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Empowerment of Factors that Influence Parents' Choice of Tahfeez Institution in Malaysia

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Abstract

Tahfeez and Al-Quran education holds a place in the parents' hearts these days who would wish for their children to be the memorizers of al-Quran. The number of tahfeez institutions is also seen to be increased through the years by its establishments by the government and private sectors that are developed personally or by certain parties. Behind those high requests for the tahfeez institution application through the years, tahfeez education system is still deemed to be improved in many aspects for the empowerment of the institution. This study was conducted with the library research approach and the documentary method which involves the analysis of scholarly materials such as books, journals, proceedings, and encyclopaedias. The overall findings of this study suggest that an awareness factor plays a role in the decision of parents to have tahfeez schools as the institution of choice for their children. Thus, this paper will be discussing the factors that influence the decision of parents to send their kids to be educated at tahfeez schools.

Keywords: Empowerment, Tahfeez, Parents, Decision-making

Introduction

Islamic Studies has been given a priority at the primary and secondary school levels to achieve 21st-century education. Among the approaches taken by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) to uplift Islamic education, the tahfeez Model Ulul Albab (TMUA) programme which is a model of integration between the sciences with Islamic Studies was introduced. This model, in which the syllabus includes memorizing the Quran, was introduced in 2013 and so far has been implemented in three selected schools in Malaysia. The curricular structure combines the standard curriculum of tahfeez schools which includes the subjects Maharat al-Quran and Hafazan along with subjects from the Secondary Schools Standard Curriculum (KSSM) to produce students capable of memorizing the Quran. This initiative is a means to equip students with the integrated skills and knowledge (Suliaman, 2015) to achieve success in this world and the hereafter based on the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah.

The rapid growth of tahfeez education within the country is due to the demand of the community which can be attributed to the increasing awareness of the need to memorise the Quran. Within the past 20 years, parents and youths alike have shown exceptional interest in Islamic education. There is an increasing trend of parents sending their children to religious schools such as Maahad Tahfeez, which begs the question: what influences parents to choose

to send their children to study in religious schools? The tendency of parents to opt for religious schools or tahfeez institutions has become a national issue. Tahfeez institutions are varying in nature, and each institution has its approach and system. This diversity certainly has its advantages and disadvantages, as well as its impact on future generations and the national education system as a whole.

Categories of Tahfeez in Malaysia

According to the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), tahfeez institutions can be categorised as follows: (Nawi, 2020)

1. Full-Time Tahfeez

Full-time tahfeez programs offer tahfeez education without any additional subjects within the national education curriculum or Islamic studies. Nevertheless, there are a few full-time tahfeez programs that allow their students to attend public schools during normal schooling hours whilst their tahfeez studies are conducted outside of public schooling hours.

2. Religious tahfeez

Religious tahfeez institution or the tahfeez religious school provides a program combining Islamic studies with Quranic memorization. This type of tahfeez school continues to grow in Malaysia and plays an important role in producing scholars and ulama who are experts in religious studies. This institution offers a curriculum that focuses on tahfeez and Islamic studies with subjects such as *qira'at*, *tafsir*, *hadith* and *fiqh*. Examples of tahfeez agama tahfeez religious schools include Maahad tahfeez Kubang Bujuk Terengganu and Maahad Tahfeez Sungai Badak Kedah.

3. Integrated Tahfeez (Academic)

Parents are more inclined to send their children to national schools with a mainstream curriculum as they intend for their children to succeed academically. In order to bridge the gap between mainstream academics and Islamic studies, Integrated Tahfeez schools were formed. These schools offer an integration of tahfeez studies and the national curriculum for their students. Consequently, students from Integrated Tahfeez schools are able to sit for public examinations such as the Malaysian Certificate of Education, locally known as Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). A few examples of Integrated Tahfeez schools include Maahad Tahfeez Pulai Chondong, Kelantan, Kolej Tahfeez Klang, Selangor and Institusi tahfeez al-Quran Negeri Sembilan (ITQAN).

4. Science Tahfeez

To align with the rapid development of science and technology, science tahfeez institutions were born. These schools integrate tahfeez studies with the science stream. Some examples of science tahfeez institutions include Sekolah Menengah Imtiyaz Yayasan Terengganu, Maahad tahfeez Sains Tanah Merah, Maahad tahfeez Sains Negeri Pahang and Maahad Integrasi Istana Bandar (MITIB) Selangor. Certain branches of MARA Junior Science College (MRSM) such as MRSM Kota Putera, Besut, Terengganu and MRSM Gemencheh, Negeri Sembilan also offer dual tahfeez and science programs. Students at these institutions display excellent academic achievement, thus opening the eyes of many to the capabilities of *al-hafiz* and *al-hafiza* (memorisers of the Quran).

5. Moral Rehabilitation Tahfeez

There are also tahfeez institutions that focus on moral rehabilitation, in addition to the memorization of the Quran and learning and understanding the faith of Islam at a deeper level. These schools include Maahad Tahfeez Pemulihan Ar-Rayyan, Kampung Sungai Buaya Rawang Selangor, and Pondok Bustanul Ariffin, Kuala Langat Selangor. Moral rehabilitation tahfeez have their own separate schedules and examinations are conducted internally.

Development/Advancement of Tahfeez Education in Malaysia

The awareness of the importance and the advantages of memorizing Quran among Muslims has pushed parents to send their children to tahfeez schools, be it under the management the Federal Government, State Islamic Religious Council (MAIN), State Department of Islamic Religion (JAIN), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), or a private tahfeez school (Rahman, 2020). The Malaysian government, through KPM and JAKIM are committed to empower Quranic tahfeez education in this country through multiple efforts. It is done to produce more professional huffaz that master two fields, Quranic tahfeez and other science disciplines (Ahmad, 2018). Recent trend shows that Muslims are aware of the benefits, effectiveness, and prestige of memorizing the Quran, which has led to an increase in student enrolment at tahfeez institutions (Ulwan, 2015). To these Muslims, specifically, the parents, the tahfeez education system which is a dual system that integrates academia with Islamic studies and Al-Quran memorization aligns with the needs of the global market. Thus, it can be said that the title of 'al-hafiz' and 'al-hafiza' is highly valued within current society and in the eyes of Allah (Ismail, 2018). To establish a standardized tahfeez education system in Malaysia, tahfeez institutes under the purview of the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) were formed. The process of restructuring tahfeez schools occurred from the year of 1966 to 1992 where Tahfeez Al-Quran studies were placed under the administration of several institutes and parties such as the Jawatankuasa Tadbir Masjid Negara, Pusat Penyelidikan Islam, Institut Dakwah dan Latihan Islam (INDAH), Cawangan di Bahagian Agama, the Prime Minister's Department, and lastly, JAKIM (Hameed et al., 2003). Moreover, Tahfeez Al-Quran studies were initially named 'Maahad tahfeez Al-Quran Wal-Qiraat' but eventually renamed to Darul Quran when the management was under the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM).

Factors that Influence Parents' Choice of Tahfeez Schools Education

1. Balanced Academic and Religious Knowledge

The Malaysian community has an in-depth interest and inclination toward Islamic and tahfeez education. According to a board member of Yayasan Pendidikan Islam Selangor (YAPIS) Prof Datuk Dr Abd Halim Tamuri, parents who are too busy working due to rising living costs has caused the task of educating children on knowledge of the world and the hereafter has fallen upon the shoulders of fellow *ustaz* and *ustazah* of tahfeez institutions (Abdullah, 2018; Nawi, 2020).

Parents play a major role in their children's lives as they are responsible for shaping their characters. Parents also have an immense influence over their children's basic and religious values. Some parents are willing to send their children to tahfeez institutions for their betterment, in which this statement is supported by motivational and parenting expert Dr Rozieta Shaary who in a press statement claims that parents nowadays not only encourage their children to attend tahfeez schools but they even 'force' them to attend. Parents go to such extent to fulfil their own wishes of attending tahfeez schools, which they were not able

to in the past. A child is like a blank canvas, and it is up to the parents to illustrate and paint the canvas beautifully. This perception is common among parents; thus, they possess a sense of responsibility to properly shape the future of their child, leading them to 'encourage' their children to attend their tahfeez school of choice (Kamaruddin, 2017; Nawī, 2020).

It is an undeniable act that placement at tahfeez schools is limited. However, these types of tahfeez schools through the years are said to be springing up like mushrooms after rain. A few independent and private tahfeez institutions construct their very own syllabus that becomes the main guideline and source for their students' studies at the institution. Furthermore, some institutions provide Al-Quran studies and memorization at the certificate, diploma, and degree level while other institutions provide tahfeez education for pre-school, primary, and secondary levels (Nawī, 2014). Hence, it can be inferred that the execution and *manhaj* (execution) of tahfeez schools are being increasingly accepted within the local Muslim community.

Tahfeez education has received a positive reception from parents who are inclined to witness their children hone their talents in the religious and tahfeez field to shape their children into individuals of high character (Abd Razak et al., 2018). Dr Ibrahim Hashim, the Dean of the Faculty of Human Sciences at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) claims that the outlook on tahfeez institutions is increasingly positive as the community acknowledges that tahfeez students are exposed to elements of Quranic knowledge and Islamic values. Tahfeez-educated students are taught a complete mixture of '*ilm naqli* (religious knowledge) and '*ilm 'aqli* (academic knowledge). This added value allows for tahfeez-educated students to venture into a variety of fields as they possess an advantage over others, especially with regard to religious knowledge and activities; such value is needed and appreciated by the country and the job market today (Che Lah, 2017). High moral values and religious obedience are part of the reason why students at tahfeez institutions are capable of memorizing 6,236 verses from 30 juz' of the Quran. Since the tahfeez education system is versatile in its variations and forms, some administration teams focus solely on memorising the Quran (Jamaluddin, 2010; Ariffin, 2012; Nawī, 2020).

Moreover, tahfeez institutions also focus on a few different aspects according to various *manhaj* (execution) and methods such as modern academics, studying the Turath in Arabic or Jawi scripture, technical or vocational skills, and others (Abdul Manaf, et al., 2015; Talib, et al., 2017). The variety in approach has its very own implication, objective, and benchmark for the parties involved. In conclusion, parents have their own reasons and justification regarding the type and location of their tahfeez institution of choice.

Hopes and Aspirations

According to a press statement by the Deputy Chairperson of Madrasah tahfeez al-Furqan, Mohd Samudin Mohd Samian, awareness among parents on the importance of sending children to tahfeez schools increases every year. This increasing awareness can perhaps be attributed to the belief that children require a balanced input between *naqli* (revealed knowledge) and '*aqli* (conventional knowledge). Raieh (2017) asserts that excellence in '*aqli* but neglect in *naqli* does not bring upon any gain. The past few decades foresaw contributions from individuals and organisations to the nationwide growth of tahfeez institutions. These efforts are propelled by the aspiration and objective to uplift religious education, especially in the field of tahfeez al-Quran and as-Sunnah among Muslim students. Non-government organisations (NGOs), and state and federal governments have played their respective roles in developing tahfeez institutions. These parties have designed and established their own

tahfeez system while striving to become a major organisational body to improve the quality of al-Quran and hadith memorisation at all levels of education: primary, secondary and tertiary. The hope and goal of these three parties may be relevant or contradictory to one another. For some parents, their ultimate goal in sending their children to tahfeez schools is for their child to become akin to traditionalist or contemporary ulama, such as the likes of Imam Nawawi, Imam Syafie, Sheikh Dr Bakar Abu Zaid, Sheikh Dr Fathi Yakan, Sheikh Imam Prof. Dr Yusoff Al-Qaradhawi, Sheikh Prof. Abd Wahab al-Khallaf, Sheikh Imam Prof. Muhd Abu Zuhrah, Sheikh Prof. Dr Wahbah Mustafa Az-Zuhayli and Sheikh Prof. Dr Said Ramdhan Al-Buti. On the other hand, some parents intend for their children to become scholars such as Ibn Battuta, Abu Musa Jabir Bin Hayyan, Al-Farabi, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina and al-Khawarizmi, while others intend for their children to become professionals or technocrats who are also *al-hafiz* or *al-hafiza* (Nawi, 2020)

mereka bentuk suatu sistem pengajian tahfeez Al-Quran serta berlumba-lumba ingin menjadi sebuah badan organisasi utama supaya mutu hafazan Al-Quran dan hadis dapat ditingkatkan di semua tahap pengajian, baik di tahap rendah mahupun di institusi pengajian tinggi. Harapan dan matlamat antara ketiga-tiga pihak tersebut mungkin relevan antara satu sama lain dan mungkin juga berbeza atau bertentangan antara satu sama lain.

Islamic Literacy

Ismail (2016) states that the development of human beings in civilisation requires two aspects which are physical development (advancement of individual, communal and national ecosystems) and social development. Malaysians are already experiencing physical development through infrastructural and economic growth alongside improved standards of living. However, the same cannot be said for the nation's social development, especially in terms of education. Children undergo years of formal education from kindergarten to university to shape their way of thinking, personality, behaviour and temperament (Ahmad, 2004). Nonetheless, various parties have started to realise and acknowledge the potential of tahfeez education in raising a generation that understands, appreciates and practices the teachings of Islam holistically.

The government and private sectors have played a part in uplifting and enlivening Islamic glory. Badrulhisham Ibrahim of Mudir Madrasah Pusat Pengajian Asas dan Lanjutan Tahfeez (PPALT) was quoted saying that the reason why people opt for tahfeez centres as their school of choice is that tahfeez institutions are an excellent approach in educating children and prevents them from involving in social ills. This proves that social ills among teens can be prevented through the religious approach specifically by employing the teachings of the Quran, but it requires immense effort from parents and educators alike (Hassan, 2016; Nawi, 2020).

Additionally, plans and policies involving religion usually attract the attention of the media and the community. Mosques have also been built that not only serve as a symbol of Islam's uniqueness as the religion of the Federation but it has also been well-used. The awareness on the significance of religion, expressly the elements of iman and taqwa, is important for all parts of society, especially the Muslims to lead better lives. Due to the awareness on the importance of Islam in character-building, more and more parents have the intent and tendency to send their children to be educated and undergo *tarbiyah* (guidance) at institutions that prioritise Islamic values. This awareness has also allowed for the nationwide growth and development of tahfeez and Islamic studies institutions. The overwhelmingly

positive response from parents who opt for tahfeez schools has resulted in a categorisation of tahfeez institutions, namely (Ismail, 2016; Nawi, 2014)

1. Tahfeez institutions established under the federal government
2. Tahfeez institutions established under the state government
3. Tahfeez institutions established independently

Islamic studies in Malaysia have gone through different stages and processes for many years. Before the arrival of the colonisers, Islamic studies were conducted with their limitations. *Sekolah agama* or religious schools were once seen as 'second class' and suitable only for the poor and the conservative. Those attending *sekolah agama* at the time did not have a clear vision or mission, especially with regard to national development. However, during the colonial era, Islamic studies effectively contributed to the cultivation of nationalism and the spirit of independence. Some view religious schools as a place capable of producing religious scholars and educating their children on religious matters. Highly skilled individuals and an educated society are not only built through vocational, technical, and science-based subjects along with extracurricular activities but also through Islamic studies, as this subject plays a role in producing individuals who are excellent, brilliant and intelligent in a great variety of fields.

Discussion

This research gives a clear implication that the effort in producing generations of Al-Quran that is desired by parents through the tahfeez education requires a lengthy journey but far from impossible. The existing processes of improvement on the system or the model of the tahfeez education executed by schools and institutions in Malaysia require the involvement of a clear philosophical formulation aspect, goals, mission, and vision because the establishment and the growth of tahfeez institutions in Malaysia are getting more support from the society. This institution has a role in producing noble generations because they are educated to practice the way of Islam in their lives, family, society, and country. The presence of tahfeez institutions also gives an impact to the society in overcoming current prominent problems and as an effective way to eradicate social problems that have been infecting modern communities. With the establishment of tahfeez institution, which must have been the choice of the parents these days, whether it is managed privately or by the government, the generations of people who understand Al-Quran will be produced, spreading the teachings of Al-Quran to the society at once.

Conclusion

In Malaysia, tahfeez education is being offered in schools under Ministry of Education (MOE), schools under state supervision and private schools. Tahfeez schools may be named differently by the operators such as Mahaad, Tahfeez Center, Ulul Albab School and others. Tahfeez schools under MOE in general are under of MOE's governing authority. Private religious schools or centers offering the teaching of Al-Quran together with national academic curriculum are also subject to MOE and religious council governing authority. Whilst, private tahfeez institutions or centers focusing on the teaching of Al Quran only and not registered with MOE are under the governance of the State Religious authority. So, tahfeez institutions provide education that is holistic. Thus, the standardization, development, supervision, and improvement of tahfeez institutions must take into account the national education policy and existing regulations to ensure an effective education model.

Contribution

The Malaysian educational system is always forthright in dignifying Quranic tahfeez institutions. Regardless, there are still a few aspects that must be taken into consideration in an effort to increase the quality of the national tahfeez education because it is still deemed to be in the moderate level compared to the mainstream education. As an example, the failure of certain registration parties in registering their tahfeez institution is one of the factors that happened by tahfeez institution. The failure of registering tahfeez institutions to the authorities may lead them to be left behind in retrieving any form of aid distribution. The well-structured management system of the tahfeez institution is also one of the leading factors to the success and excellence of the tahfeez students. The failure of the administration party in managing the tahfeez institution will make it difficult for the tahfeez students to get a place in studying at a tahfeez institution. Empowerment and policy must be done in an effort to dignify the tahfeez educational system so that it could be comparable to the mainstream educational system.

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