TOJET
The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology

ISSN 2146-7242

Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology

Special Issue for INTE 2017
December 2017

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TOJET
01.12.2017

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ISSN: 2146 - 7242

Indexed by
Education Resources Information Center – **ERIC**
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Published in TURKEY

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Message from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Colleagues,

We are very pleased to publish Special Issue for INTE-2017, ITICAM 2017 & IDEC 2017 conferences. This issue covers the papers presented at International Conference on New Horizons in Education, International Trends and Issues in Communication & Media Conference and International Distance Education Conference which were held in Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. These papers are about different research scopes and approaches of new developments and innovation in education, communication, media and technology.

Call for Papers

TOJET invites you article contributions. Submitted articles should be about all aspects of educational technology. The articles should be original, unpublished, and not in consideration for publication elsewhere at the time of submission to TOJET. Manuscripts must be submitted in English. TOJET is guided by its editors, guest editors and advisory boards. If you are interested in contributing to TOJET as an author, guest editor or reviewer, please send your CV to tojet.editor@gmail.com.

December, 2017
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Sakarya University

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The Dynamics of *Tahfiz* Institutions: A Case Study of Three Best Practice Models of *Tahfiz* Education in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT
Amidst the modern and globalised world, the Malaysian Muslim society has become more aware of the importance and benefits of memorising the holy Quran. This has caused the emergence of many *tahfiz* institutions and centres around the country. This paper describes the standards and best practices discovered in three *tahfiz* institutions namely 'Tahfiz Pondok Durani', 'Pondok Bustanul Ariffin' and 'Maahad Tahfiz al-Kayyis'. In doing so, the study employs the qualitative method through document analysis and in-depth face-to-face interview sessions with the principals. The paper concludes with a discussion on the roles *tahfiz* institutions and centres might play in producing a well-balanced generation, and the associated standards that would allow other *tahfiz* institutions to emulate.

Keywords: *tahfiz*, Quran, standards, best practices

INTRODUCTION

Recent developments indicate that *tahfiz* institutions and centres have started to gain special attention from the public (Basirah Abu Bakar & Mohd Yakub @ Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff, 2016; Noor Hisham Md Nawi, Nur Azuki Yusuff, Mohd Binyamin Che Yaacob & Nasrul Hakim Salleh, 2014; Mohd Aderi Che Noh, 2017; Nordin Ahmad, 2015). Many of them are in existence following the responses to the reality of today's fast-paced world

where life is very much secularised, and the Islamic values are becoming more trivial and insignificant each day. *Tahfiz* education is introduced to all who are interested, including children as early as six years old up to adults.

Islamic Education in Malaysia

In general, the development and implementation of Islamic education in the Malaysian context can be discussed from two angles which are before and after its independence. Historically, before the British era, the Malaysian education system among the Malays was mainly concerned with the teaching and learning of Islamic teachings and the Quran (Abdul Halim Tamuri & Che Pee Saad, 2008; Rosnani Hashim, 2004; Norlizah Che Hassan, Fathiyah Mohd Fakhruddin, Ahmad Fauzi Mohd Ayub, Lukman Abd Mutalib & Wan Marzuki Wan Jaafar, 2015). Thus, for the children, attending school was equivalent to learning Islam and Quran which were mostly conducted at the *surau* (prayer hall) led by an *imam* or *lebai* (local religious leaders or scholars).

Traditionally, the memorisation of the Quran has taken place in *pondok* (traditional religious school). Circa 1966, the first Malaysian Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj has founded the *Tahfiz* Institution, inspired by the visit of Sheikh al-Azhar Sheikh Mahmud Syaltut during his official visit to Malaysia to officiate the opening of the National Mosque (Norlizah Che Hassan, Fathiyah Mohd Fakhruddin, Ahmad Fauzi Mohd Ayub, Lukman Abd Mutalib & Wan Marzuki Wan Jaafar, 2015).

***Huffaz* and *Tahfiz* Institutions**

Tahfiz institutions are centres that are "accountable in educating students who can memorize and recite the whole Al-Quran" (ibid., 2015, p. 235). According to Hamidah, Maheran, Abd Halim and Muhammad Mukhlis (2014), the number of tahfiz centres in Malaysia has increased from only 58 to 278 in twelve years (1999 – 2011). Furthermore, it is found that more than 91% of the number is privately owned.

Memorising the Quran is no easy task, and someone who manages to do so has a special place in Islam. According to Murihah Abdullah, Abdul Hafiz Abdullah, Arieff Salleh Rosman and Mohd Faeez Ilias (2016), a *huffaz* (someone who memorises the whole of the Quran) has several responsibilities which include:

1. honesty and integrity towards the memorisation of the holy book of Quran.
2. being consistent in reciting and finishing the reading of the Quran.
3. frequently and habitually reading the Quran at night time.
4. ensuring the memorisation of the Quran stays in the memory.
5. upholding the image of a *huffaz*.
6. exemplifying good manners.
7. trying to build skills so as not to make the Quran a source of income.

According to Mohd Anuar Abdul Rahman and Norshahril Abdul Hamid (2011), the immediate surrounding of students is seen as an important element in shaping the personality of an individual. Thus, in order to build and shape a successful *huffaz*, many *tahfiz* institutions will set certain routines for students which include the memorisation schedule, time management, and also the other compulsory practices which must be adhered to by the students (Murihah Abdullah et.al., 2016). The routine is usually viewed as a group practice to create a suitable atmosphere for a *huffaz*. This kind of positive atmosphere will be the catalyst for students in memorising the Quran, and at the same time avoiding and blocking students from any negative or immoral elements.

In this era of the fourth industrial revolution, there are many challenges faced by humankinds especially in ensuring the best education for the future generations. In fact, Azam Othman, Suhailah Hussien, Ismail Sheikh Ahmad, Adnan Abd Rashid and Mastura Badzis (2017) emphasise that in spite of the many ideals and aspirations portrayed in the 21st Century education, everything is very much "secular-oriented", as "there is no emphasis on the students' role as *Insan* and servants of Allah" (p.205). Although this is the reason why many parents resort to enrolling their children into *tahfiz* institutions which is to gain Islamic knowledge as a form of 'protection' in this demanding world, there are still negative, disapproving and pessimistic views regarding the operations of these institutions. Hence, this study proposes to look into the practices and operations of these institutions and highlight those with the best practices. The guiding research questions are:

RQ1: How are the *tahfiz* institutions managed?

RQ2: What are the characteristics of the *tahfiz* institutions deemed as having the 'best practices'?

Thus, this paper presents the findings of a qualitative study that sought to share, impart and reveal best practices of selected *tahfiz* institutions that can be emulated by other institutions to ensure students at these institutions can be at par with students from the mainstream education system.

THE STUDY

This study was part of a larger life-long Islamic education project funded by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia that was designed to look at the existing life-long Islamic learning programmes and consequently offer suitable recommendations to promote better life-long Islamic learning culture in the Malaysian society. Besides the introduction earlier, this paper discusses the research context, research design and its findings based on the research questions posed. It ends with the discussion regarding the future of *tahfiz* institutions and some recommendations regarding the issue.

Research Context

Based on the data on SIMPENI (Islamic Education Information System Portal), a website managed by JAKIM (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia), there are 669 registered *tahfiz* institutions in Malaysia (http://simpeni.islam.gov.my/simpeniv2/index.php). The research team went to the different zones in Peninsular Malaysia – North, Central, South and East covering 12 *tahfiz* institutions. This paper discusses the three institutions—Tahfiz Pondok Durani and Pondok Bustanul Ariffin, both located in the central zone, and Maahad Tahfiz al-Kayyis situated in the northern zone, which are deemed to have the best practices. This is elucidated in the research findings.

Research Design

This is a qualitative study whereby the researchers employed in-depth face-to-face interviews with the *mudir* (principals) of the *tahfiz* institutions, and also document analyses of the institutions' formal documents and websites or blogs. The document analyses also include photographs of the institutions and their activities.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

RQ 1: How are the *tahfiz* institutions managed?

Tahfiz Pondok Durani

Tahfiz Pondok Durani, located at Teras Jernang, Selangor is led by its principal, Tn. Hj. Nasir Malik. When asked what has made him sacrifice many things and set up the institution, he mentioned,

"*I accidentally came across a book entitled 'Negeri Lima Menara' (A State of Five Towers) which describes Gontor, an Islamic institution in Indonesia—which amazes and inspires me to establish a tahfiz institution myself. That's how it started*".

Despite the many challenges faced e.g. financial and staffing, Tahfiz Pondok Durani is still relevant, and it stands among the centres chosen by parents to educate their children. Indeed, its establishment is the response to the reality of today's world where life is very much secularised and Islam is marginalised. The institution's vision is to prepare its graduates and alumni to spread in a variety of fields, professions and vocations covering all aspects of life, contributing to the society, and at the same time, instilling Islamic values. The vision is hoped to be made a reality through the development of its students.

Students development at Tahfiz Pondok Durani is emphasised through three main components as described in

Figure 1.

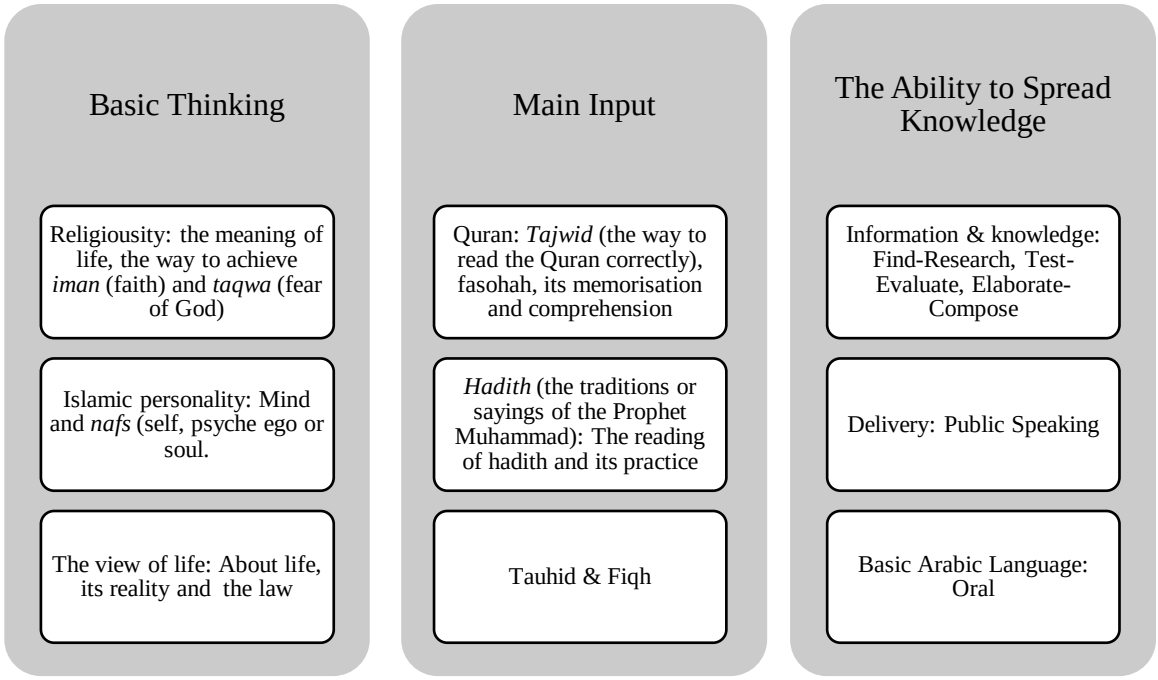

Figure 1: The Development of Students at Tahfiz Pondok Durani

These components, coupled with the vision and mission of the *mudir* (principal) as well as teachers and other school infrastructure, help in producing students who can memorise the Quran, indirectly building 'self' which consequently building the Ummah. Figure 2 below contains this aspiration.

			TAHFIZ PONDOK DURANI			
	Target					Process
A			**BUILDING SELF**			
A1	Level of Achievement	Know & knowing	Understand & Practise	Appreciate & Spread	Faqih (a Muslim theologian versed in the religious law of Islam)	Evaluation, Tazkirah (A brief talk (about the religion of Islam) as a reminder, Tests
A2	Development					
	A2.1 Basic Thinking	Knowledge	Iman (Faith)	Taqwa (Fear of God)	Religiosity	Forums & Discussions
		Akidah (formal statement of faith)	Fikrah (daya berfikir)	Nafsiyyah	Sahsiah (Whole nature or character of a person /	Workshops and Practices

				Personality)	
	About life	Reality	Law	View of life	
A2.2 Basic Intelligence	Research	Know	Understand	Manage – Use	
	EQ	IQ	PQ		
	Feelings	Situation	Activities		
	Self & others	Challenges, thinking & chances	Sports & entrepreneurship		
A2.3 Main slots	SQ				Lectures
	Quran	Memorise 30 juz >> Know Harfiah >> Understand > Practise			
	Hadith	Selective memorisation >> know Interpret >> Understand > Practise			
	Tauhid & Fiqh	Learn >> Know > Understand > Practise			
A2.4 The Ability to Research, Test & Spread Knowledge	Internalising knowledge	Arrange - Adapt	Use of Techniques	Think, Compose, Deliver: Public Speaking	Workshops & Practices
B	**BUILDING THE UMMAH**				

(Based on Tahfiz Pondok Durani's school booklet)

Figure 2:

According to the principal, new students entering the centre will be asked about basic Islamic knowledge to gauge their level of understanding towards Islam in terms of *Rukun Islam* (the Pillars of Islam), *Rukun Iman* (the Pillars of Faith), and *Solat* (Prayers).

The principal also assimilates his past managerial experience as a manager in a big factory into the management of the *tahfiz* centre. He includes some western approaches in running Tahfiz Pondok Durani.
"I include Peter Sach's Organisational Learning, Process Thinking, Personal Mastery and also Ungku Aziz's Thinking Model. We will discuss the khutbah (the primary formal public preaching in Islam carried out at (noon) congregation prayer on Friday). We also have public speaking on Saturdays".
These sessions assist in generating more well-rounded individuals who can be involved effectively in intelligent discussions and debates. In addition, with the help of some parents, for example those who own a car workshop, who offer their expertise to teach students skills such as fixing the car, students are also exposed to acquiring living skills, apart from the religious knowledge they obtain at the institution.

Pondok Bustanul Ariffin

'Pondok Bustanul Ariffin' is a well-known tahfiz *centre*, not only among the local community but also among Malaysians as a whole. It is located in Kampung Labuhan Dagang, Banting, Selangor, Malaysia. This *tahfiz* centre has been in operation since 2003 on a 3 ½ acres of land. The current enrolment is around 200 students which include foreign students from Acheh, Cambodia and Eqypt, while its alumni have reached around 2,000 of

which some have come back and offered their services to the centre itself, and others who pursue their studies in and out of Malaysia.

With its comprehensive mission and vision of 'Knowing yourself, thus knowing your God', the centre has made it clear to the students that they will be guided in the path of Islamic teachings. In making this a reality, the centre employs capable and dedicated teachers which include the alumni of the centre, al-Azhar University graduates, and also others who are qualified to teach Islamic knowledge subjects. The daily schedule at the institution starts as early as 4.30 a.m. with *Solat Tahajjud* (night prayer), reciting the Quran and performing other *sunat* (non-obligatory) acts of worship, and *Solat Subuh* (fajr prayer). Then, at 8 – 11 a.m. the students will go into their respective classes. At 12, all students are made compulsory to have *Qailullah* (a nap before *Zuhr* prayer which was practiced by Prophet Muhammad S.A.W.). After lunch and *Solat Zuhr* (noon prayer), students will continue with classes until 4 p.m., and then they will recite the Quran again and also perform *Solat Asr* (afternoon prayer), before having their daily leisure sports activities such as playing football, archery and paragliding. Apart from that, students are also involved in the institution's Arabic Language Club to improve in the language of the Quran.

The principal holds a B.A. Syariah degree from Al-Azhar University, Egypt and has a broad experience as a religious teacher. He has also undergone additional periods of *ilm*-seeking at different institutions which include 4 years in Terengganu, 4 years in Thailand and another 4 years in Syria. All these experiences and religious knowledge that he has gained contribute to the way he manages Pondok Bustanul Ariffin, its study system and also its students of various backgrounds. The principal has also gained the trust from parents who face problems with their children such as drug addicts or ex-convicts, to assist in their moral rehabilitation through the Islamic ways.

In addition, due to the centre's location and its wide space, it is possible to integrate valuable skills such as wiring, welding or flooring for the students to learn as an additional element. There is also a palm oil plantation area which students help to work on, and get the benefits too. This will allow the students to be equipped with living skills that enable them to have added values.

Madrasah Tahfiz al-Kayyis

The *tahfiz* institution is located in Pulau Pinang, the northern part of Malaysia. It is managed by the *mudir* - Ustaz Zolkarnain Tan. The teaching staff include himself, his wife and another teacher who is from Egypt. Currently, there are 53 students in the institution – 30 boys and 13 girls. The boys are based in the old mosque while the girls are in a single-storey bungalow house about three kilometres away. Formally, Al-Kayyis was established in December, 2004. Since then, 150 students have graduated where all of them have successfully memorised the 30 chapters of the Quran.

Al-Kayyis embraces the vision of 'Developing an excellent *huffaz* (a person who memorises the Quran) cum a survivor/an educator. Thus, the *mudir* ensures that the *tahfiz* is run in line with the vision. He employs the deoband system in the *tahfiz*. Ustaz Zolkarnain studied using the same system in Pakistan for 11 years, thus he believes that it produces excellent *huffaz*. This effort has been proven very successful as the number of *huffaz* produced by Ustaz Zolkarnain has reached 150 in its 13 years of operation.

Ustaz Zolkarnain did not come from a well-to-do family, therefore, he had to struggle to be what he is today. He did all kinds of jobs, from cooking to being a factory worker. However, at the same time, he was always invited to be the *imam* for *terawikh* prayers (prayers done in the month of Ramadhan). His life experience has taught him to be independent. He believes in 'the hand that gives is better than the hand that receives'. In other words, he trusts that independence leads to success. This is evident in his management of the *tahfiz* where everything is run by the students – they cook, clean, wash their own clothes, entertain guests and others. Ustaz Zolkarnain relayed that once he received 40 guests and all was handled by his students. He said "the guests couldn't believe that his students did the cooking. They called the students and asked. They praised: *sedap* (delicious)". Furthermore, when we visited the two locations of the *tahfiz* – the mosque and the house, both were clean and

spotless, even the kitchen. They have to follow the timetable strictly. Besides doing the everyday living skills, the students are also exposed to horse riding. It is one of the Prophet's *sunnahs* (activities done and favoured by the Prophet). Ustaz Zolkarnain has two horses behind his house where every day, 6 students take turn to practise horse riding. He said "they could also be jockeys".

The students can usually memorise the Quran between 2 to 5 years. Once done, they can continue to take the mainstream exam and pursue their studies. In fact, one of the earlier students is doing his doctorate degree. Ustaz Zolkarnain admitted that not everyone can complete the 30 chapters of Quran memorisation. To those who cannot, he gives them a choice. He shared "if they cannot complete, I give them a choice, to stay, behave and try to complete it …or to have the opportunity to work". He then revealed that he has set up the business wing of the *tahfiz*. This includes the drinking water factory, the clinic, the sundry shop and the fish-rearing business.

It can be surmised that the students' exposure to being independent at the institution and also the setting up of the avenues for jobs by Ustaz Zolkarnain are steps in ensuring that the students' future is guaranteed and the institution's vision and mission are realised.

RQ2: What are the characteristics of the *tahfiz* institutions deemed as having the 'best practices'?

Based on the findings in RQ1, the researchers have ascertained several key characteristics identified as the 'best practices' in the selected *tahfiz* institutions. These characteristics include:

Characteristic 1: Broad Mission and Vision

It could be seen from the case study of the three *tahfiz* institutions that each of them has very clear mission and vision which is mainly to produce a generation of students who are steadfast in upholding the Islamic teachings and values, as well as producing a generation of *huffaz* who will preserve and practise the content of the holy book of Quran.

Characteristic 2: Motivated and optimist *Mudir* (principals)

All principals of the selected *tahfiz* institutions are far-sighted individuals who have good judgment about what is relevant in today's world, and what will be needed in the future. They are the anchor persons of the institutions, who inspire and aspire the students and also the direction of the institutions. They are also wise in making decisions, and in managing the institutions that despite the challenges faced, the institutions remain relevant and significant to the community.

Characteristic 3: Proper Time and Institutions' Management

It could be seen that all the institutions stress on appropriate time and institutional management—a crucial element that is also given paramount emphasis in Islam. This could be seen through the daily learning schedules arranged for the students, and the running of the institutions encompassing the daily routine as well as the broader management implications of risk to the institutions.

Characteristic 4: The Shaping and Development of Students

In line with the main objective of the establishment of the institutions, which is basically to revert to Islam in every aspect of life, all institutions place emphasis on the spiritual development of the students according to Islam and the Quran. Once they possess a solid foundation of the religion, they will better understand their existence as *khalifah* (servant and representative of Allah) in this world.

Characteristic 5: Integration of Living Skills

Islam is a way of life. Even though the ultimate purpose of humans' life is to obtain the blessings of Allah, Islam does not disregard the importance of living in this world. In fact, it teaches its followers to work and study hard as if they will live forever, and to serve Allah as if they will die tomorrow. This signifies that Islam puts emphasis on a balanced life. It could be observed that all the *tahfiz* institutions offer some choices of skills e.g. wiring, welding, business etc. for the students to acquire, along the journey of learning about Islam.

Discussion and Conclusion

Tahfiz institutions are seen as alternative education centres for Malaysian Muslim parents who feel that the modern, fast-paced world of today would jeopardise their children's well-being. These institutions are also viewed as worthy efforts in ensuring the balance of physical and spiritual needs of the future generations, as well as fulfilling their needs and necessities of the world and the hereafter. Nevertheless, these institutions are often criticised for being disorganised and unsystematic. This study aims to highlight some best practices of *tahfiz* institutions. Based on the research that was carried out, it can be concluded there are several key characteristics identified as the 'best practices' of selected *tahfiz* institutions. These characteristics include: 1) Broad Mission and Vision, 2) Motivated and Optimist *Mudir* (Principals), 3) Proper Time and Institutions' Management, 4) The Shaping and Development of Students and 5) Integration of Living Skills, as discussed in the Findings section.

For leaders of Islamic educational institutions, the key challenge is to meet major challenges of the 21st century while upholding the ideals of the Islamic integrated education system and realising its noble objectives. At present, a standardised framework of implementation for integrated Islamic educational institutions that is considered to be wholly accepted by Muslims is still lacking. The absence of such a framework makes it challenging for Muslim parents to make better choices for their children's education. Thus, based on the characteristics highlighted in this study, at least other *tahfiz* institutions can emulate, and pattern themselves after these *tahfiz* institutions' best practices.

Photographs of the selected *tahfiz* institutions.

Tahfiz Pondok Durani

Pondok Bustanul Ariffin

Madrasah Tahfiz al-Kayyis

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