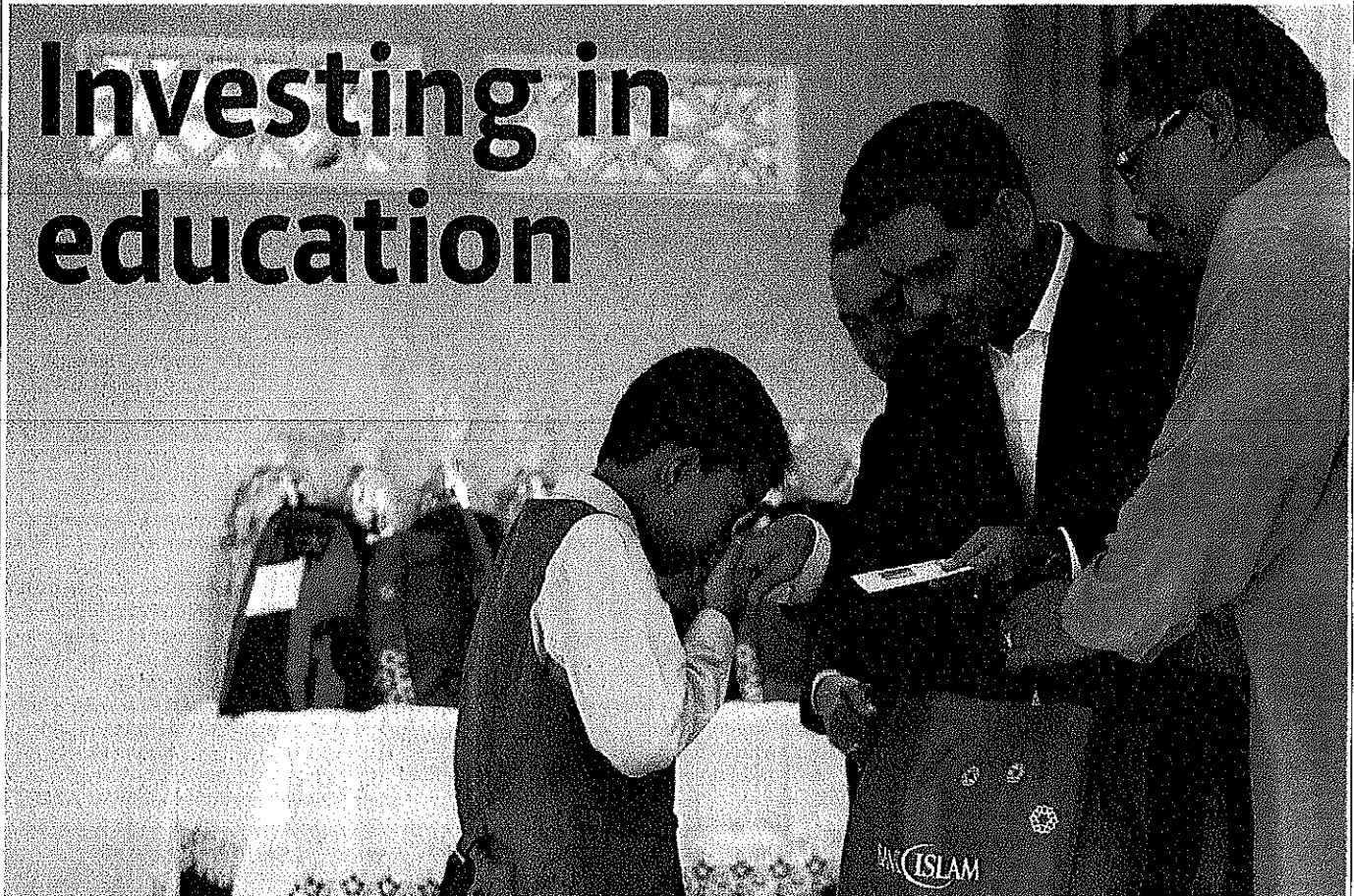


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Investing in education

Datuk Sri Zukri Samat, Bank Islam Managing Director presenting contributions to one of the students of SK Kebangsaan Pasir Puteh (L), Pasir Puteh, Kelantan.

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No investment has such a lasting effect as the education for children.

There is no disputing that education is a crucial element that allows a society to thrive, bringing growth and prosperity to the country and its people. As the Malaysia National Education Blueprint has put it, there is no better predictor of a nation's future than what is currently happening in its classrooms, and there is no better investment than to invest in education for children.

While overall education system has made tremendous progress over the years with significant investments and real commitment by the government, the Blueprint has also rightly pointed out that there is still room for improvement. Chief among them are ensuring education access and delivering the best possible education to every child regardless of geography, gender or socio-economic background, while endowing them with quality knowledge and skills to better prepare them for today's and tomorrow's global needs.

These efforts happen to be a reflection of the caring nature of Bank Islam's Corporate Responsibility (CR) educational initiatives that value, above all else, social justice for every layer of society.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Poverty should not be a hindrance to getting good education, while good education is an effective means against poverty.

Malaysia's economy has developed significantly over the years, but lest we forget, a significant number of the population, especially in the rural areas, are still living in poverty. And despite the progress made in delivering education across the country, for most children with this background, this usually means a noticeable lack of quality educational curriculum or facility compared to what children from urban areas with well-to-do economic backgrounds enjoy on a regular basis. For most of these poor children, proper education represents the only way out of poverty, and most of the time they are not getting it.

It is for this very reason Bank Islam

has chosen to associate itself with the PINTAR Foundation in adopting 18 schools that are considered poor across the country. The foundation's stated aim to make a meaningful difference to children from impoverished families and undeserved communities and level the playing field between urban and rural students is aligned with the bank's own belief in providing for the community.

"Regardless of whether they are poor

or live far away from the city centre, all children deserve to receive the same level of education," points out Bank Islam's Managing Director, Datuk Sri Zukri Samat. "It will reflect poorly on our education structure and the overall society if segregation exists in the system. The bank's CR initiatives for education place emphasis on students from poor economic backgrounds and support the national agenda in providing access for quality education to those in the rural areas, thereby ensuring equal education opportunities."

Under the bank's CR initiatives, students of the 18 selected schools receive specially-designed education programmes and activities. These have enabled

students to gain extra knowledge and skills, allowing them to close the knowledge gap with students in urban areas.

"Unlike students in urban areas who have the means to attend extra classes or tuition that can help them sharpen their knowledge or enhance specific skills, poor students in rural areas usually are not able to receive such extra attention, either because their families are too poor to pay for extra classes or the schools themselves do not have

the resources," says Datuk Sri Zukri.

"It is up to us to provide the necessary means and tools to enable these children to upgrade themselves in terms of skills and knowledge, in addition to helping the adopted schools provide the necessary facilities for the betterment of their students."

ERADICATING ILLITERACY

Reading is a basic tool in the living of a good life.

One of the key points of the Blueprint is the need for students to be biligualy proficient, with Bahasa Malaysia as the national language and English as the international language of communication. Bank Islam believes that to achieve this, the children themselves have to learn to love reading.

Datuk Sri Zukri says that teaching the youngsters to read and showing to them that reading is a pleasurable activity is the surest way for them to learn language effectively. "At its simplest, this means finding them the books that they enjoy, giving them access to those books and letting them read," he elaborates.

Zero-to-Hero was one such programme that has proved successful in inculcating the love of reading among children. It has also allowed students afflicted by dyslexia, ADHD and other learning disabilities to share the love of reading. "There is nothing better than seeing these 'special' children receive the life-long gift of reading, and giving them the control to shape their own future," says Datuk Sri Zukri.

"Our English Communications workshops have also been instrumental in raising the level of English proficiency among the poor students in rural areas, who otherwise would not have the means or access to such a programme," he continues. Efforts to raise the educational standard of the poor students in rural areas were encapsulated by the I See You and Latih Tubi UPSR clinics, which have helped students achieve their desired results in the national exams.

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"There is nothing better than seeing these 'special' children receive the life-long gift of reading, and giving them the control to shape their own future."

Datuk Sri Zukri Samat,
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Helping the young live their dreams

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EDUCATING THE MIND AND HEART

The objective of education is to prepare children to educate themselves throughout their lives, replacing empty minds with an open one.

The National Education Blueprint places importance on the need to inculcate strong ethics and spirituality in every child to prepare them for the inevitable challenges of their adult lives. In this respect, Bank Islam's collaboration with the army personnel of the 25th Battalion of the Royal Malay Regiment has resulted in two motivational camps (Kem Jati Diri) being organised at the army encampment in Bentong, Pahang.

With the army being the driving force, the two-day programme saw students being whipped into shape as they went through typical army drills and exercises, all in the name of building their characters and turning them into useful individuals. Upon completion of the programme, participants were expected to hone their leadership skills and utilise the motivational knowledge imparted in line with the Blueprint's intention to develop values-driven Malaysians.

INVOLVEMENT OF ALL

When you know better, you do better.

The bank's CR educational initiatives seek participation from the parents as well. Educating a child cannot be the sole responsibility of the school. Studies have shown that a child tends to perform better when parents make an effort to be fully involved in their child's educational activities.

"Our Jaya Waris initiative was a motivational programme for parents that offered parent insights into their children's behaviour and how children can be encouraged to take up learning as a means to develop themselves," Datuk Sri Zukri explains.

ECO EDUCATION

In failing to educate the children, we fail the environment.

Bank Islam constantly strives to cultivate environmental awareness among children, as can be seen by a number of eco-themed educational initiatives. Our Planet, We Decide! workshop introduced students to some of the world's environmental concerns and methods to tackle them. The Food Workshop Garden programme provided participants with interesting aspects of plants

and their role in the food supply chain.

"Providing innovative and interesting programmes with a focus on the environment is our way of educating students on the importance of environmental preservation," Datuk Sri Zukri says. "The programmes provide an important lesson on how making adjustments to our everyday lives can help us sustain the planet for future generation."

Bank Islam's experience as the country's pioneering Islamic bank is a prime example of the importance of investing in education. "Being the first in the industry, we are already the source of reference for syariah-based banking," Datuk Sri Zukri explains. "Therefore, it is important for Bank Islam to have a sustainable source of talents that possess specific knowledge and skills essential for the progression of the Islamic finance and banking industry."

"Our CR educational initiatives could be that sustaining factor, where we have high hope that the children we help can go on to contribute to the society and help Bank Islam and, by extension, the country to develop."

"We believe that the act of helping the children and youths in achieving their dreams will help the Bank as well. Tomorrow's Bank Islam bankers could be today's schoolchildren."



Showing support for 'Our Planet, We Decide' programme (SK Seri Aman, Pasir Puteh, Kelantan).

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Graduating from Kem Jati Diri (25 Batalion Rejimen Askar Melayu DiRaja, Kem Bentong, Bentong, Pahang).



Love to read, key to English proficiency — English Communication workshop at SK Kuala Kupang, Kedah.



Showing the fruits of their labour — Food Garden Creative workshop at SK Kuala Kupang, Kedah.

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Entertaining the Children of the Orang Asli Community at Kg Leryar, Ringlet, Cameron Highlands.