# The Needs Analysis of Development Facilities Instrument for Private Tahfiz Schools in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

Private tahfiz schools in Malaysia have no common way to check whether their facilities are fit for safe, effective Quran memorisation; none of the sources we reviewed describes one. Weak or unsafe facilities can hold back memorisation and put boarding students at risk, yet schools, regulators and parents lack comparable evidence on facility readiness. Such evidence matters most for fire safety, because approval from the Fire and Rescue Department and the local authority decides whether a building can be used at all. This article therefore analyses the facility needs of private tahfiz schools and shows how those needs justify the content of a Development Facilities Instrument. The study is qualitative and exploratory. We drew on a literature and document review, on structured interviews with ten principals of registered tahfiz schools (one from each district of Johor), and on an interview with an officer of the Johor Islamic Religious Department (JAINJ), where 132 institutions were registered in 2023. Data were analysed descriptively and thematically, and the themes were matched against candidate instrument content. Four needs stood out: sound learning and boarding infrastructure, learning equipment and educational technology, fire safety and building control, and asset management backed by steadier funding. Each maps to one of the instrument's three sections (demography, infrastructure and equipment), and fire safety reaches both infrastructure and equipment. An instrument like this would show administrators where their gaps are, and give regulators, investors, accreditation bodies and parents a clear view of facility quality. The findings come from one state and a small purposive sample, and the instrument itself still has to be validated through expert review, piloting and reliability testing.

**Keywords:** tahfiz school; facilities; needs analysis; instrument development; school governance

## INTRODUCTION

Tahfiz schools have multiplied across Malaysia faster than their facilities. The literature we drew on describes madrasah that opened quickly, often under managers with little experience in management and governance, and links this to weaker memorisation among students (Mohamad Shahrin & Baharudin, 2013; Othman & Anas, 2020). Training good huffaz is widely seen as an investment in the country's future, so the stakes are not small.

Facilities are part of this story. A good tahfiz environment is one where students can concentrate on memorising, in buildings that are safe. Newer schools often struggle to provide comfortable classrooms, hostels, libraries and basics such as computers and projectors, and many rely on donations, so money for building and equipment is never certain.

Regulation raises the stakes. In 2023 Johor had 132 tahfiz institutions registered with the Johor Islamic Religious Department (JAINJ), yet some madrasah still fell short of what the authorities and local councils

require. Fire safety comes up again and again: without approval from the Fire and Rescue Department and the local authority, a building cannot be used at all.

What is missing is a way to turn these scattered concerns into evidence that can be compared. The Development Facilities Instrument for Private Tahfiz Schools was designed for this, with three sections: demography, infrastructure and equipment in schools. Before building and validating an instrument, though, we should check that its content answers real needs. This article asks three questions:

1. What facility needs do private tahfiz schools face, according to the literature, documents and stakeholders consulted?

2. How do these needs translate into the content of a facilities instrument?

3. Who needs the resulting data, and for what decisions?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Facilities in Tahfiz Governance

Most Malaysian studies treat facilities as one piece of wider institutional governance, not as a topic of their own. Othman and Anas (2020) trace how governance in private tahfiz schools has evolved, Azizan (2017) looks at the role of the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia (JAKIM) in monitoring them, and Mohamad Shahrin and Baharudin (2013) set out the issues and challenges of teaching and learning. In each, facilities sit beside management, finance, teachers and curriculum, and none offers a tool for measuring how ready a school's facilities are.

### What a Conducive Tahfiz Environment Contains

The literature describes a good tahfiz school as one where the setting helps students concentrate and the buildings are safe. The facilities it lists include an academic building, an administration office, a teachers' room, a meeting room, a playing field, a cooperative, a prayer hall, a laboratory, an ICT room, a canteen and fire-prevention equipment. Modern centres add comfortable lecture rooms and audio-visual aids for memorisation. There is also a religious reason to care: Islam treats cleanliness of the body, the prayer space and the home as part of worship, so hostels, toilets and prayer areas are far from optional extras.

Wider educational research points the same way. Libau and Ling (2020) show that teaching aids and feedback-rich learning environments improve the quality of student learning, which is a good reason to include equipment in any assessment of facilities.

### Recognised Constraints

The sources keep returning to four constraints.

1. Many tahfiz schools run on tight budgets and depend on donations, so spending on buildings and equipment rises and falls with what comes in.

2. Newer schools often lack comfortable classrooms, hostels, libraries and educational technology such as computers, projectors and digital resources.

3. Administrators are urged to check the expiry dates of extinguishers, hose reels, hydrants and sand buckets, keep an evacuation plan and hold regular fire drills; the building itself needs approval from the Fire and Rescue Department and the local authority.

4. Schools are advised to keep checklists of equipment bought with school funds, repair or replace what is damaged or expired, and follow departmental guidance on donated assets.

### The Gap

So the sources tell us what good facilities look like and which problems schools face. What we did not find was a multi-dimensional, evidence-based instrument that lets a school or a regulator score facility readiness against a common standard. That is the gap the instrument in this article is meant to fill.

## METHODOLOGY

### Design

The needs analysis is qualitative and exploratory. It follows a case-study approach, using interviews, observation and document analysis (Creswell, 2012). A qualitative design suits a subject that has not been measured well, and it lets the content of the instrument grow out of what stakeholders actually say.

### Participants and Sampling

We used purposive sampling, which works with small samples and allows depth (Gall & Borg, 2003). Ten principals of registered private tahfiz schools took part, one from each district of Johor (Johor Bahru, Kulai, Kota Tinggi, Pontian, Batu Pahat, Muar, Kluang, Tangkak, Segamat and Mersing), in both urban and rural areas. We also interviewed an officer of the Tahfiz Registration Unit, Islamic Education Division, JAINJ, about the background and facility development of tahfiz institutions. The ten schools stand for the 132 institutions registered with JAINJ in 2023. We do not name the schools, because finance and student welfare are sensitive topics.

### Data Sources

Table 1 lists the four data sources.

**Table 1.** Data sources of the needs analysis

| Source | What it contributed |
|---|---|
| Structured interviews, 10 principals | Funding of facilities, handling of shortages, spending on infrastructure |
| Structured interview, 1 JAINJ officer | Regulation, registration, facility issues in tahfiz management |
| Literature and document review | Facility standards, safety guidance, asset management, regulation |
| Instrument design brief | Three-section structure: demography, infrastructure, equipment |

### Instruments and Procedure

The interview questions were fixed beforehand and checked by academic experts before fieldwork. On facilities, the JAINJ officer was asked to explain the facility issues in tahfiz management, and principals were asked how their school copes with shortages of funds or facilities and how it pays for operating costs, facilities and infrastructure. Interviews took place at the school outside teaching hours so that participants could answer without pressure. They were recorded with consent and transcribed soon afterwards.

### Analysis

We analysed transcripts and documents descriptively and thematically (Figure 1), then matched the themes against candidate instrument content to make sure every proposed section answered a documented need.

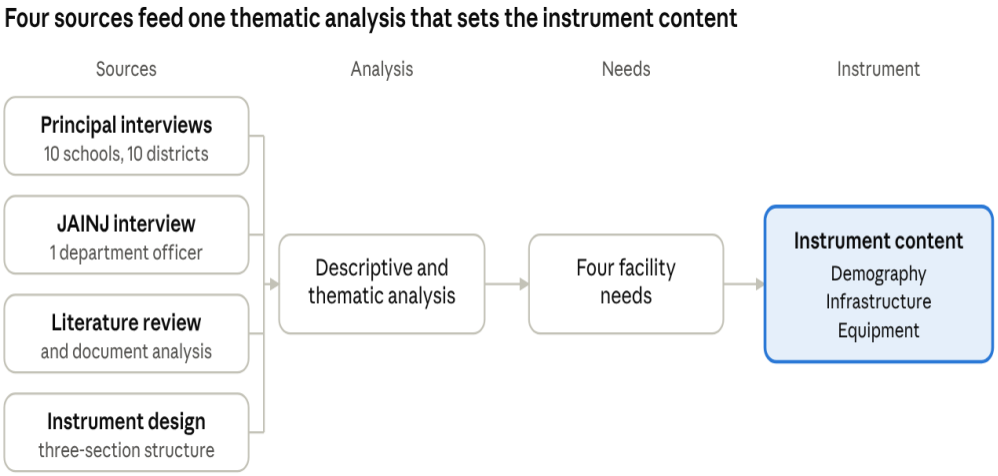



**Figure 1.** Research procedure: four sources feed one descriptive and thematic analysis, which yields the facility needs and then the instrument content.

## FINDINGS

We identified four facility needs, and each maps to a section of the instrument. Table 2 traces the chain from need to evidence to instrument content.

**Table 2.** Facility needs, supporting evidence and the instrument content they imply

| Need | Evidence | Instrument section | Candidate indicators |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adequate learning and boarding infrastructure | New schools lack comfortable classrooms, hostels and libraries; a conducive setting supports memorisation | Infrastructure | Classrooms, hostel, library, prayer hall, toilets, canteen, recreation area: presence, condition, capacity |
| Learning equipment and educational technology | Shortage of computers, projectors and digital resources; audio-visual aids support memorisation | Equipment in schools | Computers, projectors, audio-visual aids, ICT room, laboratory: quantity, working condition |
| Fire safety and building control | Expiry checks on extinguishers, hose reels, hydrants and sand buckets; evacuation plan; fire drills; approval from Fire and Rescue Department and local authority | Infrastructure and Equipment | Building approval, evacuation plan, drill frequency, safety equipment and expiry dates |
| Asset management and stable funding | Donation-dependent budgets; checklists for equipment bought with school funds; guidance on donated assets | Demography and Equipment | Registration status, funding sources, asset checklist, maintenance record |

The first two needs are the ones parents and students notice first, because they are what a child sees on arrival. The third matters most: if fire safety fails, boarders are in direct danger. The fourth helps explain why the others persist. A school that lives on irregular donations cannot plan to replace or maintain anything, so the

instrument has to record funding and asset records as well as the facilities themselves. Figure 2 summarises how the needs, the instrument sections and the users connect.

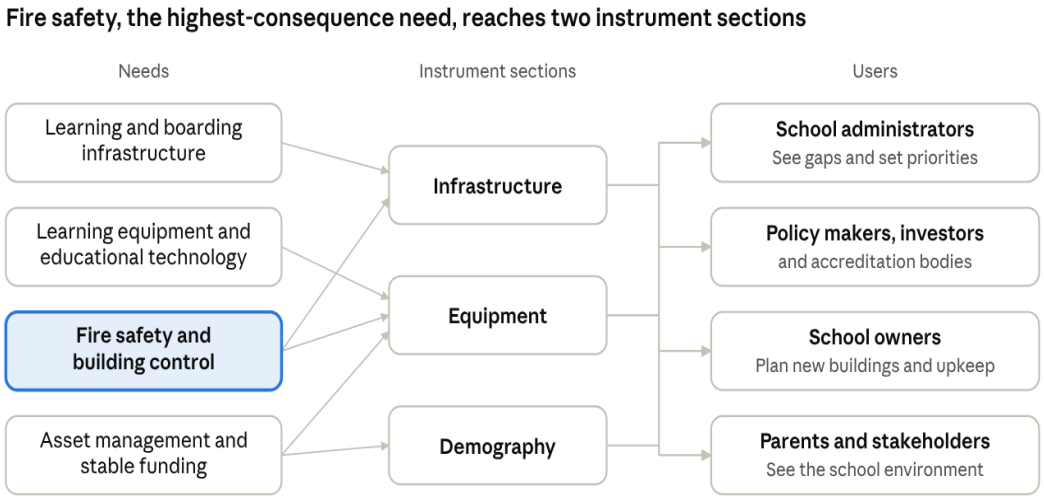



**Figure 2.** Conceptual framework: each facility need maps to one or more instrument sections, and the resulting data serves four user groups. Fire safety (highlighted) reaches both Infrastructure and Equipment.

Three features of these needs shaped the design of the instrument.

- The needs cover buildings, equipment, safety and records, so a single checklist would hide where a school is weak. Scoring therefore has to be multi-dimensional.
- Regulators and schools need a shared reference to compare a school with others and with requirements, so the instrument benchmarks against evidence.
- Location (urban or rural), the age of the school and its funding source change what counts as reasonable, so demography sits beside the other two sections as context.

**[Author note:** insert here the interview evidence from the principals and the JAINJ officer (theme counts and short quotations, anonymised by school code). The needs above are supported by the literature and documents reviewed; the interview results should confirm, qualify or extend them. Delete this note before submission.]

## DISCUSSION

Facility problems in private tahfiz schools turn out to be about more than money; they are also about missing evidence. Schools know what they lack, but regulators, donors and parents cannot compare one school with another, so support tends to go to the best-known schools rather than the neediest.

This fits the governance literature. Othman and Anas (2020) and Azizan (2017) describe a sector in which private operators grow faster than oversight. An instrument that scores facilities on common indicators would give oversight bodies a practical way to keep up, without relying on inspection reports that vary from officer to officer.

The instrument serves four groups, each making a different decision.

- School administrators can see gaps in infrastructure and equipment and set priorities within a limited budget.
- Policy makers, investors and accreditation bodies can direct funding and recognition using comparable data.

- School owners can plan ahead, for example by phasing new buildings and replacing expired safety equipment.
- Parents and stakeholders can see what the school environment is like before they enrol a child.

Fire safety deserves a closer look. Boarding is common in tahfiz schools, and the literature keeps stressing expiry checks, evacuation plans and drills. Giving these items indicators of their own, rather than one line in a general checklist, reflects how much is at stake.

Two caveats. The needs reported here come from one state and a small purposive sample, so they say nothing about national prevalence. And a facilities score can put pressure on schools that lack resources for reasons beyond their control, so the instrument should come with support and not be used only to rank schools.

## CONCLUSION

Private tahfiz schools need a common, evidence-based way to measure facility readiness, and this needs analysis supports a three-section instrument covering demography, infrastructure and equipment. Four needs shape its content: learning and boarding infrastructure, learning equipment and educational technology, fire safety and building control, and asset management with stable funding.

Administrators can use the instrument to find and rank their gaps. Regulators, investors and accreditation bodies can use the same data to target support and recognition, and parents get a clearer view of the school environment.

The sample is small (ten schools and one officer, all in Johor, chosen purposively), so the findings describe needs in context and do not estimate how common they are nationally. The instrument has been designed but not yet validated.

Next, the instrument needs content validation by expert panels, a pilot and a reliability test. Sampling should extend to other states so that it serves private tahfiz schools across Malaysia, and later work should test whether facility scores relate to safety outcomes and to the quality of memorisation.

### Ethics Statement

Participants gave consent to take part and to be recorded, and schools are not named in reporting. [Authors to confirm: ethical approval body and reference number.]

### Conflict Of Interest

[Authors to confirm.] The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Data Availability

The interview data are not publicly available, because they contain sensitive information about school finance and student welfare and participants were assured of confidentiality. [Authors to confirm.]

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