obtain an overall understanding of the respondents' view. In interview section, I also applied an open-ended protocol to ensure successful interview process. Each interview began with a broad, open-ended question using the prepared and written protocol interview question and when participants are needed to be guided to the main focus of the research or clarify some points, I interrupted the participants' conversation for clarification. For an illustration, when one of the respondents stated that, "Since the age of 3 to 4 years my grandchildren have begun to follow their uncle to attend the holy Quran studies in the mosque". I ask her; who is the uncle. She replied;

“my husband, their grandfather”.(Muhammed Yusuf, 2010;David Lodge, cited in Gorman & Clayton 2005, p.5).

Result

The themes in the interviews were extracted and analyzed according to the research questions and issues identified from literatures as well as on the field revelations, thereby inculcating the participants' view. As a result, from the interview conducted, the researcher come up with some themes under the following headings; 1) Religious thought and morality, 2) Communication and social interaction, 3) Culture and superstition, 4) Academic and skill development.

Religious thought and morality

There are two themes generated under this heading and they are as follows: First, teaching religious at an early stage, from the interview conducted, a majority of the respondents explained as grandparents, they inculcate the religious teaching on their grandchildren during their tender age. Actually, sending grandchildren to worshipping places like mosques is an opportunity for them to be socially matured. In this, one of the respondents asserts that:

“Since the age of 3 to 4 years my grandchildren have begun to follow my husband, their grandfather, to the mosque. The grandfather took them together to attend the holy Quran studies in the mosque. In addition, the grandfather also brought them to hear religious talk and told them to pray in congregation. The grandfather always told them to say “Subhanallah” if things fall” [Subhanallah, is an Islamic term to be saying when surprising things or events occur].

Teaching religious at early stage of children's life is something worthwhile. This is confirmed by the study carried out by Janet al. (2008), that religious duty is not only restricted to praying and going to mosques or churches, but is a way of life affecting family relationships, decision-making, life choices and parenting styles. Another theme that was derived under this heading is virtuous. Second, Virtuous acts were encouraged: virtue is one of the qualities that portray man to be developed and educated. It is discovered from discussion with the respondents that, grandparents instil and encourage the virtuous deeds in their grandchildren. This is affirmed from the statement of one of the respondents:

“My grandchildren were taught to speak politely, and equally taught to respect guests such as greeting them. Also, I trained them not to interrupt when the guests were talking and they follow the regulations accordingly.”

Virtue is an umbrella word for all good moral behaviour and antonym to all bad ones. This suggests that grandchildren are taught all behaviours that are considered to be worthwhile by their grandparents during their tender age. In order to overcome growing global youth moral deteriorations, Chang (2013, 2010) draws the attention of educators to

inculcate good characters to the youth upbringing worldwide. These should include noble values, harmonious life, moral and spiritual, justice and righteousness thinking. A study by, Sheridan et al. (2011) emphasized that grandchildren and parents' descriptions of grandparents' support suggest how grandchildren may be protected from unenthusiastic behaviours. Virtue is something abstract, it could not be known unless it is exhibited. The avenue at which virtues can be exhibited is through communication, modeling, and social interaction, which will lead us to the second heading.

Communication and social interaction

The discussion of the interview enabled the researcher to coin two themes from this aspect; one of which is: Cultural enlightenment and Oratory training. Grandparents perceive it as a point of duty to give cultural enlightenment and oratory training to their grandchildren. These are done through various ways, according to them. One of the interviewees pronounces that:

I use to teach my grandchildren about the importance of culture in the life, I teach my grandchildren about respect forelders, culture, and polite values” while another asserts that:“I often practice a good means of communication that my grandchildren can emulate.

The grandparents understand the importance of their cultural heritage and their native language. Hence, they find ways to pass it on to the next generation, these are done through cultural enlightenment and oratory training. This is supported by the excerpt from Policy Brief (2010) that, many grandparents wish to pass on the culture and the language of their home town and villages to their grandchildren. This is showing that the grandparents are the preservers of the cultural and language heritage, they pass them on the next generation to achieve one of the functions of education. Equally the second theme derived from this aspect is presented next: multi-lingua encouragement. Children are encouraged to be multi-lingua but priority should be given to the native language, as an illustration, some grandparents want their grandchildren to understand and speak many languages, but stress the fact that their native language should not be turned down and neglected. In this respect, one of respondents explained that:

“My grandchildren rarely use English, but they often use the Malay language because I want my grandchildren to make the Malay language as their identity. I also teach my grandchildren to be able to master the English language”.

In a bid to promote their native language, grandparents laid more emphasis on speaking their native language. They speak the pure language to their grandchildren. This could be through discussion, stories and old tales, which always interest the grandchildren. Accordingly, many grandchildren always enjoy listening to stories and tales, thereby, persuading their grandparents to share stories of their families. Sometimes they even make a drawing of their family tree as it was highlighted by the grandparents (Dowshen 2009; Mills, 1999). From the tales and stories narrated by the grandparents, some superstitious beliefs were always brought out by the grandparents or deduced by the grandchildren. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand the role of grandparents in promoting superstitions in the next subtitle.

Culture and superstition

The issue of culture has been explained from the above discussion, the only theme that is left under this heading is the issue of superstition. This deals with the disposition of individual family to superstition. Some grandparents believe that superstitious belief can mislead the grandchildren therefore, it should be discouraged. On this, one respondent asserts that:

I do not expose my grandchildren to superstition. I always remind them to come home before dusk. They were not allowed to go out of the house at night. They were only allowed to attend night tuition classes with full protection.

This respondent believes that, it is dangerous for grandchildren's development to believe in superstition, because it may prevent them from exploring some things that might be beneficial to them. While some other grandparents maintained that superstitious belief should be instilled, simply because it may serve as a deterrent to some unhealthy behaviours, the respondent that is supporting this view claimed thus:

Yes, they always sing in the kitchen. I did not want them to adopt the act. So, I told them that if they sing in the kitchen, they will get married with older husbands.

We may observe here that, the decision on grandchildren superstition exposure depends on the religious background of grandparents. Most of the grandparents from Hindu and Buddhist family agree that, superstitious belief should be instilled while most of the grandparents from an Islamic background, maintained that, superstitious belief should be discouraged. One of the Muslim high educated grandparents argues that;

We didn't talk to our grandchildren about superstition; don't sit outside at night because of ghost and if you sing in the kitchen, you will get married to an older husband... No, no. [Deep laugh] because they are smarter than us, they are more advanced than us. The superstition is going to affect their behaviour. Singing in a kitchen is an expression of happiness, isn't it? [The grandfather asked].

Academic and skill development

All the grandparents want their grandchildren to be educated, and obtained some basic domestic skills. Therefore, under this heading there are two themes derived from the interview: Encouragement for Studying. All the grandparents always motivate and encourage their grandchildren to be educated because it is the demand of this present age. They usually provide necessary support to ease the academic tussle of their grandchildren. On this, one of the respondent state thus:

At an early age, my grandchildren have been taught to recognize ABC and I always advise my grandchildren to study hard in order to be successful in their life, thus, my grandchildren are very interested in study.

Domestic Skills Training, the majority of the grandparents, usually called their grandchildren at a tender age to engage in domestic activities that involve skills, such as cooking and kneading. One of the interviewees declares this:

I always told my grandchildren to learn to cook. They also frequently ask for help when they do not know how to do a specific job, let say cooking. I make sure that they do the job with care.

These domestic skills were taught, in order to ensure that they pass on the skills to the next generation. This statement was supported by Dowshen (2009) and Lee (2010) that many grandparents have some usual practices or special skills like cooking, knitting or woodworking that they will love to pass on to their grandchildren. Niuma and Murray (2013) indicated that interactive learning approach provides students with learning opportunities, various skills, and modeling.

Discussion and conclusion

From the interviews and themes generated, the researcher comes up with the following important findings: a) That, all the grandparents are willing to take good care of their grandchildren, they wish to extend love and affection to them and want to share their experiences with their grandchildren, b) That if the grandparents are given the opportunity to take total care of their grandchildren, they will make a positive impact on the total personality development of their grandchildren, c) It is also discerned from the discussion that the way to preserve cultural heritage is to allow grandparents to bring up their grandchildren, d) Some languages and dialects are going into extinction, while some are being diluted with foreign languages. From the interview it shows that with the help of grandparents the original native language could be maintained till eternity.

This study is essential in the sense that, it allows us to know the importance and relevance of our grandparents to the development of dignified society, that they are not an object of humiliation that should be discarded in the old folk house. Hence, if the grandparents could help to develop a quality personality for grandchildren through thought and good deeds, we should give them the chance to serve, subsequently; the society will have good people that are specialist in their field that will contribute to the human development. However, directly and indirectly many grandparents have dramatically contributed to the development of human society positively (Fletcher, 2004).

Recognizing the grandparents' contribution is not merely important, it can be used to facilitate the achievement absolute educational goals and intergenerational relationships, especially in areas like informal childcare provision (Mitchell 2008). Also, it is vital in the sense that, it gives the grandparents the second opportunity of children rearing which will imbue these children with historical facts and imbibe their cultural heritage. This will enhance cultural preservation from one generation to another. It will also improve the moral standard of children efficiencies because many grandparents nurture their grandchildren with tenderness and interest. They served their grandchildren as a role model, mentor, and hero. As a result, such grandchildren could develop a balanced personality that undergo a comprehensive educational thought under their parents, grandparents, and school supervision. Doing this enables the grandchildren to have access to their cultural heritage and beneficial historical background. Equally it serves as a relief for parents from combining both child rearing and occupation, and

serves as a training ground for parents themselves on how to take care of their children professionally.

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