

Educational Methods and Instructional Media in Religious Schools in Malaysia: A Case Study of Dar Al-Hadith Al-Falfalaniyyah School, Penang

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of educational methods and instructional media at Dar Al-Hadith Al-Falfalaniyyah School in Penang, using a religious school in Malaysia as a case study. The study aimed to identify the main teaching methods used in the school, examine perceptions of their importance and actual availability, and determine the gap between educational priorities and classroom practice. A descriptive quantitative design was employed, using a structured questionnaire administered to a purposive sample of 42 participants, comprising teachers, administrators or educational supervisors, and students, during the 2024/2025 academic year. The instrument covered two domains: educational methods (12 items) and instructional media (13 items), each assessed for importance and availability on a three-point Likert scale. Internal consistency validity was supported by statistically significant Pearson correlation coefficients across all items, while reliability coefficients measured by Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.853 to 0.960, indicating strong reliability. The findings show that both domains recorded high levels of perceived importance, with educational methods scoring a mean of 2.897 (96.56%) and instructional media scoring 2.718 (90.60%). However, availability scores were lower, with means of 2.623 (87.43%) for educational methods and 2.546 (84.86%) for instructional media, revealing gaps of 9.13% and 5.74%, respectively. The study concludes that the main challenge is pedagogical rather than merely material, and that strengthening teacher professional development, institutional support, and educational planning is essential for improving the quality of religious education in Malaysia.

Keywords: Religious Schools, Islamic Education, Educational Methods, Instructional Media, Malaysia, Penang

Introduction

Religious schools continue to play an important role in preserving Islamic identity, transmitting knowledge, and fostering moral development among Muslim students in Malaysia. Within this context, Dar Al-Hadith Al-Falfalaniyyah School in Penang provides a useful case for examining how religious institutions combine Islamic and Arabic studies with broader educational practices while maintaining authentic Islamic values.

The present study addresses the educational role of religious schools by examining the teaching methods and instructional media used at Dar Al-Hadith Al-Falfalaniyyah School. The school was selected because graduates of Al-Azhar University founded it, it is located in a context where students require strong religious guidance to preserve Muslim identity, and it represents an institution with which the researchers had direct academic familiarity.

The core problem of the study is that some students in religious schools may still exhibit behavioural challenges, raising questions about the adequacy of the educational environment, teaching methods, and instructional support in such institutions. Since religious schools are expected to combine academic excellence with moral formation, examining the alignment between educational priorities and actual implementation is both academically and practically significant.

Accordingly, the study was guided by three research questions: (1) What educational role do religious schools in Malaysia perform, as reflected in Dar Al-Hadith Al-Falfalaniyyah School? (2) What does the school employ the most important educational methods? Moreover, (3) What are the principal instructional media and tools used in the teaching process?

Literature Review

Educational research in school settings commonly relies on well-established methodological literature to ensure that research design, sampling procedures, instrument construction, and statistical analysis are aligned with accepted academic standards. In this study, the methodological orientation is consistent with widely used references in educational inquiry, particularly those addressing quantitative design, questionnaire-based data collection, and statistical treatment of field data. Creswell (2012) explains that quantitative educational research is especially suitable when a study seeks to describe trends, measure perceptions, and examine relationships among variables through structured instruments. This orientation is directly relevant to the present study, which investigates the perceived importance and actual availability of educational methods and instructional media through a questionnaire administered to respondents within a specific school setting (Creswell, 2012).

The issue of sampling is equally important in field-based educational studies, especially when the research is conducted within a limited institutional environment. Dattalo (2008) emphasises that sample selection should be guided by the practical nature of the research setting, the target population, and the intended level of precision, while Thompson (2012) highlights that sampling procedures must be appropriate to the structure and size of the study population. In contexts where the research population is relatively small, and the participants are directly relevant to the topic under investigation, purposive sampling may be methodologically justified. This is particularly applicable to the present study, which focuses on teachers, administrators or supervisors, and students who are directly involved in the

educational process at Dar Al-Hadith Al-Falfalanyyah School. The use of purposive sampling, therefore, is not merely a practical choice, but a defensible methodological decision grounded in educational research principles (Dattalo, 2008; Thompson, 2012).

Questionnaire development also occupies a central place in educational field research because the validity of the findings depends heavily on the quality of the instrument used. Majid (2014) argues that the construction of psychological and educational scales requires conceptual clarity, alignment between domains and items, and careful attention to the measurability of each statement. Similarly, Abu Allam (2011) notes that research instruments in the educational and psychological sciences must be designed to reflect the dimensions of the phenomenon under study and to allow data to be analysed systematically. These observations are especially relevant to the present research, where the questionnaire was divided into two main domains, namely educational methods and instructional media, and each item was assessed across the two dimensions of importance and availability. Such a structure reflects a deliberate effort to translate abstract educational concepts into measurable indicators that can capture both normative perceptions and practical realities within the school environment (Abu Allam, 2011; Majid, 2014).

A further methodological issue concerns instrument validity and reliability, both of which are indispensable in empirical educational studies. Abu Allam (2011) explains that validity concerns the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure. In contrast, reliability refers to the instrument's consistency in producing stable results. Majid (2014) similarly stresses the need for expert review, internal consistency checks, and reliability testing when constructing educational measures. In quantitative educational research, such procedures are necessary to ensure that the resulting findings can be interpreted with confidence. The present study follows this logic by subjecting the questionnaire to expert review and then examining internal consistency using item–dimension correlations and reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The manuscript reports that all correlation coefficients were positive and statistically significant and that all alpha values exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, thereby indicating that the instrument was suitable for field application (Abu Allam, 2011; Majid, 2014; Field, 2009).

The statistical analysis adopted in the study is also well supported by established literature. Field (2009) provides a widely accepted framework for using SPSS in educational and social science research, particularly for descriptive statistics, measures of dispersion, and inferential tests such as analysis of variance. Abu Allam (2011) likewise discusses the importance of using means, percentages, and standard deviations in describing educational phenomena, especially when the purpose is to identify patterns in respondents' evaluations. In the present study, these statistical procedures are appropriate because the research does not merely seek to identify whether certain methods or media are present, but rather to compare perceived importance with actual availability and to determine the size of the gap between them. This analytical approach adds value to the study by moving beyond simple description and providing a more diagnostic reading of the school's educational condition (Abu Allam, 2011; Field, 2009).

From a substantive perspective, the manuscript indicates that several previous studies have examined the role of religious schools in Malaysia across different states, thereby confirming

that this educational sector has attracted scholarly attention. However, the discussion in the source text makes clear that the existing body of work remains uneven in focus, with many studies addressing general educational roles, curricula, or institutional contributions rather than the detailed relationship between educational ideals and classroom implementation. This is an important point because religious schools are often discussed in terms of their doctrinal, moral, or curricular significance. At the same time, the practical dimensions of pedagogy and instructional support may receive less systematic empirical attention.

The manuscript specifically identifies a related thesis by Muhammad Asril bin Sheikh Hashim entitled *Tahfiz Teachers' Perceptions toward the Curriculum of Dar Al-Hadith Study Centre in Penang Island*, submitted in partial fulfilment of a master's degree at Universiti Utara Malaysia. According to the manuscript, the study focused on the curriculum adopted by the school under investigation, making it relevant to the institutional context of Dar Al-Hadith Al-Falfalaniyyah School. Nevertheless, the same source makes clear that the earlier study did not examine the issues explored in the present research, namely the educational methods employed by the school, the instructional media used in the teaching process, and, more importantly, the gap between the perceived importance of these elements and their actual implementation in practice.

This distinction is significant because curriculum analysis and pedagogical implementation, although related, are not identical areas of inquiry. A curriculum-focused study may explain what content is intended to be taught and how the educational programme is conceptually structured. However, it does not necessarily reveal how teachers conduct classroom interaction, how students experience teaching methods, or whether educational tools are sufficiently available to support learning. By contrast, the present study addresses the operational dimension of schooling. It examines whether educational methods such as dialogue, teamwork, critical thinking, memorisation, moral instruction, and role modelling are not only valued in principle but also implemented in classroom practice. It also investigates whether instructional media, including visual aids, religious references, technological tools, library access, and community activities, are meaningfully available within the educational environment.

In this sense, the current study fills an identifiable gap in the literature by shifting attention from curriculum as a formal framework to pedagogy as lived educational practice. Its contribution lies in linking two evaluative dimensions that are often discussed separately: the normative dimension of educational importance and the practical dimension of educational availability. This is especially relevant in the context of religious schools, where strong educational ideals may coexist with limitations in teacher training, infrastructure, planning, or institutional support. By empirically measuring the discrepancy between what participants regard as educationally important and what is actually implemented, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of institutional strengths and developmental needs within Islamic schooling in Malaysia.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive quantitative approach to investigate the current state of educational methods and instructional media at Dar Al-Hadith Al-Falfalaniyyah School (Creswell, 2012). Data were collected using a questionnaire specifically designed for the field

study and analysed in SPSS and Microsoft Excel, employing descriptive statistics and gap analysis (Abu Allam, 2011; Field, 2009; Majid, 2014).

Research Design and Participants

The study population comprised teachers and educational staff at Dar Al-Hadith Al-Falfalaniyyah School in Penang during the 2024/2025 academic year, while the sample was purposively selected to include those most closely connected to the research problem (Dattalo, 2008; Thompson, 2012). The total sample comprised 42 participants, including 12 teachers, 7 administrators or educational supervisors, and 23 students. In terms of experience, 8 participants had less than 5 years, 17 had 5 to 9 years, and 17 had 10 years or more.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire served as the primary data-collection instrument and was structured into three sections: demographic data, educational methods, and instructional media (Creswell, 2012; Majid, 2014). The educational methods domain contained 12 items, whereas the instructional media domain contained 13 items. Each item was evaluated across two dimensions, namely degree of importance and degree of availability, using a three-point Likert scale consisting of high (3), medium (2), and low (1) (Majid, 2014).

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review by specialists in education, curricula, teaching methods, measurement, and evaluation (Majid, 2014). Internal consistency validity was examined by calculating Pearson correlation coefficients between each item and its corresponding dimension, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha (Abu Allam, 2011; Field, 2009; Majid, 2014). All coefficients were statistically acceptable, with alpha values ranging from 0.853 to 0.960, indicating strong internal consistency of the instrument.

Data Analysis

The statistical analysis relied on frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, and standard deviations to describe participant responses (Abu Allam, 2011; Field, 2009). The researchers also converted mean scores into percentages. They calculated the gap between importance and availability using the formula $\text{Gap} = \text{Importance Percentage} - \text{Availability Percentage}$ to identify strengths and weaknesses in educational practice. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to assess differences in responses according to job position and years of experience (Field, 2009).

Results

The overall findings indicate that participants attributed very high importance to educational methods and high importance to instructional media, but reported lower levels of actual availability in both domains. Educational methods recorded a mean importance score of 2.897 (96.56%) and a mean availability score of 2.623 (87.43%), producing a gap of 9.13%. Instructional media recorded a mean importance score of 2.718 (90.60%) and a mean availability score of 2.546 (84.86%), producing a smaller but still notable gap of 5.74%.

Educational Methods

All items in the educational methods domain received high importance ratings, ranging from 92.07% to 100.00%, which indicates broad agreement on the educational value of both modern and traditional teaching approaches. The highest availability was found in behavioural and moral education (mean = 2.810; 93.67%) and good role modelling (mean = 2.714; 90.47%), while lower availability was observed in encouraging critical thinking and integrating theory with practice (both means = 2.476; 82.53%).

The most substantial gaps in this domain concerned the integration of theoretical and practical aspects in lessons, the encouragement of critical thinking and creative analysis, teamwork, and dialogue-based teaching. These findings suggest that while respondents strongly value interactive and student-centred pedagogy, these methods are not implemented as consistently as their perceived importance would require.

Instructional Media

In the instructional media domain, importance ratings ranged from 84.13% to 96.83%, again indicating broad agreement on the value of diverse educational tools. The highest availability scores were reported for integrating stories from the Prophet's biography into teaching (mean = 2.714; 90.48%), using approved books in Hadith teaching (mean = 2.714; 90.48%), and relying on religious books and references as primary sources (mean = 2.667; 88.89%).

The largest gaps related to the provision of a classroom environment equipped with supportive resources (gap = 9.524), student access to the library (gap = 7.937), participation in community activities (gap = 7.936), and the use of visual educational aids (gap = 7.936). These results indicate that practical constraints in infrastructure, planning, and resource activation continue to limit the school's ability to realise its instructional aspirations fully.

Group Differences

ANOVA results showed no statistically significant differences in perceptions according to job position across the four analysed dimensions, with significance values above 0.05 in all cases (Field, 2009). Similarly, no statistically significant differences were found across years of experience, indicating broad convergence in respondents' evaluations of both the importance and the availability of educational practices in the school.

Discussion

The results reveal a pattern that is particularly significant for religious education: respondents recognise the importance of both pedagogical development and instructional support, yet practical implementation lags behind this awareness. The larger gap in educational methods compared with instructional media suggests that the primary challenge is not simply the presence or absence of resources, but the pedagogical capacity to translate educational ideals into sustained classroom practice.

Several explanations emerge from the manuscript's analysis, including insufficient teacher training, pressure from dense curricula, limited administrative and supervisory support, and the persistence of a traditional educational culture that privileges rote learning over critical engagement. At the same time, the relatively high levels of implementation of moral education, oral recitation, approved religious texts, and Prophetic biography suggest that

religious schools remain strong in domains deeply embedded in their intellectual and pedagogical traditions.

This pattern may be interpreted as a form of partial pedagogical modernisation: the school shows strong commitment to its foundational Islamic educational ethos, but has not yet fully institutionalised student-centred strategies such as critical thinking, collaborative learning, and practical integration. As such, meaningful improvement requires not only equipment and materials, but also sustained professional development, stronger planning, and a more deliberate alignment between educational philosophy and classroom execution.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Dar Al-Hadith Al-Falfalaniyyah School possesses a strong educational awareness of the importance of effective teaching methods and instructional media. However, the degree of actual implementation remains below the desired level in both domains. The most prominent weaknesses concern the integration of theory and practice, critical thinking, classroom resources, and library activation. In contrast, moral education and the use of core religious teaching resources appear comparatively strong.

The findings imply that improving religious education in this context requires a strategic emphasis on teacher professional development, stronger institutional and supervisory support, improved educational planning, and greater integration of instructional resources into daily teaching practice. In this way, the school can move from awareness of educational quality toward a more comprehensive and sustainable enactment of that quality in practice.

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