

History of the Establishment and Development of Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu, Padang Midin

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Abstract

Maahad Tahfiz is an educational institution synonymous with the Quran memorization curriculum. Nowadays, there are many maahad tahfiz that not only focus on memorization but also emphasize religious and academic knowledge. Most recently, Maahad Al-Quran Tahfiz Terengganu (MTQT) is one of the maahad tahfiz that applies this system in their learning through the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), Malaysian Higher Religious Certificate (STAM), and the Maahad Tahfiz. However, there is still no specific documentation on MTQT in the form of academic studies as a reference for the community. In addition, a systematic database that records information related to the background, development, and excellence of the MTQT is still very limited. Therefore, this study was carried out to meet these deficiencies. This study is a qualitative study that contains data in the form of literature. Through this study, information was collected through document analysis and interviews with relevant figures to obtain information on the history, background, and latest information on this maahad tahfiz, as well as the development of MTQT administration and management. Based on the results of the study, the institute, which was founded in Masjid Abidin in 1984 under the Terengganu Religious Affairs Department (JHEAT), had changed management under the Terengganu Foundation before being returned to the administration of JHEAT under the administration of the Terengganu State Islamic Education Department (JPINT). Various efforts have been made by the Terengganu state government to develop this maahad tahfiz, either in the form of infrastructure, administration, or curriculum. In conclusion, MTQT, which is now 40 years old since it was established, has contributed and inspired many parties in line with its position as one of the earliest tahfiz institutions in the country. Therefore, this study is expected to provide an academic contribution and as a reference for the community who want to know more about MTQT.

Keywords: Maahad, Tahfiz, History, Establishment, Management

Introduction

Maahad Tahfiz refers to a centre or institution that propagates Islamic education, specifically focusing on those who wish to learn how to memorize the al-Quran. Maahad Tahfiz offer courses in Islamic studies and Arabic in addition to focusing on memorising the al-Quran. It is also an essential institution in Islamic tradition. According to the 4th Edition of *Kamus Dewan*, Maahad Tahfiz is a centre for studying and memorizing the al-Quran. Today, the term "*Maahad Tahfiz*" is no longer foreign to the public, and many people aspire to send their children to this type of Islamic religious school that emphasizes on memorising the al-Quran. This study investigated one of the tahfiz schools that is famous among the people of Terengganu, namely Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu (MTQT). MTQT not only focuses on students who memorise the al-Quran but also offers basic academic subjects. Based on the researcher's search about the history and contribution of Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu (MTQT), there is still no specific study about it.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the historical background of the establishment of Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran in Terengganu.
2. Review the development of the administrative and management system adopted by Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu since the beginning of its establishment until today.

Methodology of the Study

Research methodology is a method used to conduct a study. Idris (2010) states that methodology is very important because this section explains to the evaluation panel the procedures, methods, and processes that will be carried out to investigate the proposed research problem. In the research methodology, the planning of the study and the activities that need to be carried out to complete the proposed study must be presented.

This study employed a qualitative approach that used semi-structured interviews as the research instrument (Lebar, 2012). The purpose of these interviews was to obtain definitive and coherent information regarding the historical development of Maahad Tahfiz. In addition, this study also used observations to examine the development of Maahad Tahfiz, particularly the changes in its administrative system.

This study has also utilized the observation method. This observation method is used in both quantitative and qualitative research. Most of the discussion in this chapter touches on the use of this method in qualitative research. However, it is now generally accepted that observation cannot be done naturally, even though observers try their best to implement neutral observations, as all researchers have their own theories and values. This is because observation cannot avoid being influenced by those theories and values (Hin, 2007).

The researcher has watched several videos made by Maahad Tahfiz students about the history of the establishment of Maahad Tahfiz, which began at the Library Building in front of Masjid Abidin, then moved to the Hasan Husin Building in Pengadang Baru, and finally settled in the permanent complex of Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu located in Padang

Midin. In the video, several achievements of some Maahad Tahfiz students from the current years, namely 2020 to 2022, were also included.

Findings

The findings of this study are based on the researcher's efforts to examine the history of the establishment of Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu. The research findings are divided into two sections, namely the background of the establishment of Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu, as well as the administrative and management system prevalent in Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu.

The Historical Background Behind the Establishment of Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu
Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu (MTQT) is one of the earliest formal Quranic educational institutions in Malaysia and it is fully funded by the Terengganu state government. (Ismail, personal communication, April 4, 2024)

On April 18 1984, a Maahad Tahfiz was established under the patronage of the Terengganu government. The idea of establishing a Maahad Tahfiz was the brainchild of the then Chief Minister, the late Dato' Sri Haji Wan Mokhtar Bin Wan Ahmad. Terengganu was the first state to establish a Maahad Tahfiz under the auspices of its state government and it has been managed by the Terengganu Department of Islamic Affairs (JHEAT) since its inception (<https://mtqterengganu.wordpress.com/>, December 25, 2023).

The purpose for establishing a Maahad Tahfiz was to meet the demands of *fardhu kifayah* and produce a generation of skilled memorizers (*hafiz*) of the al-Quran. The students will not only be able to memorize all 30 *juz'* of the al-Quran but also be proficient in Quranic-related knowledge and academic subjects, which will serve to address the shortage of *hafiz* who will represent the country/state in National and International Quran Reciting Competitions (Anon, 1996).

According to the first principal of Maahad Tahfiz, Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Syaikh Haji Ismail bin Haji Muhammad al-Hafiz, the Maahad Tahfiz was also established to systematically train and educate Muslim children on the subject of memorising the al-Quran, with a focus on essential aspects such as *tajwid* (pronunciation rules), *waqaf* (pausing rules), and other elements related to reciting the al-Quran, besides subjects related to Islamic knowledge (Mohamad, 1985).

The Terengganu government had yet to find a suitable location for the Maahad Tahfiz when the idea of its establishment was first mooted, hence, it was temporarily housed at the Abidin Mosque Library building, also known as the Masjid Putih. This library building was reportedly loaned by JHEAT to serve as a temporary site for the Maahad Tahfiz. The Abidin Mosque Library did not only serve as a library but also hosted classes that taught *Tafaquh Fiddin*. Subsequently, the library building housed temporary classrooms and dormitories for the Maahad Tahfiz students. (Ismail, personal communication, April 4, 2024)

The Terengganu government provides funding and contributions for Maahad Tahfiz, as well as students' educational expenses. The state government also bears the costs of

accommodation, meals, and other student-related expenses including students' allowances (Anon, 1998).

According to Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr. Syaikh Haji Ismail bin Haji Muhammad al-Hafiz, there was minimal interest from the younger generation at the inception of Maahad Tahfiz, which led the Terengganu Department of Religious Affairs having to constantly advertise its establishment to the public, particularly to parents residing in Terengganu (Mohamad, 1985).

The student intake involved several stages in the early days of Maahad Tahfiz, with nine students in the first stage, two in the second, and three in the third. After the multi-stage intake process, an initial group of 15 students (all males and 16 years of age) had started their religious education, although only 11 remained until the end. These students were admitted without an interview and selected from Islamic secondary schools that were managed by the Terengganu government, such as Sultan Zainal Abidin Secondary School, Mahmudiah Secondary School in Kuala Berang, Tok Jiring Secondary School, and others. This was because the subjects taught at Maahad Tahfiz were taught entirely in Arabic, and memorizing the al-Quran was a compulsory subject (Mohamad, 1985).

After spending two years at the Abidin Mosque Library, the Maahad Tahfiz moved to a building rented by the Terengganu government, located in Pengadang Baru Village, known as the Hasan Husin Building. This building, a three-story shop lot, served multiple purposes, such as the student hostel (on the second floor) and classrooms (on the third floor). A special room was provided for the warden in this building (Ahmad, personal communication, May 12, 2024).

A total of 20 subjects was offered to students, including memorizing the al-Quran, besides *Quraniyyah* (Quranic studies), Arabic, and *Diniyyah* (religious studies). (Anon, 1998). The Maahad Tahfiz had set specific targets for the students when memorizing the al-Quran. Students were required to memorize 10 *juz'* in the first year, 8 *juz'* each in the second and third years, and 4 *juz'* in the fourth year. However, some students had succeeded in completing their memorization task ahead of the designated time (Ismail, personal communication, April 4, 2024).

After eight years at the Hasan Husin Building in Pengadang Baru, a permanent campus for Maahad Tahfiz was finally completed and ready to accommodate its students. In August 1993, the permanent Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Complex in Padang Midin opened for both new and existing students. This campus spans an area of 6.991 hectares (17.275 acres) and is located about 10km from Kuala Terengganu. Construction of the Maahad Tahfiz complex took only 1 year and 4 months to complete, which began on March 11, 1992, and eventually completed on July 14, 1993 (<https://mtqterengganu.wordpress.com/>, December 25, 2023).

The Terengganu government spent RM6.198 million for the construction of Phase 1 of the Maahad Tahfiz Complex, which included seven fully operational building blocks. These buildings comprised two lecture blocks, three dormitory blocks that can accommodate 218 students at one time, a library building, dining hall and a language laboratory. Phase 2 involved the development of a prayer hall (surau), an administrative building, female dormitory complex, and staff quarters. The cost of the second phase was estimated at RM9 million and was completed in 2008. (Zakhi, personal communication, June 11, 2024)

Initially, Maahad Tahfiz's student intake was conducted every two years for each generation of students and was open only to male students. However, in 1994, the intake frequency was changed to once a year, and in 1996, Maahad Tahfiz began admitting female students who were interested to join (Ahmad, personal communication, May 12, 2024). The minimum intake of students each year was maintained at approximately 20 to 30 students. The duration of study at Maahad Tahfiz remained the same as in previous years, namely a four-year study period. The academic school term also followed the same schedule as that set by the Ministry of Education (Muda, 1994).

On January 2, 2007, Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu came under the patronage of Terengganu Institute of Quran (IQT), an initiative led by the Chief Minister of Terengganu at that time, Dato' Seri Idris Bin Jusoh. Establishment of the Terengganu Institute of Quran was the consequence of dynamic educational changes that were progressing at that time. Programs offered by IQ Terengganu included the Syhadah Certification Program, post-SPM Diploma, and al-Furqan studies (Zakhi, personal communication, June 11, 2024).

Among the unique features and facilities provided by Maahad Tahfiz were full board accommodation, and a monthly allowance of RM100 per month per student. Students also had the opportunity to further their studies at Maahad Qiraat Al-Azhar in Shoubra, Egypt, as well as other international universities. They also had ample opportunities to continue their education at public or private universities in Malaysia.

The Administrative and Management System Adopted by Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu

This school was named Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Negeri Terengganu (MUTTAQUN) when it was first established, but the abbreviation was later changed to MTANT, and then in 2007, the name was changed to Terengganu Institute of Quran (IQT). In 2016, the name was revised to Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu (MTQT), and the name (MTQT) has been used ever since (Ahmad, personal communication May 12, 2024).

The principal during the school's early years was Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr. Syaikh Haji Ismail bin Haji Muhammad al-Hafiz, who later became the Grand Imam of the National Mosque. (<https://mtqterengganu.wordpress.com/>, December 25, 2023). He was assisted by three teachers from various backgrounds, including Ustaz Wan Hasan Yusof bin Wan Ngah, originally from Kelantan, and two teachers from Indonesia who were specifically appointed by the Terengganu state government to serve at Maahad Tahfiz, namely Ustaz Ansin bin Wijaya and Ustaz Auza bin Omar (Mohamad, 1985). The current (2024) principal of Maahad Tahfiz is Ustaz Ku Apwa bin Ku Ibrahim.

The tuition fee for students enrolled in Maahad Tahfiz is fully paid for by the state government. Since its inception, students have been provided with a monthly allowance, a practice that has continued until today. Initially, the allowance provided was RM50.00 for first- and second-year students and RM60.00 for third- and fourth-year students. Today, the allowance has been increased to RM100 per month, and allocated equally to all students regardless of their year of study (Zakhi, personal communication, June 11, 2024)

Currently, students are required to pay an enrolment fee for entry into Maahad Tahfiz. However, this fee is charged only during the initial registration and does not exceed RM1000. The fee covers registration, matriculation card, hostel welfare, co-curricular activities, Takaful insurance, and Parent-Teacher Association (PIBG) fee. Moreover, students need to purchase certain equipment and necessities upon their enrolment into Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu, such as school uniform, hostel essentials (bed sheets and blankets), and other supplies (<http://smaonline.terengganu.gov.my/>, May 23, 2024).

One of the primary objectives of Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu, starting from 2017, is to provide excellent education related to memorizing of the al-Quran, excel in Malaysia's Tahfiz Education System in Malaysia, and produce scholars majoring in the field of al-Quran and religious studies. The Maahad Tahfiz's vision is to produce a dynamic generation of *huffaz* (Quran memorizers). The mission is to become a Centre of Excellence for Tahfiz Studies, Quranic Knowledge, and Quranic Culture. "The Best *Huffaz* in the World" has been chosen as Maahad Tahfiz's motto. (<https://mtqterengganu.wordpress.com/>, December 25, 2023 (Zakhi, personal communication, June 11, 2024).

In 1993, Maahad Tahfiz's principal, assistant principal, and teaching staff met to discuss the introduction of Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) at Maahad Tahfiz, since the SPM certificate is a primary requirement for seeking employment in the public sector. The meeting decided to allow students to sit for the SPM exams, although they had to attend nearby government secondary schools to sit for the exams. The principal at that time was the late Ustaz Wan Ismail bin Wan Ngah. Finally, the application to hold SPM exams at Maahad Tahfiz was approved by JHEAT in 1996 (Terengganu Religious Affairs Department). JHEAT sent several SPM-qualified teachers and provided SPM-related textbooks to Maahad Tahfiz. During that period, Maahad Tahfiz students took only core SPM subjects, while the number of subjects for the Syahadah Certification was maintained (Ahmad, personal communication, May 12, 2024).

Maahad Tahfiz also expanded and began offering the Diploma in Quranic Studies under the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) for students who wanted to continue their education. This diploma certificate was issued by JAKIM itself. After JAKIM's diploma program was discontinued, Maahad Tahfiz established the Malaysian Higher Religious Certificate (STAM) examination in 2017. Despite the introduction of STAM, Maahad Tahfiz continued to conduct its own Syahadah Certification. There was no new student intake specifically for STAM, as Maahad Tahfiz decided to only admit existing students in order to maintain the quality and objectives of Maahad Tahfiz, which was to focus on producing a high-quality generation of al-Quran memorizers. (Ahmad, personal communication, May 12, 2024)

Hence, it can be concluded that the period of study for students at Maahad Tahfiz is four years. As for the Maahad Tahfiz Syahadah Certification, students were required to study from the first year to the fourth year, taking the final Syahadah examination in the fourth and final year. As for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), students begin studying for it in the first and second years. In their second year, students take the SPM exam, just like other schools under the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM).

Conclusion

Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu (MTQT) has now reached its 40th year of existence since its establishment in 1984. It was initially located in the Masjid Abidin Library building, and then moved temporarily to a shop lot in Pengadang Baru, known as the Hasan Husin Building. When its permanent complex in Padang Midin was completed in 1993, all the students were relocated there, where it has remained to this day.

The development of Maahad Tahfiz has been remarkable over the years. It initially only accepted male students, but opened its doors to female students in 1996. The number of students had steadily increased, leading to the implementation of an interview process to select new students. These interviews aimed to ensure that students can cope with the academic program run by Maahad Tahfiz.

Since its establishment, over 1,000 students have studied at Maahad Tahfiz, with 32 generations of graduates from Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu alone. Most Maahad Tahfiz graduates have excelled in their careers, whether being self-employed, or working for either the public or private sector.

Throughout its establishment and growth, Maahad Tahfiz has faced numerous challenges that the Terengganu state government had to overcome to ensure that it could produce successful generations grounded in Quranic knowledge, and much more. The state government's efforts to maintain the quality of memorization among students has led to fruition. Thanks to the dedication of skilled teachers, Maahad Tahfiz's students have become distinguished and respected throughout the state. Today, the name Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Terengganu (MTQT) is well-known, especially amongst the Terengganu society.

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