

## Leadership Elements in Private Tahfiz Educational Governance Framework: An Interpretive Inquiry of Regulators and Operators

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### Abstract

The emergence of Islamic education, especially tahfiz schools in Malaysia, is an alternative to the national-based education system that envisions creating a better Muslim generation to fulfill the role of viceregency on earth. However, the concern is that the mushrooming of these religious schools, especially tahfiz schools, may compromise the quality of education and may hinder the objective of providing future leaders. As such, this study examined leadership elements as part of the shariah governance framework of tahfiz schools in Malaysia to help in understanding the emphasis on such elements by tahfiz regulators and operators. The respondents from the state Islamic religious council (SIRC) and tahfiz schools in Selangor, Johor, Melaka, and Perak were interviewed, and the data were analyzed using Atlas.ti by focusing on the quotations made by both parties. The results showed that the leadership element is being emphasized by the regulator and operator of tahfiz schools in Malaysia, where the sub-element of roles and responsibilities was among the highest numbers quoted by the regulator and implementation was the highest quotation by the tahfiz operator. This indicates that good leadership elements are being emphasized and practiced by both regulators and operators of tahfiz schools in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Tahfiz, Governance, Leadership, Regulator

### Introduction

Religions, colonialism, politics, traditions, and social structure shape Malaysia's current educational framework. This educational framework adapts with fresh societal demands and new ideas for educating children for the future. Every country's progress depends on its

children's talent. Access to quality education to increase their skills is crucial. Without the best education, children may not reach their potential and contribute to the nation's progress. Some parents believe that the best education for their children is religious-based education. For that reason, there is an increase in demand for the religious school especially tahfiz schools. Most of these institutions are privately owned and managed by individual or non-governmental organisations. Since the government doesn't have direct control over these schools, there are questions about how they are run, which is important for how well they teach and how well their students learn.

This research aims to fill that gap by examining the governance structure of Malaysian tahfiz schools from both the regulator's and the operator's points of view, with a special focus on the emphasis placed on leadership features. There are several elements that build up the governance framework of tahfiz school such as leadership, performance, accountability, etc. However, it is argued that leadership is the most crucial element in shaping the governance framework of tahfiz school. As asserted by Liu (2021), several researchers argued that the failure of school organization is associated with ineffective school leadership. She also found in her research related to underprivileged schools that the lack of school leadership in underprivileged schools could lead to school failure.

Having good leadership, will help the organisation to achieve its goal and inspire the subordinate to work innovatively in the education field. Teacher and management team leadership will lead to better professional collaboration in managing schools (Liu and Watson, 2020) and contribute to the improvement of teaching quality (Liu, 2016). In the light of this, the following objectives for the paper were set forth:

- a. To examine how the element of leadership in the governance framework of tahfiz school be emphasised in the operation.
- b. To determine how leadership elements are perceived by the regulator and operator of tahfiz schools in Malaysia.

To explicate the above objectives, analytical methodologies would be employed. Some relevant texts from the two main sources, primary and secondary literature will be reviewed and analysed. To date, the literature on tahfiz school has only dealt with the issue of memorization, module, and method. Whilst the literature on leadership and management of tahfiz educational governance is still lacking. Thus, this study is an attempt to fill in the gap stated above.

### **Literature Review**

Education plays a key role in realizing Malaysia's aspirations to be a developed nation. The education system is divided into preschool education, primary education, secondary education, post-secondary education, and tertiary education. Most of these types of education are called national schools. Following the completion of primary education, students go on to complete secondary and post-secondary education. Apart from all the national education, there are other types of education in Malaysia namely Islamic-based education such as tahfiz and pondok.

According to Ismail (2016), private tahfiz institutions need to be registered under the supervision of the authorities. This registration should be made mandatory according to two conditions. First, is the level of education and the second is the stream of education whether it is traditional tahfiz, religious study, or science tahfiz. The purpose is to facilitate monitoring by the relevant institutions in terms of administration, curriculum, teaching qualifications, student activities, and infrastructure facilities. With systematic and timely data, it will be easier for the authorities to manage and plan if any problems arise. Furthermore, the experience of a successful tahfiz institution can be used as a benchmark to further develop the country's tahfiz studies and it will make the tahfiz institution closer to the government.

Leadership behaviors are among the governance constructs embedded in the theoretical framework for governance in independent schools (McCormick et. al., 2006). Good leadership will help the group members to work alongside effectively to share ideas and formulate a good governance framework in the school. Based on this perspective, if the leader can show the quality of leadership especially in accepting others' ideas, it will provide a conducive environment for the members to work together in strengthening the school governance. A review of literature on tahfiz schools/institutions in Malaysia revealed that some of these schools have poor and weak governance (Bani et. al., 2017), insufficient financial resources (Kamal & Seman, 2017), and unstandardized school facilities (Ridza et. al, 2017).

As asserted by Gonfa (2019), among the characteristic of poor leadership is lacking management skills. The management functions such as planning, organizing, directing, and executing cannot be implemented effectively when the leader does not have such skills. This is consistent with Sharma & Jain (2013) who believe that leadership and management must go hand to hand. On the other hand, Zaccaro and Klimoski (2002) believed that leadership plays an important role in supporting group interaction effectively. To reiterate, the way how the school or institution is being managed by a good leader will determine the effective management of the school. Johnston (2003) echoes the studies above by indicating that effective and efficient governance and leadership in education are paramount in running school programs. Inability to govern and lead schools effectively and efficiently lends itself to systems that do not display accountability and transparency (Monareng, 2016)

Another element of effective leadership is related to the understanding of roles and responsibilities. Roles are the positions that are defined by a set of expectations about behaviour of any job incumbent and each role has a set of tasks and responsibilities that may or may not be spelled out (Sharma & Jain, 2013). Leaders should know the destination of their organization and the way to reach the destination point (Simiyu, 2015). Leaders must have knowledge of their business that will allow them to manage the task effectively and efficiently.

Good leadership will also lead to a better formulation and implementation of the organizational strategy (Mubarak & Yusof, 2019). However, poor implementation of organizational strategy resulted from the deficiency of leadership (Brookes & Grint, 2010). Mubarak & Yusof (2019) found that strategic leadership has a positive impact on the implementation of strategy within an organization providing the suitable and effective leadership style is applied in the dynamic situation of the organization

Based on the literature background, the researchers presented the conceptual framework of good leadership elements in the tahfiz governance as follows:

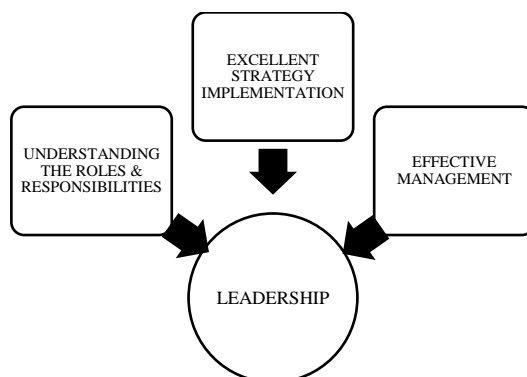


Figure 1

**Methodology**

In this paper, semi-structured interviews were chosen because of the richer and most useful option to collect data. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with four state Islamic religious departments as regulators and three tahfiz schools and one tahfiz association as operator.

The data from the interview was then analyzed using Atlas.ti. The analysis helps the researcher to organize, extract, collate and arrange the data within the texts to become meaningful findings. Atlas.ti enables the researcher to build networks and relationships from the quotation table resulting in creating a graphical view of the data.

During the interview, all the respondents were asked about the specific issues related to the leadership element in private tahfiz school as below

Table 1

No	Issues
1	Organizational structure
2	Management meeting
3	School’s mission/objective
4	Responsibilities (School and Islamic Religious Department)
5	Monitoring
6	Appointment
7	Board of School Administrator
9	Accreditation

Based on the respondents’ responses, the data was analysed, arranged and coded based on three elements as follows:

Table 2

No	Elements
1	Implementation
2	Roles and Responsibilities
3	Management

Additionally, there are 5 sub-elements that have been coded for the element of roles and responsibilities element as below:

Table 3

No	Sub-elements of roles and responsibilities
1	Monitoring
2	Standard Operating Procedure
3	Support System
4	Administration
5	Planning

**Results and Discussions**

Figure 3 shows elements and sub-elements of leadership that are usually being emphasized by operators and regulators of tahfiz schools. From the regulator’s perspective, all elements of leadership must be emphasized by the operator for them to have good leadership practice.

First element of implementation refers to the effectiveness of the implementation of solutions, guidelines, rules, and regulations that have been developed either by the regulator or operator. Second, the element of roles and responsibilities includes the sub-elements of monitoring, standard operating procedure, support system and administration. The last element is management which emphasizes the approach in managing the private tahfiz school.

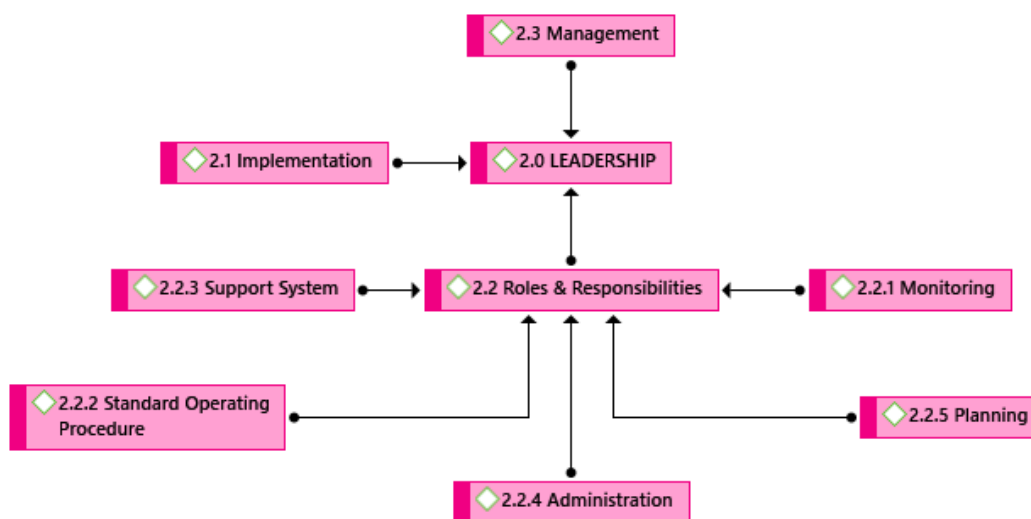


Figure 2

Table 4 shows the number of quotations from each Islamic religious department and tahfiz schools regarding the elements of leadership. The number represents the frequency of each element being mentioned by the parties.

Table 4

*Leadership Elements*

	Islamic Religious Department	Tahfiz Schools	Totals
<b>Implementation</b>	0	11	<b>11</b>
<b>Roles and Responsibilities</b>	46	3	<b>49</b>
<b>Management</b>	12	9	<b>21</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>81</b>

Based on the above quotation, the regulator emphasized more on the leadership element in the interview. Almost 72% of the quotation related to the leadership element was recorded in the interview with regulator of tahfiz and the balance of 28% was recorded with the operator. It can be simplified in the figure below.

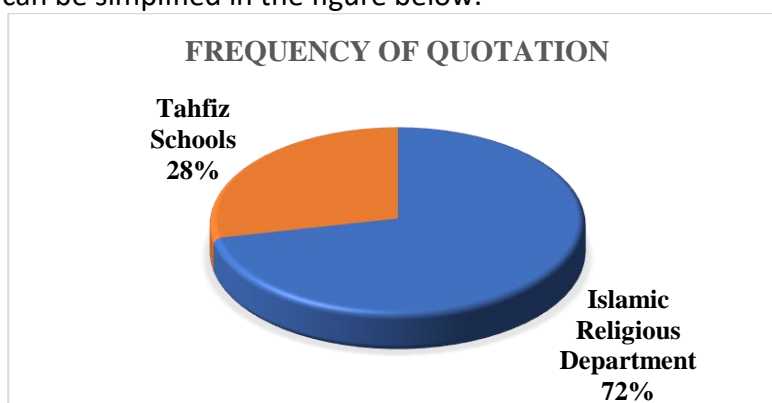


Figure 3

The management element is the highest element being mentioned by the regulator and operator as in table 3. As practice, regulators usually set-up a responsible unit in the education department to handle various aspects of tahfiz school such as management and development. Any related issues will be discussed and handled by this department. For example, regulator A quoted that:

*“Education department in the SIRC has a proper unit to monitor private school matters including monitoring unit”*

In managing the operation of private tahfiz school, regulator and operator agreed the importance of database for reporting purposes. They quoted that:

*“We use a database system developed by JAKIM for the data management of staff and students of private tahfiz schools. The data will be key-in by the school staff”*

Distributing financial assistance for the development of school infrastructure is also one of the items been highlighted by the regulator during the interview. For example, regulator B quoted that:

*“Financial aid from JAKIM will be directly channelled to the tahfiz school” and “Financial assistance from SIRC is solely for infrastructure expenses such as building, table and chair”*

In term of collaborative effort in managing the private tahfiz school, regulators acknowledged the role of tahfiz association by appointing them in the tahfiz steering committee. Regulator quoted that:

*“We acknowledge the role of tahfiz association (PITAS) and appoints them in the steering committee for the development tahfiz education”*

In different, private tahfiz school operator, viewed the management element of leadership related to their responsibilities and the importance of management skills. For example, school operator A quoted that:

*“Fund is not the main issue in managing the tahfiz school but the management skill. Most tahfiz operators are Huffaz but they are lacking in terms of management skills”*

*“Tahfiz schools are responsible to the stakeholders such as parents, state government, donors, community, mosques, and others. The support of these stakeholders will determine the existence of tahfiz school”*

To reiterate, both regulators and operators quoted that the management element is one of the important aspects that need to be strengthened in managing tahfiz schools.

The second element of leadership that has been analysed is the roles and responsibilities. Table 5 shows some of the sub-elements of roles and responsibilities that have been emphasized by regulators and operators to ensure the implementation of good leadership in the tahfiz schools. Regulators are concerned with monitoring and standard operating procedure aspects in managing private tahfiz schools. This can be seen in table 5 related to the quotation of monitoring and standard operating procedure by the regulator.

Table 5  
*Sub-elements of Roles & Responsibilities*

	Islamic Department	Religious	Tahfiz Schools	Totals
<b>Roles and Responsibilities</b>				
Monitoring	10	0	0	<b>10</b>
Standard Operating Procedure	16	0	0	<b>16</b>
Support System	9	2	0	<b>11</b>
Administration	9	0	0	<b>9</b>
Planning	2	1	0	<b>3</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>49</b>

However, these sub-elements are least being quoted by the operator of tahfiz school as compared to the regulators. This is due to the nature of the regulators themselves who have the responsibility to ensure tahfiz school can have a systematic governance structure with a proper monitoring system. This can help to achieve the objective of establishing tahfiz schools in their state. This can be seen in some of the regulators' quotations related to the monitoring where they stated:

*“One unit was established to manage and monitor private Islamic schools in state A”*  
*“Tahfiz school will be audited once every 5 years, however from 2020 onwards, the inspection will be conducted regularly to ensure that the private school especially tahfiz school get the guidance from SIRC*

Another important element of monitoring is on reporting where the operator needs to submit the report to the regulator on regular basis. For example, regulator C stated that:

*“Tahfiz schools need to submit the financial report to SIRC yearly. However, there were some schools that did not comply with this requirement”*

Based on the response from the regulator, there is a compliance issue that needs to be solved by the regulator to ensure the sub-element of monitoring can be done effectively. Without a proper report from the school operator, the regulator may not know the problem of tahfiz school, especially on the financial issue.

Private tahfiz schools are expected to follow the standard operating procedure (SOP) in managing school matters. If they failed to follow this SOP, regulators will give them a reminder letter and will assist the school to solve the problem, especially on the registration issue. For example, regulator B stated that

*“Unregistered schools will be given a reminder letter by MAIS. MAIS will assist them in registering their school”*

The regulator also provides a good support system to ensure private tahfiz schools can offer the best education to the *huffaz*. For example, regulator C stated that

*“We will appoint one Quranic teacher in all tahfiz schools in state C. The salary will be paid by SIRC”*

The success of any mission requires an organization to plan ahead. Tahfiz education will not have a clear path without a proper plan. There is a need for the regulator to exercise and implement a proper plan to *achieve the objective of increasing the number of huffaz in Malaysia*. Regulator C quoted that

*“Among our future plans are to increase the number of Huffaz, improving the professionalism of tahfiz teachers, adapting the national curriculum and offer other skills to tahfiz students with the cooperation of community college”*

In contrast, operators of tahfiz schools did not emphasize much on these elements much even though school registration, annual reports, and curriculum are the core issues of tahfiz schools. Regulators quoted more on these sub-elements because the root cause of unsystematic tahfiz school governance mostly starts with non-compliance with procedures, even though these procedures have been agreed upon and cleared at the early stage of school registration.



The last element of leadership that has been analysed is implementation. However, this element is only emphasized by the operator. This might be due to the implementation aspect related to the daily operation of the school such as memorization methods, teaching methods, system to keep student records, number of students, and new student recruitment procedures. Typically, these aspects do not receive direct intervention from the regulatory body. Most of the regulators will not intervene in the daily operation of tahfiz except if there is an issue of breaking any rules or enactment stated by state Islamic religious councils. Among the responses of the operators related to the implementation are:

*“The progress of memorization will be recorded using Advanced School Information System (ASIS) “*

*“Even though the progress of memorization will be recorded using IPAD, the memorization process is still using the physical Quran*

Both quotations are related to the process of memorizing Al-Quran by *huffaz* and how the operator will monitor the process to ensure the systematic record is available for future reference.

In conclusion, not all elements of leadership are being emphasized equally by both regulators and operators. However, some of these main elements and sub-elements are inculcated in the governance of tahfiz school.

### **Conclusion**

Islam has, from its inception, placed special attention on education and has enjoyed a long and rich intellectual tradition. *‘Ilm* occupies a significant position within Islam and has been given privileged on all occasions. However, Islamic education, regardless of which form, must have comprehensive governance in the quest for excellence by inculcating and practicing effective leadership. Based on the finding in the earlier section, it can be concluded that leadership elements are exist and in practice by both parties, regulator, and operator. This leadership element can be improved if both parties play their roles effectively. Below is the area of concern that might be considered by regulators and operators to enhance the leadership element in managing private tahfiz schools.

Area of concern	Recommendation to regulator	Recommendation to operator
Management	Should be more active in getting feedback from tahfiz institution	Improving management skills by attending any management skills course. The young <i>huffaz</i> should start from the bottom before deciding to be a school tahfiz owner.
	Financial assistance should not be limited to the infrastructure only	
Roles & Responsibilities	Tahfiz schools should be monitored on a regular basis, only when they want to renew their license. This is to ensure immediate action can be taken if any issue arises.	Should comply with all the procedures stated in the registration manual especially in submitting the report to the regulator
	The regulator can ask for a mandatory report from the school operator based on the specific interval. The regulator can impose a penalty, or the license might not be renewed if the operator failed to submit the report.	
Implementation	Should discuss with the stakeholders the best curriculum to be implemented in the private tahfiz school. This is to ensure tahfiz students can plan their future better.	The implementation of tahfiz curriculum should consider the reality of employability. <i>Huffaz</i> should be equipped with the related knowledge that may help them when they complete their memorization process.

The results also highlighted the quotation gap between the regulator and operator where the regulator quoted the highest frequency element of leadership as compared to the operator. It is recommended that future research can investigate the contributing factor of this quotation gap by both parties. This might reduce the frequency gap between these two parties.

On the other hand, tahfiz operators also need to focus on preparing short or long-term planning to improve the teaching and learning process by getting a professional expert to help them in their planning. With good planning, tahfiz school can move forward to offer a better choice of education to all Muslims in the world.

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