Quality Education for Inclusivity and Sustainable Malaysia: Tahfiz-TVET Operators' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

To date, Tahfiz centres are not only training their students to learn and memorize Al-Qur'an but also furnishing them with the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). As of 2024, Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) has authorized four of its skills institutes (IKM and KKTM) to conduct Tahfiz programs: (i) IKM Lumut which specializes in welding, (ii) IKM Jasin which specializes in automotive, (iii) IKM Besut which specializes in air-conditioning, and (iv) KKTM Ledang which specializes in bio-medical engineering. Such educational endeavours have enhanced the quality of education, which aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) that makes the Tahfiz centres inclusive into the national mainstream policies and agenda and ultimately contributes to the country's economic sustainability. This paper aims (i) to explore the perception of Tahfiz operators on the quality of Tahfiz-TVET education, (ii) to understand how the acquired TVET knowledge and skills could offer inclusivity of Tahfiz students in the national agenda, and (iii) to identify the most in-demand TVET program among the Tahfiz students so its sustainability. This study used a qualitative approach of online interviews with three out of four registered TVET-Tahfiz MARA operators across Malaysia. This study revealed that the Tahfiz students have acquired additional and enhanced knowledge through TVET programs without abandoning their core activity of memorizing Al-Qur'an, hence assumed for a better chance of job marketability. The programs serve as an enabler that harmonizes religious knowledge with the needs of modern industry, making them more relevant in today's world of IR4.0. Among the in-demand programs offered are Automotive and Mechatronics, Welding, Modern Agriculture, Information Technology and Multimedia, Entrepreneurship and Business, Automotive and Air-conditioning, which make the activities and professions related to these more sustainable, and inclusive. For future research, this study would recommend a bibliometric analysis to understand the trend of Tahfiz-TVET programs and their graduates' marketability.

Keywords: Tahfiz-TVET, Sustainability, Inclusivity.

INTRODUCTION

Tahfiz – originates from an Arabic language which means 'to memorise' or 'to remember.' It is a spiritual process of learning Al-Qur'an by heart on 114 chapters (surah) and more than 6,000 verses (ayat) covering 30 divisions (juz), and the one who has completely memorise Al-Qur'an, called as Hafiz (male), Hafizah (female) and Huffaz (many regardless of gender).The initiatives of memorizing Al-Qur'an initially started upon the demise of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) by His companions as a mean of preserving and protecting the authenticity of Qur'anic verses for the future reference of generations, apart from compiling and writing them down in the form of manuscripts and today what we see in the form of Al-Qur'an (Nordin, 2015).

Learning the knowledge of the Quran is the most important thing in the lives of Muslims. It coincides with the prophetic tradition of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W, where he said "The righteous Muslims are those who learn the content of the Quran and spread it." Since then, the Quran has been learned and memorized in the

hearts of the companions, until today. Modern education in the 21st century is also not left behind in implementing the element of memorization (hifz) as an important and alternative element for students. The element of memorization and preservation of the Quranic knowledge is applied as early as primary education, to secondary level and then to higher level. Memorization in Quran education, known as Tahfiz al-Quran education, was first offered in 2013 at the polytechnic of the Ministry of Higher Education and was followed a few years later by MARA education/training institutions under the Ministry of Rural Development in all fields and ranks exclusively in the technical and vocational fields.

Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in October 2024 announced that RM17 million had been allocated to implement this program optimistically placing long-term aspirations that this new education agenda could provide Tahfiz graduates with various abilities in line with the current industrial expectations and needs (Zakiah, 2024). The great emphasis on this national endeavour is evident as a huge amount of finances is allotted as presented in the 2018 Budget aspired to offer better and enhanced quality education for the Tahfiz-Tahfiz students in the near future.

A quality education has always been a top priority for any developing nation (Dwangu & Vimbi, 2021). The system of education must be sustainable as the learning activities is a life-long and continuous process and involve teachers and students (Gupta et al., 2021) who share the common concerns and interest in education. A quality education is one of the key dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) that was promoted in January 2016 which asserts that every global citizen deserves an inclusive and equitable quality education while also promoting lifelong learning as a key part of country building. On a serious note, a quality education also means that there should not be any gap or discrimination whilst encourage equality and fairness within the educational landscape. In 2000, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) shared the similar viewpoints on education (Yamada & Otchia, 2021). Quality education must reflect a set of systemic variables, including assessable aspects of student learning including school resources, supporting facilities, efficient management and its administrative system, and this is also applicable to Malaysia educational institutions (Madani, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Malaysia, the Tahfiz education (Quranic memorization) has been embedded into the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) hence evolved the educational landscape which bridge the spiritual development with socio-economic practice. This literature review emphasizes on the paradigm shift, structural execution, theoretical grounding, and sustainability dimensions of the Tahfiz-TVET model.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is affixed in two prominent theories: Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964) and Sustainable Development Theory (Buntat et al., 2013). The Human Capital Theory suggests that the skill sets a person acquired can boost one’s performance, economic benefits, and employability, which supports an idea that investing in education as a worth. In the context of Tahfiz-TVET education, the incorporation of both technical and vocational skills as well as Quranic memorization has multiplied advantages for graduates with greater qualities of high-tech and spiritual conscious. While the Sustainable Development Theory motivates workforce empowerment through systematic vocational training which ultimately offering a balanced economic progression and employability that serves the system. This theory has also supported by one of the sustainable domains, which is Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) that highlights inclusivity, and lifelong learning opportunities. Grounded from this theory, such an intergration between Tahfiz and TVET into mainstream educational ecosystem has further advanced not only the academic structure and training, but also the sustainability of economic progression.

Paradigm Shift and Structural Execution of Tahfiz-TVET

In the past, Tahfiz education has been emphasizing on religious studies and Quranic memorization and its proficiency (Nordin, 2015). Alongside with the Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) and its advancement, the

structure of Tahfiz education has also undergone significant transformation with ultimate aim is to combat unemployment among graduates (Rasul et al., 2021). To pursue with such economic and education endeavours, the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) has established the National Tahfiz Education Policy (DPTN) in 2016, followed by formal institutional pilot programs in collaboration with Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA), GiatMARA, and polytechnics (Yusak et al., 2019).

To date, Tahfiz-TVET institutions operate a dual-curriculum model: morning session is allocated for Quranic memorization and Islamic studies (Tahfiz), while the afternoon classes are dedicated for learning the technical and vocational skills, for instance, automotive, welding, air-conditioning maintenance, and electrical engineering. The gradutes of these dual programmes will be awarded with Tahfiz credentials and the Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM) issued under the Department of Skills Development (JPK) (Malay Mail, 2022).

Challenges in Tahfiz-TVET Sustainability

Despite its benefits, such an implementation and structural changes bring challenges to the program's operators. Bani et al. (2023) assert that private and public Tahfiz institutions often experience operational difficulties, among them financial insufficiency due to heavy reliance on students' tuition fees, scarcity of infrastructure needed for particular program offered, and a shortage of dual-qualified trainers who are competent in both Islamic studies and technical training. To ensure this program sustainability, having addressed these challenges is crucial for seeking and anticipating best solutions for a better quality of education.

Journey and Implementation of Tahfiz-TVET in Malaysia

In a study on the 'Strategic Approach to the Tahfiz Program for Malaysian Polytechnics' published in a book titled 'Creative Education, studying the integration of the tahfiz program (memorization of the Quran) into the Malaysian polytechnic education system' in 2019, Yusni Mohamad Yusak et al. found that this program aims to produce graduates who are not only skilled in technical and vocational fields but also skilled in Islamic studies. The primary goal of this tahfiz program is to develop professional huffaz—individuals who have memorized the Quran—who are also competent in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). This integration seeks to balance worldly and ukhrawi (spiritual) knowledge, aligning with the needs of the ummah and the nation. The curriculum is developed in collaboration with Darul Quran (DQ) to produce a dynamic and deductive semi-professional workforce.

The curriculum comprises core courses, elective courses, and compulsory courses mandated by the institution. Key components include the program synopsis, overview, delivery methods, assessment methods, and referencing. These elements collectively form the essential components of the program performance. The study identifies several strategic considerations to ensure the successful implementation of the tahfiz program, which are 1) student enrolment which faces challenges related to a small number of students that may affect its sustainability and impact, 2) the lack of promotion and awareness about the program, which hinders its growth and recognition, and 3) faculty development where a limited number of trained lecturers poses a challenge to delivering quality education and maintaining program standards. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the future success and expansion of the tahfiz program in polytechnics.

Yusak concludes that the integration of tahfiz programs into Malaysian polytechnics represents a strategic approach to producing well-rounded graduates who are proficient in both technical skills and Islamic knowledge. By addressing the identified challenges and enhancing the program's visibility and resources, the initiative aims to contribute to the development of professional huffaz who can meet the diverse needs of society and the nation.

Bani et al. (2023) highlighted various issues related to the sustainability of tahfiz institutions in Malaysia, especially those privately owned. Their study highlighted that despite the increasing demand for tahfiz education, many institutions face significant challenges in ensuring the sustainability of their operations.

Among the main issues faced are lack of funds and inefficient financial management. Tahfiz institutions often rely on student fees as their main source of income, but erratic fee collection and high arrears have exacerbated the situation. For example, it has been reported that student fee arrears in some tahfiz schools have reached RM8 million, which has become more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic as parents face financial difficulties.

In terms of infrastructure, many tahfiz institutions, especially those with private status, have facilities that do not meet the safety and health standards set by religious, fire and health authorities. The lack of official registration with the State Islamic Religious Council (MAIN) also puts institutions at risk of closure and ineligibility for government assistance. The shortage of qualified tahfiz teachers also affects the quality of education. Around 40% of teachers in government-funded tahfiz schools have no background in tahfiz education, while teachers in private institutions often lack formal qualifications in teaching pedagogy.

To address these issues, Bani et al. proposed the application of a sustainability model based on three main dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. This model aims to ensure the comprehensive and sustainable development of tahfiz institutions, in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Overall, this study emphasizes the need for a more systematic and comprehensive approach in addressing the sustainability issues of tahfiz institutions in Malaysia, by involving all stakeholders in finding effective solutions.

According to Shauqi Wahab (2023), on October 13, 2023, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, announced an allocation of RM17 million to implement the Tahfiz Education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Program, i.e. the introduction of TVET program at the tahfiz center. This program aims to provide tahfiz (Qur'an memorization) students the opportunity to diversify their technical skills while continuing their religious studies. According to Deputy Minister of Human Resources, Mustapha Sakmud, the initiative is expected to produce individuals who are not only hafiz al-Qur'an (Qur'an memorizers) but also skilled in technical fields such as electrical wiring, in line with the Malaysia Madani concept.

For example, the Ahmadiah Vocational Tahfiz Centre has partnered with the Industrial Training Institute of Kepala Batas to offer mechanical courses to its students, expanding their career opportunities beyond the religious field. An additional allocation of RM6.8 billion was also announced for the TVET sector in 2024, including RM100 million for professional certification and RM180 million through the Skills Development Fund Corporation (PTPK) to provide educational loans to TVET trainees. This initiative reflects the government's commitment to empowering tahfiz students with technical skills, broadening their career prospects, and supporting the inclusive Malaysia Madani concept.

The Malay Mail (2022) reported that the Malaysian Ministry of Human Resources has also launched the Tahfiz-TVET training model on March 16, 2022 aimed at empowering tahfiz (Quranic) students with technical and vocational skills. This initiative is a collaboration between the Department of Skills Development (JPK) and the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), supported by the National Skills Development Council (MPKK). The model aims to improve the employability of tahfiz students in various TVET fields and to produce highly skilled workers. MPKK has established a Tahfiz-TVET Development Working Committee to assist tahfiz institutions in strengthening their curriculum, teaching materials, and certification through the Malaysian Skills Certification System (SPKM).

As of the launch, there were 1,177 registered private tahfiz centers in Malaysia, with 100 of them having implemented the Tahfiz-TVET program. The Ministry of Human Resources aims for all tahfiz centers, both public and private, to adopt this training model to provide wider career pathways for tahfiz students. Additionally, the ministry is working towards obtaining skill certificate ratings between levels 6 and 8 to ensure the sustainability of TVET education and to make it a primary choice for parents in providing formal education for their children. This initiative is expected to broaden career opportunities for tahfiz students and align religious education with current industrial developments.

According to Rasul et al. (2021), the Tahfiz-TVET initiative in Malaysia represents a unique integration of Islamic religious education—specifically Quranic memorization and studies (Tahfiz)—with technical and vocational training. This hybrid approach aims to produce holistic graduates who are not only spiritually grounded but also equipped with market-relevant skills for employment and entrepreneurship.

Background and motivation of Tahfiz-TVET is connected to; (i) Growing Number of Tahfiz Institutions where Malaysia has seen a surge in private and public Tahfiz schools. Many graduates, however, lack formal qualifications or employable skills, (ii) Unemployment Concerns which Graduates of religious schools often struggle to integrate into the modern workforce due to limited technical or vocational training, and (iii) National Policy Push where The government, under various Education and Human Capital Development policies (e.g., Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia), sought to merge religious and technical education.

The Key Milestones in journey can be seen through the following years: (i) 2016 when the idea of integrating Tahfiz with TVET was proposed under the National Tahfiz Education Policy (DPTN) by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), (ii) 2017 when Prime Minister's Department proposed official integration of TVET into the Tahfiz system, (iii) 2018–2020 when Pilot programs began in selected institutions, such as GiatMARA, Kolej Komuniti and Private Tahfiz institutions collaborating with TVET providers, and (iv) 2021–Present where Expanded efforts under the TVET Malaysia Coordination Body, with enhanced cooperation between JAKIM, the Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR), and MARA.

Implementation of Tahfiz-TVET are done through: 1. Structural Integration with Dual Curriculum Model, i.e. Tahfiz: Quran memorization, Fardhu Ain, Islamic jurisprudence and TVET: Skills in areas like automotive, culinary, IT, electrical, sewing, etc. and Scheduling: Morning sessions often focus on Tahfiz; afternoon sessions are allocated for vocational training. 2. Institutional Models with Government-Led: Integration at Kolej Vokasional, GiatMARA, and other public training institutions, Private-Public Partnerships: Private Tahfiz schools partner with TVET institutions to offer certified courses, and Accreditation: Graduates receive dual certification – Tahfiz credentials and SKM (Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia) under the Department of Skills Development (JPK). 3. Challenges in Implementation which are Curriculum Balance: Ensuring neither Tahfiz nor TVET is diluted in quality, Qualified Teachers: Shortage of educators trained in both Islamic and technical fields, Infrastructure: Many Tahfiz schools lack equipment and facilities for vocational training, and Recognition and Acceptance: Concerns over acceptance of such hybrid qualifications by employers and religious bodies. 4. Success Indicators which are Improved employability of Tahfiz graduates, Increased enrollment in integrated programs, Graduates starting businesses or entering skilled employment, and Support from government agencies and NGOs.

The Future Prospects of Tahfiz-TVET is in line with the rapid development of; (i) Digitalization and IR 4.0: Plans to integrate emerging technologies into the curriculum (e.g., coding, robotics, digital entrepreneurship), (ii) Industry Partnerships: Strengthening ties with industries for job placements and apprenticeships, and (iii) Expansion to Higher Education: Development of diploma and degree-level programs integrating Islamic studies and technical fields. In short/other words, the Tahfiz-TVET initiative in Malaysia represents a progressive approach to education, aiming to bridge the gap between spiritual development and socioeconomic relevance. While still evolving, it holds the promise of creating a new generation of Muslims who are both spiritually committed and economically empowered.

Quality Education of Tahfiz Malaysia

In line with the era of globalisation and in meeting the needs of industries that require skilled manpower, TVET education has been transformed to enhance its appeal as the primary educational pathway of choice. The TVET route is now wide open among Tahfiz students whoare given the skills to equip themselves to meet the needs of the industry Hence, ss of 2024, MARA has authorized four Tahfiz centres to run its Tahfiz-TVET program: (i) IKM Lumut for welding, (ii) IKM Jasin for automotive, (iii) IKM Besut for air-conditioning, and (iv) KKTM Ledang for engineering bio-medicine.TVET programs are designed and implemented in the form of short course implementation to suit the time and circumstances of the Tahfiz

students involved. A vocational Tahfiz centre is a Tahfiz educational institution recognised to run the Huffaz skillsprogramme such as entrepreneurship, management,

tourism, commercial agriculture, etc.This institution was created to develop the National Occupational Skills Standard (NOSS),especially those related to vocational skills among Huffaz (Jalani, 2015)

Table 1 presents the breakdown of SDG 4 with the features of quality education targets related to the quality education of Tahfiz Schools. The 5 Years National Progress Report on SDG 4 by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF Malaysia titled Education 2030 in Malaysia indicated that private Tahfiz schools are part of Malaysia's educational planning. Clearly, this institution should contribute to Quality Education thrust, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals framework.

Table 1: The SDG 4 dimensions of quality education of private Tahfiz schools

Number	Target
SDG 4.1	Quality Primary and Secondary Education
SDG 4.3	Technical, Vocational, Tertiary and Adult Education
SDG 4(A)	Educational Facilities and Learning Environment
SDG 4(C)	Teachers

(Source: Ministry of Education and UNICEF Malaysia,2023)

Table 1 presents the breakdown of SDG 4 with the features of quality education targets related to the quality education of Tahfiz Schools established by the Faith-based Non-Governmental Organization in Malaysia. The 5 Years National Progress Report on SDG 4 by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF Malaysia titled Education 2030 in Malaysia indicated that private Tahfiz schools are part of Malaysia's educational planning. Clearly, this institution should contribute to Quality Education thrust, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals framework.

The initial aim of establishing Tahfiz institutions was to accommodate the communities of underprivileged with the Islamic education. Such educational efforts are aligned with the SDG4.1 that is to rest assure that all children at the primary and secondary level are having the access to the very fundamental knowledge and education which ultimately accomplish the objective of learning. Noor and Nawi (2023) emphasized on the four domains of NGOs: Charitable, Service, Participatory, and Empowering. Service orientations include the provision of health, family planning, or education in which the program is designed and implemented for the targeted community. In this context, it is agreed that educational services will contribute to community development goals in urban and rural areas (Norhasni et. al., 2023).

SDG 4 (A) proposes that the learning environment must be safe, inclusive, non-violent with appropriately elevated facilities for the comfort of the students and its entire learning activities. Haron et.al, (2020) assert that a learning environment that is well-accommodative with well-furnished facilities have significantly impacting the Tahfiz students' memorization of Quranic verses. In this context of study, government plays a very pertinent role at providing sufficient financial provision to MARA Tahfiz-TVET centres to ensure the sources of acquisition and maintenance of the assets, facilities, and infrastructure are sustained. While this view is understood, it has been discovered that financial allocation from relevant authorities is required to strengthen the development of encouraging teaching and learning (Bania et. al., 2023).

It was reported that the Tahfiz-Technical and Vocational (TVET) program continues to show positive results with an increasing number of students enrolled in the program (BERNAMA, 2024). This aligns with SDG 4.3, in which Technical and Vocational objectives are achieved. In the same vein, tertiary and adult education is achieved when more private Tahfiz schools embed the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) exam or

Malaysia's secondary education main examination in their syllabus. This indicates that these schools are committed to ensuring that students have a clear pathway to future professionalism, particularly the opportunity to further study at the higher education level (Ahmad, 2018). SDG 4 (A) promotes the need to provide, build, and upgrade education facilities that are safe, non-violent, and inclusive, so that the learning environment can be effective regardless of student conditions (Itohan, 2017).

Tahfiz-TVET Inclusivity Program and Its Sustainability

A report of EU-Malaysia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2007) highlights that IR4.0 is making the communication and data analysis via machines faster and more effective so it could reduce unnecessary cost incurred and at the same time decrease the energy consumption. This entire process seems to be complex, however the transformational activities involve is easier with the skilled manpower in the workforce and the right utilisation of technologies.

For this matter, the government and its various agencies has worked through Tahfiz-TVET programmes as a mean to open a gateway for students at tahfiz institutions to equip themselves with skill-based knowledge and exposure (BERNAMA, 2024). Itohan defines Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a type of education that offers skills, expertise and attitude to individuals for successful employment in particular career prospects. From this outlook, the tahfiz students are expected to benefit from this approach and prepare them for the future employability. In this essence, MARA, an agency of the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, established on March 1st, 1966 under an Act of Parliament as a statutory body has been aggressively expanding its educational sector and activities to accommodate the current industrial needs and expectation (Wan Hanim et.al., 2021). The Corporate Communication Unit of MARA via its write-up sent to BERNAMA asserts that moving forward until 2030, MARA will increase the Tahfiz -TVET program under the GiatMara Vocational Technical Hub (GVTH) - a collaboration with the community, school students, agencies, key industry players, and tahfiz institutions across the country pertaining to the skills and knowledge exposure and enhancement. Practically, the University of Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) has been coordinating with Darul Quran Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) to recognize Ulul Albab's Professional Huffaz students through tahfiz certificates that would make them eligible for enrolling into Islamic universities for short and long-term courses.

Above 90 percent of 1,103 Tahfiz -TVET graduates under the management of MARA are employed thus validating a high-level of acceptance of this innovative concept of education in this country. In addition to this, UniKL or any other technical-based colleges or universities would also accept those tahfiz graduates who have completed their diploma studies to pursue their learnings to Degree of Engineering Technology. In fact, GiatMara Skills Institute (IKM) and MARA Higher Skills College (KKTM) are among other institutions that have been actively collaborating with MARA in this discourse. As reported in BERNAMA (2024) currently, there are 558 students enrolling in 67 Tahfiz -TVET programs at these institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative exploratory research design to identify the perceptions and experiences of Tahfiz-TVET operators concerning the quality of education, and program sustainability. Creswell & Creswell (2018) suggest that a qualitative method as the best fit for its data rich, and multifaceted social and educational phenomena.

Sampling Type and Sampling Size

This study has benefitted from the Purposive Sampling which referred to the key informants who possessed direct and vast experience and exposure in administering the Tahfiz-TVET programs. They were the academic and operators from all three authorized MARA institutions offering the dual program, namely: Institut Kemahiran MARA (IKM) Lumut, Perak (labelled as Respondent 1); IKM Besut, Terengganu (labelled as Respondent 2); and IKM Jasin, Melaka (labelled as Respondent 3).

Despite the small sample size of three informants, it is however, methodologically justifiable for the said

qualitative study. Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora (2016) stated that for this research method, data-rich and its depth can take precedence over size of the informants. In fact, as of data collection stage, these aforementioned institutions are authorized by MARA which represent the entire population, hence justify the agreement of other national operators of the similar programs. Their experience and knowledge mastery not only in Tahfiz-TVET operation, but also program offering offer authoritative data and saturation for elite-level case studies.

Data Collection Procedures

For data gathering purposes, this study has employed structured online qualitative interviews with standard protocol of open-ended questions that reflected objectives of research; mainly to gauge the Tahfiz-TVET Operators' views on educational quality, student employability, national integration and program sustainability. Despite geographical and administrative limitations, the informants have provided written-response digital interview format, which allowed them sufficient time to deliberate for comprehensive and insightful data. The data were later compiled, transcribed, and arranged into textual dataset for analysis purposes.

Data Coding and Thematic Analysis

The data that were transcribed and compiled, later analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. The process started with getting familiar with rigorous data through repetitive review of the transcripts. Next, initial codes were generated based on identified recurring concepts or terms, semantic units, and significant patterns associated to curriculum quality, Tahfiz-TVET integration, and economic sustainability. These codes were subsequently collated into broader potential themes, which were reviewed, refined, and cross-referenced against the research questions. In the final stage, the themes were clearly identified and labelled, supported with direct verbatim excerpts from the transcripts to preserve the empirical meaning.

Trustworthiness and its Rigor

This study has also adopted three characteristics for preserving research trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely: credibility, dependability, and confirmability and contextualized them per explanation below:

a) Credibility: the transcribed data and preliminary analysis were shared with the respondents to ensure their intended meanings were appropriately interpreted by researchers.

b) Dependability: researchers developed a comprehensive audit trail which involve documenting every stage of research process from designing research instrument, data collection to coding procedures and theme creation.

c) Confirmability: was determined through reflexive journaling by the researchers to mitigate potential researcher bias, and to ensure that the interpretations were based stringently from the empirical data rather than predetermined assumptions.

This study employed a qualitative approach via online interviews to meticulously explore the objectives of study. According to Peterson (2019), qualitative research is a methodological process through which researchers evaluate and interpret social phenomena. Ahmad et al. (2021) claimed that conducting in-depth interviews in a study can provide a better understanding of the problem. The researchers approached the purposive sampling with certain characteristics; they are the Tahfiz-TVET operators with years of teaching experiences. There were three informants out of four Tahfiz-TVET operators assigned by MARA engaged involved in the data collection activities namely: Institut Kemahiran MARA Lumut, Perak (itemized as Respondent 1), Institut Kemahiran MARA Besut, Terengganu (itemized as Respondent 2) and Institut Kemahiran MARA Jasin, Melaka (itemized as Respondent 3). The interview protocols with written response format were then transcribed as the research instrument for this qualitative study. The data collected using

semi-structured interview based on the list of questions guided by the research objectives under study, hence the responses provided were also skewed towards meeting the purpose of research. The main emphasis was to identify the perspective of Tahfiz-TVET operators on the quality education their students acquired, their inclusiveness in the national agenda, the sustainability of these programs at their centres as well as the most in-demand program among the Tahfiz-TVET students.

RESULTS

Profile of Informants

There were three informants representing the Tahfiz-TVET centres involved in the data collection process per details stated in the methodology sub-section above.

Table 2: Profile of the Key Personnel

Item	Gender	Age (Years)	Experience (Years)	Institutions
R1	M	40	17	IKM Lumut, Perak
R2	M	52	27	IKM Besut, Terengganu
R3	M	27	2	IKM Jasin, Melaka

Quality Education for TVET-Tahfiz Students

The findings disclosed that all the Tahfiz-TVET operators are convinced with the quality of programs offered to their students, and enhanced the quality education as Tahfiz students and later their graduates. One of the scenarios given was as the students of TVET-Tahfiz MARA are not only pursuing their Quranic learning, but also acquired technical and scientific knowledge. At the same time, MARA provides a pathway for these students to continue at higher level of education, at the UNibersiti of Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) for instance which their qualifications are also recognized by the key industrial players.

"The program of Tahfiz-TVET enhances our students' marketability and employment opportunities. Tahfiz students who are trained with TVET skills are not only capable in religious related activities, such as being imams (those who lead prayers), religious teachers or preachers, nevertheless, they can also venture into technical and professional affiliated industries for instance automotive, engineering, agriculture, welding, information technology and digital media. So, in near future, they are advantageous to be entrepreneurs who are not only possessing high skills set of technology, but also practicing Muslims who can succeed and balance both matters of worldly and hereafter" (R1).

This opinion is strongly reinforced by the R2 who stated that their programs have progressed the students with technical skills and their skill sets are in-demand, for example installation, repair and maintenance of air-conditioning. "At my institution, we offer not only Qur'anic memorization and Islamic studies, but our students are furnished with complete skill set of the three stages of air-conditioning: install, repair, and maintain. Their niche skills are also recognized by the industry key players" (R2).

The R3 mentioned that the technical and vocational skills the students earn are definitely valuable not only for future employment, but also on timely basis. He asserted that "Through this Tahfiz-TVET programs, the students are actually maximizing their potential. They are no longer relying their job opportunities on religious related activities, but re-defining their capability based on the skills they have acquired. For instance, we have graduates who are trained in automative from IKM Jasin, they are graduates of welding from IKM Lumut, we produce graduate with skills in aircond from IKM Besut, and they are graduates of bioscience from KKTM Ledang. Terengganu. All of these programs and skills are very much needed and make them not only demanding in our country, but also abroad. Hence, our graduates are not only competitive in profession, they too will not abandunt their religious obligations".

These findings clearly indicate that the implementation of Tahfiz-TVET programs has added value to the Tahfiz students who can expand their knowledge of technical sets by incorporating the Islamic values which make them as better packaged personnels with great skills and good virtues for their employers. This outcome is consistent with Clement et al (2018) who generally stated that the TVET system can be defined as the most relevant learning education programme for the industry by focusing one quipping graduates with appropriate skills according to the needs of the industry. Jalani (2015) further added that skills-based programme such as entrepreneurship, management, tourism, commercial agriculture and others have added value to the existing quality of Tahfiz students.

The Sustainability of the Tahfiz-TVET Programs

All the respondents were confident that the Tahfiz-TVET programs would run for long-term hence contribute to the sustainable Malaysia, economically. However, the program implmentation must be well-supported with technical support, finance, and deeper understanding. With proactive management and strong collaboration, more tahfiz centers are expected to support this initiative in the foreseeable future.

"The Tahfiz-TVET program has the potential to survive for a long period of time if several important factors are taken into account to ensure its effectiveness and continuity as the demands and supply are relevant to the future needs. It meets the needs of the modern job market, especially in high-skilled sectors such as technology, engineering, and modern agriculture. With the integration of tahfiz, the program offers a holistic education that is increasingly being sought after by the Muslim community. Institutions such as MARA, JAKIM, and NGOs continue to support the development of Tahfiz-TVET through funding, training and cooperation opportunities with industry hence making it sustainable" (R1).

R2 asserted that "The Tahfiz centers are very interested in this implementation and this program will survive for a long time if the curriculum is constantly reviewed and improved". R3 shared a somewhat similar views on this claiming that "The Tahfiz-TVET programs would survive if they are well-supported with sufficient resources, a curriculum relevant to current developments, as well as cooperation between the parties involved (such as Tahfiz centers, technical education institutions, and industry)".

This findings are explained further by Abd Hamid et.al., (2021) who assumed the potential of sustainability of Tahfiz-TVET Programmes is high due to an increased interest of various parties to develop collaborative effort including the state religious authorities with the Department of Skills Development, Ministry of Human Resources. Likewise, Norhidayah et.al. (2021) asserted that the implementation of numerous activities by the government and its agencies has also contributed to the sustainability of these programmes for long-term.

Tahfiz-TVET Program and its Contribution to Sustainable Malaysia

In line with the era of globalisation and in meeting the needs of industries that require skilled manpower, TVET education has been transformed to enhance its appeal as the primary educational pathway of choice. The TVET route is now wide open among Tahfiz students who are given the skills to equip themselves to meet the needs of the industry.

The R1 asserted that "The skills acquired by our Tahfiz-TVET graduates in various industries, for instance, automotive, food technology, and information technology, placing them as among top choice of employees, in the eyes of the industry players. The employers would value the religious qualities our students possess for example, through the Qur'anic memorization and Islamic studies, they are trained with good morality such as trustworthy, and disciplined workers, which reflects of high values of employees that no employer could abandon. Or, if they would become entrepreneurs and be own bosses, they can challenge themselves by setting up a food and beverages café, automative workshops, and be in agricultural industry, this makes them rather a job provider than a job seeker. With the skills they acquired, too, they could charge for their services to the public or clients, for example repairing air-conditioning, fixing damaged vehicles, and prepare food and beverages. This daily service can generate income for them and their families too and ultimately pay back to the country's economic well-being" (R1).

The R2 expressed similar viewpoint stating that "Today, the Tahfiz-TVET students are not only occupied with Qur'anic memorization and Islamic knowledge, but they are also trained with technical skills and benefit from industrial exposure and demand, which making them now distinctively different from the non Tahfiz-TVET graduates".

The R3 added significantly that the Tahfiz-TVET students or graduates could contribute in the field of entrepreneurship. He asserted that "In IKM Jasin, our students learn entrepreneurial courses as their main subjects, and such subjects are related to Islamic teaching, Quran printing, Islamic digital applications, or technology services that leveraging their skills. This is one of the ways how our Tahfiz students or graduates can fill this gap and contribute to the country's economy".

These findings proved that the Tahfiz institutions are not left behind, but decides to incorporate the technical and vocational skill programs into their educational system of to ensure their graduates are compatible with other graduates who can contribute to the contry progression (Abd Hamid, 2021). Salleh & Sulaiman (2020) further suggested that this approach is intended to produce skilled or semi-skilled professionals who can generate income and economic growth in a country. This assumption is also consistent with Tawyer (2016) who had specifically studied various TVET programs at Tahfiz Centres and Madrasahs around KotaTinggi, Johor then proposed that the various collaboration between agencies and industries are expected to provide advanced knowledge and skills for the Tahfiz students who could benefit their life and generate income for the county in future.

Tahfiz-TVET Programs in-Demand

This question was literally asked to probe more understanding on which sector or industries that would have sustainable practices among the local practitioners in the near future. However, all the three operators stated that the popularity of the programs is somehow depending on the locations where the students choose to enroll. The findings revealed that the Tahfiz-TVET students have more interest at pursuing the Agriculture, Entrepreneurship and Business Management courses.

The R1 mentioned that "In IKM Lumut, we offer in-demand programmes for instance Automotive and Mechatronics, Forging and Welding, Modern Agriculture and Agro-preneurship, Information Technology and Multimedia, Entrepreneurship and Business". These programmes are verypopular among the students because they will embark into critical sectors that demand niche skilll sets for such practices".

His opinion was strongly backed-up by the R3 who expressed a somewhat similar opinion that "The in-demand programs among the students are Agriculture and Environment, Business and Management, Commerce and Entrepreneurship, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, and the Information Technology (IT)".

While the R2 viewed that the most popular programs among his students is to pursue in the "Diploma in Automotive and Air-Conditioning".

DISCUSSION

TVET helps the Tahfiz students to achieve progress without abandoning religious principles. The students are able to harmonize religious knowledge with the needs of modern industry, making them more relevant in today's world through which the quality of their education has been enhanced. With TVET skills, the Tahfiz students can build their own careers as skilled workers, becoming entrepreneurs by opening workshops, farms or other businesses that suit their skills. This reduces their reliance on specific job opportunities. TVET not only adds value to the Tahfiz students but also opens up space for them to be agents of change in society. The Tahfiz-TVET MARA educational framework focuses towards producing skillful Huffaz, Innovative Muslim with Complete Personality. Graduates of these centers are proficient in the areas of automotive, agroculture, coaching, and information technology, making them indispensable manpower in modern industries. The religious values instilled through the recitation of tahfiz produce trustworthy, ethical, and disciplined employees as the assets for the industries.

These programmes demand strong and constant support from various stakeholders including the government and its agencies, private institutions, and industrial key players as the fianncial, coaching and facilities system would determine its quality and sustainability, hence infleunce the involvement of TVET-Tahfiz studnets or graduates into the mainstream economic agenda of this country. It is believed that the integrated technical skills with Islamic virtues would create significant impacts towrardssustainable Malaysia and a prosperous society. One of the sustainable sectors or practices is Information Technology (IT). With the rapid development in the digital world, Tahfiz students who master the information technology can develop applications related to Islamic education or utilize social media for preaching. For the Electrical and Electronics Engineering, the Tahfiz students are equipped with high technical skills and wide range of job opportunities. Likewise, the students who venture into the Commerce and Entrepreneurship, they are exposed to then commerce management, marketing, and entrepreneurship. The Business and Management is also one of the in-demand courses as the students learn to manage Islamic organizations or educational centers that require management skills. Lastly, the students who specialize in the Agriculture and Environment, the taught courses are related to the agricultural activities and its processes, as well as the ethical stewardship of natural resources.

This empirical study offers of high value of views on the intersection between religious education and technical training, which is a transformed definition from the lenses of Human Capital Theory and SDG 4.

Integration between Spiritual Values with Economic Progression

The qualitative data gathered and analyzed revealed that the Tahfiz-TVET operators convinced that such an integration in education has become a significant and effective instrument at boosting the quality of education.

In the context of Tahfiz-TVET dual programmes, the incorporation of traditional Tahfiz structure and technical and vocational training has successfully risen above lame perceptions; to date, the Tahfiz-TVET graduates are not only capable of memorizing Qur'an, but alos in-demand due to the skill sets looked up by the industrial key players. This finding is supported and directly reflected the Human Capital Theory which suggest that the students' capability are not merely limited to traditional, saturated by religious labor markets but are equipped with dual competencies that multiply their market values in high-demand sectors.

Inclusivity and its Alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)

This study also highlights vigorous implications for educational inclusivity which reflect the SDG4. In the past, Tahfiz institutions operated equally within the mainstream national education policies, and periodically, marginalizing their graduates from mainstream economic progression. Nevertheless, with such an integration of Tahfiz-TVET dual programmes, the students of Tahfiz institutions have become among the mainstream and involve mainly in economic progressive plan. This concern has been emphasized clearly under the clause of SDG 4.3, that while the technical and vocational pathways have been widened, no student of these streams shall be left behind.

Despite the advancement of these dual programmes and the benefits that they could offer, Bani et al. (2023) argued that such programmes planning and its execution require long-term projection to ensure their programmes sustainability. Among the necessities are constant financial support, up-to-date machineries and facilities, as well as well-trained trainers or instructors. The progression from anecdotal reporting to empirical validation in this study reveals that when institutional support is optimized, Tahfiz-TVET graduates could achieve employability rates exceeding 90% (BERNAMA, 2024), validating the systemic efficacy and societal value of this educational innovation

CONCLUSION

The execution of TVET at Tahfiz centres is ultimately looking at producing marketable graduates and trained human resource in technical and occupational setting. As much as the government wants to make changes follow-suit the other countries commitment in the fields of technology and industrial demands, this

socio-economic move involve many stakeholders to ensure the idea is well-comprehended by the involved parties. Hence, constant communication, and on-going campaigns on Tahfiz -TVET have been done on timely basis through many of ministries and government agencies. At the same, the mobility of this agenda must be well-supported with quality education the government and its agencies can offer to the students.

It is believed that Tahfiz school graduates have high potential for skilled labor and are significant to human capital in Malaysia, hence the implementation of Tahfiz-TVET programmes is one of the best steps taken by the government to ensure the marketability of the graduates and eventually contribute to the sustainable Malaysia. The existing programmes offered manage to attract numbers of Tahfiz students' interest and attention which also symbolizes the programme sustainability.

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