



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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ISSN: 2222-6990

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i16/11217> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i16/11217

**Received:** 10 July 2021, **Revised:** 02 August 2021, **Accepted:** 23 August 2021

**Published Online:** 21 September 2021

**In-Text Citation:** (Norsalim et al., 2021)

**To Cite this Article:** Norsalim, P. M. N., Akbarruddin, M. N. A., Basir, N. S. A., Muda, W. H. N. W., & Jeinie, M. H. (2021). Challenges in Establishing Vocational Skills in Tahfiz Curriculum at Malaysian Tahfiz Centre. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(16), 53–62.

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**Special Issue Title: Contemporary Issues in Tourism and Hospitality industry, 2021, Pg. 53 - 62**

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## Challenges in Establishing Vocational Skills in Tahfiz Curriculum at Malaysian Tahfiz Centre

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### Abstract

The development of Qur'anic Tahfiz education centres has grown rapidly in the country due to the public demand and awareness of the importance of reciting the Quran. The government has welcomed the existence of a vocational Syariah Tahfizes (Tahfiz) in Malaysia for this Tahfiz institution moving towards the Industrial Revolution 4.0. This study explores the obstacles in establishing vocational skills in the Tahfiz curriculum among the Tahfiz centres in Malaysia. This study uses the qualitative approach. Interview sessions with study participants were conducted by bringing the researcher down to the field for data collection. The study's findings show that the biggest challenges in establishing vocational skills in Tahfiz educational centres are mainly due to financial problems and lack of coordination for standard curriculum. The results of the interviews show that three other challenges were encountered, including the lack of skilled teachers, students' attitude and community perception. At the same time, the most dominant challenge facing culinary courses is financial problems. In addition, curriculum alignment is also seen as a difficult task for the Tahfiz administrators to reach a systematic standard. Studies on the challenges of establishing the skills in vocational will help transform the Tahfiz educational institutions in Malaysia in the future.

**Keywords:** Tahfiz Center, Vocational Skill, Curriculum, Malaysia

### Introduction

The Central Government has formally mobilised the foundation of development in the field of Tahfiz starting in 1966 (Nordin, 2015). The initial establishment began with the establishment of a Study Class on memorising the Quran and Qiraat at the National Mosque. The class was formed on the basis of instructions from the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, Y.T.M Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj. Recent developments show that al-Quran memorisation schools or Tahfiz institutions in Malaysia are beginning to receive special attention from the

community and developing rapidly (Yahaya, 2018). Thus, these institutions need to focus on the main principles of creating Huffazes which, if combined with other disciplines, will not lose the knowledge of the Qur'an embedded in their souls. To ensure that the institutions are not left behind, a form of approach is done by incorporating technical and vocational skill programmes into the system of Tahfiz education to ensure the Huffazes or graduates that are born from said institutions are comparable to the graduates from conventional institutions (Abd Hamid, 2021).

In line with the era of globalisation and in meeting the needs of industries that require skilled manpower, TVET education has been transformed to enhance its appeal as the primary educational pathway of choice. The TVET route is now wide open among Tahfiz students who are given the skills to equip themselves to meet the needs of the industry. Accordingly, several skill centres such as community colleges have taken the initiative to design and implement various TVET programs for Tahfiz Centres and Madrasahs. A total of 5 (five) Tahfiz Centres and Madrasahs around Kota Tinggi registered under the Johor Islamic Religious Office have agreed to work with Kota Tinggi Community College (KKKT) in implementing this TVET program (Tawyer, 2016). TVET programs are designed and implemented in the form of short course implementation to suit the time and circumstances of the Tahfiz students involved.

Researchers found that Tahfiz administration advisors face several challenges and obstacles in developing vocational skills in Tahfiz Vocational Centres. This case study on vocational Tahfiz is conducted to explore the biggest challenges in establishing vocational skills in the Tahfiz curriculum for Tahfiz centres in Malaysia. However, most developing Tahfiz centres in Malaysia are moving in their own direction based on the emergence of private Tahfiz schools and public Tahfiz schools. As a result, every state and Tahfiz centre is too free to use any curriculum and teaching methods from any country according to the teachers' individual taste and educational background. Besides, our society needs to see the birth of Huffaz professionals who master various disciplines of knowledge can be realised if the government and the ummah are sensitive to changes in their environment. In order to achieve these aspirations and goals, the needs of competent educators who in carrying out the teaching and learning process in vocational Tahfiz institutions must be met.

### **Tahfiz Center Vokasional di Malaysia**

A vocational Tahfiz centre is a Tahfiz educational institution recognised to run the Huffaz skills programme such as entrepreneurship, management, tourism, commercial agriculture, etc. This institution was created to develop the National Occupational Skills Standard (NOSS), especially those related to vocational skills among Huffaz (Jalani, 2015). In 2017, the Government planned to introduce Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to the local Tahfiz students. Based on the speech of then prime minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, the proposal to introduce TVET as an additional skill to their abilities and memorise the Quran, the students will also possess skills in the field of TVET. The programme has received a joint venture by the state religious authorities with the Department of Skills Development, Ministry of Human Resources (Abd Hamid et al., 2021). This is due to the collaboration between Tahfiz centres and public TVET institutions. In a study conducted by Hasniza Tawyer (2016), Kota Tinggi Community College (KKKT), one of the public TVET institutions, has designed and implemented various TVET programs Tahfiz Centres and Madrasahs around Kota Tinggi, Johor. The collaboration carried out hopes that the skills provided and applied in daily life and beyond can help them generate their income.

There is also the implementation of Lifelong Islamic Education PISH programmes, which is a continuation of Lifelong Learning (PSH) carried out based on the recommendations of the former YAB Deputy Prime Minister. It considers one of its objectives to provide skills and entrepreneurship to targeted groups such as Tahfiz students, boarding school students, and Maahad students (Nornazlina et al., 2016). As a result of implementing various programmes conducted by the government, some individuals have taken the opportunity by establishing Vocational Maahad Tahfiz, such as Vocational Tahfiz center (MTVAB). It offers students skills courses such as culinary, sewing, automotive, construction, electrical, and healthcare (Noorhidayah et al., 2021).

In contrast to the usual Tahfiz centre, the Vocational Tahfiz Centre gives balance to several other components with varying rates other than the memorisation of the Quran such as academic studies (offered by mainstream schools), yellow book studies (Turath) in Arabic in the huts, science stream, specific skills (such as vocational skills) and others (Noorhisham Nawi et al. 2014). Careful attention should be given to the class Huffaz who did not follow the mainstream educational process but possess high ability in the field of Tahfiz al-Quran. There are proposals to expand the field of Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to Tahfiz students.

### **Vocational Skill**

In the world of employment and professionals, TVET systems include semi-skilled, skilled and expert technicians or industry supervisors. In addition to preparing graduates for the industrial world, TVET plays an important role in facilitating education and training for individuals with continuous learning (lifelong learning). Clement et al (2018) state that the TVET system can be defined as the most relevant learning education programme for the industry by focusing on equipping graduates with appropriate skills according to the needs of the industry. The education system in Malaysia is divided into several types, namely technical and vocational education, academic or general education and religious education. Technical and vocational fields emphasise knowledge and skills as well as provide good employment opportunities to young adults. Recognising the importance of knowledge and skills in the workforce in Malaysia, the education system is seen to meet the commercial and industry needs and produce a workforce that is capable and innovative, productive and skilled (Rahim et al., 2011; Zahari et al., 2010).

In line with current demands, the Department of Technical Education has revised the vocational stream curriculum. The review considers the industry's current needs to help students achieve sufficient skills to enable PTV stream graduates to select suitable fields of employment in the engineering, trade, agriculture and service sectors (Tawyer, 2016). The formation of skilled human capital and equal opportunities for employment and income generation is often a priority for governments in developing countries aspiring to economic growth, investment in education – especially in TVET (Yamada & Otchia, 2020). VETs have great potential to contribute to the fight against the coronavirus pandemic despite the huge crisis in education for the world. Especially in crises that use their production and adaptation capabilities, a robust VET system can support the community's needs. Intensive discussions are concentrated around the world as VET continues to be the educational pathway (Ozer & Perc, 2020).

In a particular field of employment, vocational education is the education that provides individuals with unique skills. This education is important to create skilled or semi-skilled professional manpower to generate income and economic growth in a country. To make them

more competitive globally, this will include upgrading TVET employees to improve their skills and leveraging innovation and investment in new technologies, training and specialised skills (Salleh & Sulaiman, 2020). In producing a skilled workforce and enhancing the competitiveness of the social workforce, TVET plays an important role. The workforce needed by industry and countries to revive and strengthen the global economy can be created. This is the solution to achieving national goals. To effectively apply such important knowledge and skills into the real world of work, this critical approach integrates job education and training for TVET students (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2020).

### **Methodology**

The use of qualitative methods was applied in this study. This qualitative research design uses a case study approach because it can support a more in-depth and more detailed investigation of the process for each case, and it is necessary to answer the questions of how and why. This research has chosen purposive sampling to study participants with certain characteristics, who hold an administrative position in vocational Tahfiz Maahad, and (snowball sampling) identified subjects with certain attributes/characteristics during the study.

The selected participants held the position of administrative advisor, and the number of participants was two. The study population focused on two Vocational Tahfiz centres recommended by the Association of Madrasah Tahfiz Al-Quran Malaysia (PERMATA), namely Aman Bistari Vocational Tahfiz Centre (MTVAB) in Puchong and the ADDIN Vocational Tahfiz Centre in Perak. An interview protocol and digital audio recorder (voice recorder) from the voice memo application were used as the study instrument in this qualitative study. In this study, the data collection was based on semi-structured interviews. The participants were interviewed based on the list of questions provided, and additional questions were asked based on the answers given according to the data requirements. This selection is made because the researcher does not want the study to stray and run away from the real objective.

### **Result and Analysis**

The analysis approach that was used in this research is the content analysis method. Identify the meanings, concepts and themes generated in analysing the content of the study. This method requires a coding method made by the researcher in relation to the objectives of the study. Based on the raw data that has been obtained, it is found that the respondents of the study consist of those who are experienced in establishing vocational Tahfiz Maahads. Study participants are experienced in managing Tahfiz centres for more than ten years, meeting the requirements for the researcher to conduct research on respondents who have experience in managing Tahfiz centres and experience in the industry.

Data were taken through raw data and classified according to a code generated by the researcher. Interview sessions were conducted on two respondents consisting of administrators of Aman Bistari Vocational Mahaad Tahfiz and ADDIN Vocational Tahfiz centre. There are two classifications of themes that have been discussed, namely the challenges faced and how to deal with them. The results of the study found that the challenges faced are divided into five, namely the challenges in terms of finance, teachers' skills, student attitudes, curriculum and public perception.

### Financial Challenges

Both participants responded to the financial challenges faced throughout the implementation of vocational majors in Tahfiz education through transcripts of interviews. The following is an excerpt from R1 followed by R2 stating that the problems often encountered are financial:

*“The biggest challenge is that our finances to perform this skills-based task.... These skill systems are financial problems.... and it is Allah who brings the income to us and for today, there are tall financial challenges...”*

*“Here we need a thousand ringgit per student per head for all costs of eating, drinking, living and studying here, but the fee is only 500 ringgit which many parents do not pay...”*

*He added that;*

*“Its implementation is a high cost such as buying kitchen and other utensils for us to implement this vocational course and also the sewing machines that we bought...”*

*“That time the government did not make any provision so a piece of advice from Almarhum which was quite useful – make it as a challenge for Ustaz (myself); at that time Ustaz was asking for allocation from the Kelantan state government .....”*

*“even when Ustaz (suffered a) shortage of nearly 25 thousand dollars per month but even Ustaz did not know where the money came from even until today, in this interview, this morning, Ustaz is lacking as much as seven thousand seven in the payment of salaries of Ustaz's workers today...”*

*{R1 - T1}*

*“That's the story if we ask wherever it is funds are always the problem because to make this program, we need funds...”*

*“Many people used to say that Tahfiz management took the money but I don't know where the money goes...”*

*{R2– T1}*

Based on the interviews quoted from the study participants, R1 emphasises many financial problems often encountered during the implementation of vocational majors in Tahfiz centres. This is because Tahfiz centres are conducted privately under a small organisation. R1, on the other hand, gives less emphasis on financial problems. This is because the Tahfiz centre coordinated by R2 is under one foundation and has a large organisational system under the state government.

### Challenges of Skilled Instructors

The results of this study also found that the problem of managing skilled teaching staff is also one of the challenges faced in the implementation of vocational majors. There was one opinion for each participant. The following are excerpts from both participants on the problem of skilled teaching staff:

*“it's a lot of things including financials, skilled teachers – because these skilled teachers are expensive, it's something that has value equivalent to gold...”*

*{R1 - T1}*

*“There are credit hours, the teachers have fixed time so if we start late at 10 o'clock, then it interrupts the time, so it's a bit difficult in the beginning...”*

*{R2 - T1}*

Excerpts from the interviews regarding the teaching staff answered by the study participants showed two different aspects, R1 faced the problem of the teaching staff in terms of payment costs while R2 faced difficulties in determining the time for the teaching staff to train students.

The answers given by the participants were different because R1 had its own teaching staff and R2 collaborated with other skills institutes.

### Student Attitude Challenges

The attitude of students is also one of the causes of problems faced in coordinating vocational Tahfiz Maahad. This is because students' attitudes can affect the success and effectiveness of an educational program conducted. R1 emphasises this problem because the issue of students' attitude has a lot of impact on his Tahfiz centres. The following are excerpts from the researcher's interviews with the participants:

*"That's what become of the results let's take animation for an example when students don't even know how to draw, why should we tell them to pursue animation..."*

*"There are many ways here including caning, beating, advice, motivate all we take all the methods in approach developing disciplinary (actions) towards students' laziness we use a variety of ways..."*

*"Which ones fail the skill check departments are those (who are) arrogant when we teach who feel great about themselves – usually made up of students who wouldn't last in this Maahad..."*

*"We take all the methods in approach developing, disciplinary (actions) towards students' laziness we use a variety of ways. That's why stupid children are not sent to eh .. bright students, the bright students are not sent to Tahfiz so we are sent a stupid student, so training stupid students take a long time..."*

*"Actually the Maahad Tahfiz is seen as bad by people, seen as Mat Pet, is seen for stupid people - because the majority; arguably 75 per cent of the students at Tahfiz centre (was said by parents) our son is stupid, our son ran away from home, our son has committed adultery, our son has committed crime then only they see the (importance of) Tahfiz teaching..."*

*"Here are all the majorities that ustaz received for the new intake this year majority students here are behind in their learning... .."*

{R1– T1}

From the aspect of students' attitude, only R1 answered along with a long comment in the interview session. This is because the institution coordinated by R1 does not have any qualification to register, and it is open to everyone. This has increased the probability of R1 getting students with problems because no screening is done for students who want to register at the Tahfiz center. In addition, the Tahfiz center is also often a place for the moral rehabilitation of the youth.

### Challenges of Curriculum Implementation

The emphasis on curriculum implementation received more feedback from the two participants who were interviewed. Participants felt that implementing the curriculum for this vocational major was a difficult challenge for them to create this vocational Tahfiz. The following is an excerpt from the researcher's interview with two participants:

*"Some have majors, yes, we have made some that have been terminated, which means examples of various Khat like animation, when the reason is that the ustaz actually wants to make money any major that does not contribute to our income will be closed this reason will waste our time and our students....."*

*"So if we don't something of a course that does not bring results then we will close the program... .."*

*"From the standard point of view that we teach here we are at the same level as the existing skill institutes so even though we did not get the recognition from JPK Skills Development Department and MQA Malaysia quality management..."*

*"In fact we have been trying to get recognition for almost five years now but there's too much bureaucracy, pressure and problems from the government so we throw it away and we don't ask and so on, we want to acknowledge, we don't want to be a problem from those who cause us problems..."*

{R1 - T1}

He stressed out that;

*"So this community college then sat in under The Ministry of Higher Education before so it is a bit difficult like Giatmara, it's a little easier..."*

*"Basically, at first it was a bit difficult, we wanted to work together because there were no examples of Maahad Tahfiz that made it work so to making an MOU towards the same understanding is a little difficult. If we go near this branch, (they) tell us to get up to the HQ, it is difficult so it is hard to register at first it was a bit weird..."*

*"We wanted to sit on one track so we all just joined. There are only a few times that we have to be like a community college or Giatmara just now had to spend some time for Tahfiz or the Tahfiz have to what's that give a little time and that is how we make an understanding..."*

*"...in Giatmara, we call the Malaysian skills certificate SKM, it's SKM level one, level two or level three, so he has a credit hour, he has teachers who have fixed time, so if we start late at 10 o'clock, we're interrupting the time, so it was a little difficult at first. Giatmara we asked back what all where he said he needed the certificate that people have taken where the certificate came out after 6 months, 6 months they spent (then) 6 month they have to wait, so we see there's a huge time gap. The boys start to show their lack of interest eh, what to do when you feel like there's nowhere to go in front of us and we feel that problems start to arise at that time..."*

*"To implement TVET is usually a bit difficult because as Ustaz myself can't look left and right meaning to look at other people that we want to see, eh, how do you do that?"*

{R2 - T1}

For the curriculum aspect, both study participants focused on the curriculum problems they faced. This problem occurred due to the country's Tahfiz management which is still struggling in creating an effective coordination system for all Tahfiz centres in Malaysia. And this affects R1 and R2 in the implementation of vocational curriculum in their Tahfiz centres.

### **Public Perception**

In terms of public perception, R1 is seen to emphasise explaining the problems he is facing. This is because the established Tahfiz centre only has a place in the eyes of the people who seem to lack understanding about the institution of Tahfiz. The following is an excerpt from R1:

*"Tahfiz nowadays is sought even today but not sought by the clever ones but sought for the wicked when a child is bad and unguidable when the child is stupid then they throw these children into a Tahfiz centre. That means they will only look to Tahfiz centres for problems and not progress..."*

*"we have more than 1400 Tahfiz centres all over Malaysia but the ones that come in problematic and when they are problematic, we become problematic as well..."*



{R1 - T1}

R1 has given a long answer in terms of the community perspective compared to R2 who has nothing to say about it. This is due to the thinking of the people who still look at Tahfiz centres only to improve their morals. Apart from that, R1's Tahfiz institution is also seen to accept anyone who has a problem as long as they can be helped in the name of Islam.

### Summary of Study Findings

Table 1 revealed the summary of the findings. From the findings, it is shown that they have similar issues in designing curriculum. To mix between Quranic and TVET, there are many steps and procedures to come out with the best curriculum to fit these two requirements. For the best result of Tahfiz TVET institution, the government should help and be ready to give investment to ensure that the human capital can be produced well.

Table 1: Challenges of Maahad education

Challenges	R1	R2
Financial	High requirements	Medium Requirements
Skilled Teaching Staff	Private staff	Institute Collaboration
Students Attitudes	Moral issues	No findings
Curriculum	Difficult to standardise	Difficult to standardise
Public Perception	Stereotype	No findings

### Conclusion

It can be concluded here that the biggest challenges faced in establishing the implementation of vocational majors in Tahfiz education centres are financial problems and curriculum coordination. This is because the Tahfiz system in Malaysia still does not have one standard curriculum like an institution other than education. This is because many Tahfiz centres are established privately. Many Tahfiz centres are not registered under the religious office or Darul Quran, making it difficult to coordinate and inject funds from the government. With sufficient financial resources, the vocational Tahfiz Maahad is able to fund Tahfiz students by providing infrastructure, facilities and skilled teaching staff. Similarly, the challenge from the aspect of getting skilled teaching staff where the administrator of vocational Tahfiz centres must provide a clear understanding of the organisational status of a Tahfiz centre. Working at the centre does not promise a lucrative salary or wages but rather to impart knowledge with i'tiqad making little sacrifices in carrying out the responsibilities of Muslims for the development of the ummah.

For Tahfiz centres that want to collaborate with skills institutions, an understanding and agreement must be established to facilitate the vocational curriculum that can be carried out under different organisations. What is hoped by the administrators of vocational Tahfiz Maahad with the existence of this vocational Tahfiz center is to believe that it can change society's view of the perception that says this Tahfiz institution does not produce unqualified individuals to enter the industrial market. In addition, this vocational Tahfiz center institution will be a popular place of choice for future children to further their studies in their fields of interest while shaping their identity, religion, and nation to become globally competent citizens.

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