

# Balancing Faith and Skills: A Multi-Stakeholder Study of Tahfiz-Tvet Readiness in Kedah, Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines how technical and vocational education and training (TVET) can be integrated into tahfiz-(memorization of Quran) based Islamic education without weakening the religious mission that gives such institutions their legitimacy. Drawing on a documentary case study of two Kedah Tahfiz-TVET research reports prepared in 2026, the article synthesises aggregate descriptive survey evidence and focus group discussion (FGD) thematic evidence from key stakeholders, namely asatizah or teachers, huffaz or students, parents or guardians, and relevant policy and implementation agencies. The survey report indicates favourable stakeholder orientation, with reported overall agreement of 80.3% among asatizah, 79.7% among huffaz or students, 78.1% among parents or guardians, and 79.2% across all reported responses. The FGD report, however, shows that acceptance is conditional rather than unconditional: stakeholders support Tahfiz-TVET when it is understood as a value-adding reform that protects hafazan (memorization of Quranic verses) and murajaah (reviewing memorized portions of the Quran verses), preserves Islamic values and adab (manners), controls cost and safety risks, provides recognised certification, and is governed through phased, modular implementation. The article proposes a Conditional Legitimacy Framework for Value-Compatible Vocationalisation, arguing that vocational reform in faith-based schooling gains legitimacy through five interacting mechanisms: interpretive clarity, core-mission protection, capability-value gain, implementation trust, and governed modularisation. The article contributes to TVET, Islamic education, and educational change scholarship by shifting the analytical focus from simple acceptance to legitimacy formation in value-sensitive educational reform. It also offers policy implications for designing Tahfiz-TVET as a phased capability-expansion model rather than a disruptive curriculum insertion.

**Keywords:** Tahfiz education; TVET; faith-based schooling; vocationalisation; stakeholder readiness; Islamic education; capability approach; Malaysia

## INTRODUCTION

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has become a central policy instrument for addressing employability, youth transitions, skills mismatch, digital transformation, and inclusive economic participation. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines TVET broadly as education, training, and skills development related to occupational fields, production, services, and livelihoods, while also locating TVET within lifelong learning, social equity, decent work, and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). The UNESCO Strategy for TVET 2022-2029 further positions TVET as a mechanism for skills development for learning, work, life, inclusive economies, and peaceful societies (UNESCO, 2022). The World Bank, UNESCO, and ILO similarly emphasise that formal TVET systems must be responsive to labour-market change, technological progress, demographic pressures, and the need for more flexible pathways (World Bank et al., 2023).

In Malaysia, TVET is increasingly framed as a national development priority. The National TVET Policy 2030 was launched in 2024 to coordinate TVET implementation across ministries and strengthen quality, industry collaboration, sustainable financing, governance, and the status of TVET as a preferred career pathway (Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, 2024; Majlis TVET Negara, 2024). MyGOV describes TVET as an education and training pathway that emphasises practical and technical skills for employment and entrepreneurship, with fields including information technology, culinary and hospitality, electrical and electronics, mechatronics, robotics, automotive, and design (MyGOV, 2026). Recent national-level reporting has also identified TVET Tahfiz initiatives that expose tahfiz and pondok students to skills such as culinary, sewing, agro-technology, digital entrepreneurship, and information technology (TVET MADANI, 2025).

Tahfiz education, however, cannot be understood through employability logic alone. It is a religiously meaningful form of education centred on Qur'anic memorisation, murajaah, adab, discipline, moral formation, and family trust. JAKIM's Dasar Pendidikan Tahfiz Negara indicates that tahfiz education has become an area of national policy coordination (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2021), while recent research shows that parental preferences for tahfiz education are influenced by institutional reputation, safety, curriculum, facilities, environment, and financial capacity (Hamzah et al., 2024). In this setting, vocational reform may be welcomed as an enhancement, but it can also be perceived as a threat if it appears to dilute hafazan, disrupt the rhythm of religious learning, impose new costs, or shift the identity of the institution.

This article addresses a specific theoretical and policy problem: how does vocational reform acquire legitimacy in a faith-based schooling environment? Existing TVET literature explains skills development largely through employability, productivity, training quality, industry relevance, and flexible pathways. Tahfiz education literature, by contrast, foregrounds religious formation, memorisation, institutional trust, and parental confidence. What remains under-theorised is the mechanism through which TVET becomes acceptable in a tahfiz setting without being read as a displacement of the institution's sacred educational mission.

The Kedah Tahfiz-TVET case provides a timely opportunity to examine this problem. The available survey report presents favourable descriptive evidence across three stakeholder groups: *asatizah*, *huffaz* or students, and parents or guardians. The accompanying FGD report, however, shows that stakeholder support is not a simple endorsement of vocationalisation. It is a conditional form of legitimacy that depends on whether the programme protects hafazan, remains value-compatible, avoids overburdening students and families, provides credible certification, and is governed through a phased model. This article therefore shifts the focus from whether stakeholders support Tahfiz-TVET to why and under what conditions such support becomes legitimate.

The article is guided by three research questions. First, how is Tahfiz-TVET understood and evaluated by key stakeholders in Kedah? Second, what conditions shape stakeholder legitimacy for integrating TVET into tahfiz education? Third, what conceptual framework can explain value-compatible vocationalisation in faith-based schooling? The article contributes by proposing a Conditional Legitimacy Framework for Value-Compatible Vocationalisation, which can inform both the study of religious educational reform and the policy design of Tahfiz-TVET programmes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### TVET beyond narrow employability

TVET is frequently associated with labour-market preparation, but contemporary TVET scholarship has moved beyond a narrow manpower-planning perspective. UNESCO's 2015 Recommendation conceptualises TVET as a broad lifelong-learning system that includes occupational skills, transversal skills, citizenship skills, entrepreneurship, work safety, and social participation (UNESCO, 2015). This wider view is important because it treats TVET not merely as training for immediate employment but as a social and educational project that connects work, life, dignity, and participation.

Recent TVET scholarship similarly emphasises that skills development must be interpreted within development, justice, sustainability, and institutional context. McGrath and Powell (2016) argue that

vocational education should support well-being and sustainable development rather than simply provide green or technical skills for economic growth. McGrath and Yamada (2023) show that VET-development research increasingly includes practice-focused, political economy, capabilities, and sustainability-oriented strands. These developments are especially relevant to tahfiz education because the purpose of schooling is not reducible to occupational training. A Tahfiz-TVET model must therefore articulate how skills development serves religious, moral, social, and economic purposes simultaneously.

### **Employability, soft skills, and capability expansion**

The employability literature cautions against equating skills with job outcomes. Fugate et al. (2004) define employability as a psycho-social construct involving career identity, personal adaptability, and human and social capital. Clarke (2018) similarly argues that graduate employability is shaped by capital, individual attributes, behaviours, perceived employability, and labour-market context. Tomlinson (2017) conceptualises employability through forms of graduate capital, including human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological capital. These approaches suggest that tahfiz require more than technical exposure; they need confidence, adaptability, communication, identity integration, and credible pathways into further learning or work.

Soft skills are therefore not peripheral to Tahfiz-TVET. Succi and Canovi (2020) show that soft skills have become increasingly important for graduate employability and that employers may value them more strongly than students perceive. Abelha et al. (2020) also show that competence development is central to employability strategies in higher education. In tahfiz settings, soft skills can be interpreted not as secular generic skills but as forms of adab, amanah, leadership, communication, teamwork, service, and ethical economic participation. This reframing is important for value compatibility because it allows employability-related learning to be connected to Islamic moral formation.

### **Tahfiz education, parental trust, and the core mission of hafazan**

Tahfiz education in Malaysia is embedded in religious aspiration and family trust. Hamzah et al. (2024) show that parental preferences for tahfiz education are shaped by external factors such as facilities, safety, reputation, curriculum, location, environment, and financial capacity. These factors matter because parents do not evaluate tahfiz institutions only through academic or economic outcomes. They also assess whether the institution can protect religious identity, discipline, safety, and moral formation.

The integration of vocational skills into tahfiz education has been discussed in prior Malaysian research. Norsalim et al. (2021) identify challenges in establishing vocational skills in tahfiz centres, including financial constraints, lack of curriculum coordination, shortage of skilled teachers, student-related issues, and community perceptions. These challenges resonate with the Kedah evidence, where stakeholders support the idea of Tahfiz-TVET but remain concerned about cost, infrastructure, teacher readiness, schedule burden, certification, and the protection of hafazan. The key issue is therefore not whether skills are useful; rather, it is whether vocational integration can be designed without weakening the core mission of Qur'anic memorisation.

### **Institutional logics, diffusion, and legitimacy in value-sensitive reform**

Theoretical insight can be gained by treating Tahfiz-TVET as a meeting point of institutional logics. Institutional logics theory examines how social action is shaped by broader belief systems, rules, values, and material practices (Thornton et al., 2012). Tahfiz education and TVET represent different but potentially complementary logics. The tahfiz logic privileges hafazan, adab, religious authority, moral discipline, and family trust. The TVET logic privileges practical competence, recognised certification, industry relevance, work readiness, and economic mobility. Reform becomes contentious when one logic appears to subordinate the other.

Diffusion of innovations theory also helps explain why a reform with perceived benefits may still face hesitation. Rogers (2003) argues that adoption depends on perceived relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. In the Tahfiz-TVET case, compatibility and trialability are

especially important. Stakeholders are more likely to support vocational integration when it is framed as compatible with Islamic values and tested through low-risk modular pilots before full-scale adoption.

This literature points to a gap. We know that TVET can enhance employability and that tahfiz institutions are valued for religious formation, but we know less about how stakeholders judge the legitimacy of vocationalisation in faith-based schooling. This article addresses that gap through a case-based conceptual synthesis of the Kedah Tahfiz-TVET evidence.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Conditional Legitimacy for Value-Compatible Vocationalisation

The article proposes a Conditional Legitimacy Framework for Value-Compatible Vocationalisation. The framework explains how vocational reform in faith-based schooling becomes acceptable not simply because it promises labour-market benefit, but because it is interpreted as compatible with the institution's religious mission and implementable through trusted governance. Five mechanisms are central.

**Table 1** Conditional Legitimacy Framework for Value-Compatible Vocationalisation

Mechanism	Meaning in the Tahfiz-TVET case	Expected legitimacy effect
Interpretive clarity	Stakeholders understand what Tahfiz-TVET means, what modules it includes, when it is delivered, who teaches it, what certification is offered, and how it relates to future pathways.	Reduces ambiguity and prevents TVET from being misunderstood as a replacement for religious learning.
Core-mission protection	Hafazan, murajaah, adab, and Islamic discipline remain the non-negotiable centre of the institution.	Reassures asatizah, parents, and students that vocationalisation will not displace the sacred educational purpose.
Capability-value gain	ICT, soft skills, entrepreneurship, communication, and practical skills are framed as expanding what huffaz can do and become.	Allows skills to be perceived as value-adding capability expansion rather than secular instrumentalism.
Implementation trust	Stakeholders trust the cost model, safety procedures, trainers, certification, school capacity, and responsible agencies.	Converts general support into willingness to participate and scale.
Governed modularisation	Implementation begins with phased, low-risk, flexible modules and progresses only when evidence, capacity, and trust are established.	Increases trialability, lowers perceived risk, and supports gradual institutional learning.

The framework leads to five propositions. First, stakeholder support for Tahfiz-TVET increases when the programme is clearly interpreted as complementary to tahfiz rather than substitutive. Second, support depends on credible protection of hafazan and murajaah, which function as the core-mission test of legitimacy. Third, employability-related skills become acceptable when framed as capability-value gains that strengthen rather than secularise the huffaz identity. Fourth, implementation trust mediates the relationship between positive attitudes and actual participation. Fifth, modular and phased implementation increases legitimacy because it makes the reform testable, reversible, and adaptable.

The framework reframes acceptance as conditional legitimacy. Acceptance refers to favourable attitudes. Legitimacy refers to a broader judgement that the reform is desirable, proper, safe, value-consistent, and institutionally credible. This distinction is crucial because high agreement percentages do not automatically mean implementation readiness. A stakeholder may support the idea of Tahfiz-TVET while withholding trust until issues of time, cost, certification, safety, and hafazan protection are resolved.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

This article uses an exploratory documentary case study design. A documentary case study is appropriate when the purpose is to analyse policy evidence, institutional meanings, and reform mechanisms from existing documents rather than to test causal hypotheses from raw respondent-level data (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2018).

The case is the proposed Tahfiz-TVET reform in Kedah, Malaysia. The analysis synthesises two state-oriented research reports prepared by the Kedah Tahfiz-TVET research team in 2026: a qualitative FGD report and a descriptive survey report.

The design is not presented as a psychometric validation study, a full statistical survey, or a primary qualitative interview study. The uploaded reports contain aggregate descriptive tabulations and thematic FGD summaries, but not raw item-level data, complete transcripts, demographic distributions, audio files, or verbatim participant quotations. The appropriate claim is therefore an analytically transparent case-based synthesis of documented evidence. This positioning strengthens integrity by aligning the article's claims with the available data.

**Data sources and analytic status**

To ensure transparency and analytical clarity, this study draws on two primary documentary sources that inform the interpretation of Tahfiz-TVET readiness in Kedah. Rather than treating these materials as fully verified empirical datasets, the article positions them within clearly defined evidential boundaries and uses them for theory-building and thematic analysis. The Table 2 below summarizes the nature of each data source, its specific analytic role in the study, and the integrity constraints observed in using the material. This approach allows the study to extract meaningful insights while maintaining methodological caution and avoiding overextension of the available evidence.

**Table 2** Data Sources Used in the Documentary Case Study

Data source	Content	Analytic use in this article	Integrity boundary
FGD report, 30 April 2026	Draft FGD report on understanding, acceptance, concerns, and implementation model for Tahfiz-TVET in Kedah. It summarises themes across students, asatizah or teachers and administrators, parents or guardians, and relevant agencies.	Primary source for thematic interpretation of conditional acceptance, stakeholder risk logic, and proposed implementation conditions.	The report states that field details, participant numbers, dates, locations, and verbatim quotations require verification with transcripts and attendance records. Therefore, no invented quotes or participant counts are presented.
Survey report, 30 April 2026	Descriptive survey report using agreed stakeholder instruments for asatizah, huffaz or students, and parents or guardians. It reports aggregate percentages and mean scores for acceptance items and risk items.	Complementary descriptive evidence for stakeholder orientation and implementation-fragility signals.	The report states that findings are based on a descriptive analysis framework and representative sample framework. The article treats the figures as report-level descriptive evidence, not independently verified raw data.

**Analytical procedure**

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, the FGD report was read as a policy case document and coded around stakeholder meanings, acceptance conditions, risks, implementation requirements, and governance proposals. The coding logic drew on thematic analysis as a flexible approach for identifying patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022), while recognising that the analysis was conducted on thematic summaries rather than raw transcripts. Second, the survey report was examined for aggregate acceptance patterns and implementation-fragility signals. Items with comparatively lower agreement or higher neutral/disagreement proportions were interpreted as risk indicators rather than as evidence of rejection. Third, the qualitative and descriptive strands were integrated through a cross-stakeholder matrix. Fourth, the findings were interpreted through the Conditional Legitimacy Framework.

The article uses the term implementation fragility to refer to areas where favourable attitudes coexist with hesitation, uncertainty, or perceived operational risk. For example, the survey report's high overall agreement is interpreted alongside lower agreement on additional timetable burden, extra parental fees, external workshops, curriculum practicality, and the assurance that TVET will not disturb hafazan. This approach prevents overclaiming and keeps the analysis focused on conditions for legitimate implementation.

**Trustworthiness and ethics**

Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, analytic transparency, and negative-case sensitivity. Source triangulation was achieved by comparing thematic FGD findings with descriptive survey patterns. Analytic transparency was maintained by distinguishing report-level evidence, interpretation, and theoretical inference. Negative-case sensitivity was applied by giving attention to risk items and stakeholder concerns rather than treating high agreement as automatic readiness.

Ethically, the article uses de-identified aggregate and thematic documentary material. No identifiable participant data, raw transcripts, or audio files were accessed. Because the original reports note that field details and verbatim quotations require verification, this article does not present invented quotations, participant counts, or demographic claims. Future primary studies should obtain appropriate ethical approval, informed consent, parental or guardian consent for minors, and secure data management procedures.

**FINDINGS**

**Broad support exists, but it is conditional rather than unconditional**

The strongest cross-source finding is that Tahfiz-TVET has a favourable stakeholder base, but that support is conditional. The survey report presents high reported agreement across all three stakeholder groups: 80.3% among asatizah, 79.7% among huffaz or students, 78.1% among parents or guardians, and 79.2% overall. These descriptive figures suggest a positive orientation toward integrating tahfiz education with ICT, soft skills, career literacy, entrepreneurship, and light technical skills.

The FGD report qualifies this positive orientation. Participants are described as viewing Tahfiz-TVET as a value-added pathway that can enhance life skills, employability, entrepreneurship, and the public image of skilled huffaz. However, the same report shows that support is tied to specific guarantees: hafazan must not be disrupted, schedules must be manageable, certification must have value, costs must not burden families, external workshops must be safe, and parents must receive clear information and consent procedures. The central pattern is therefore not simple support versus opposition but conditional legitimacy.

**Table 3.** Reported Survey Acceptance and Key Implementation-Fragility Signals

Stakeholder group	Reported positive orientation	Key fragility signals	Interpretation
Asatizah	80.3% reported agreement; mean 4.13.	Only 63% agreed that the existing timetable could be modified; 68% agreed that the TVET structure was practical; 68% agreed that TVET suited student capability.	Teachers support the idea but require realistic timetabling, curriculum design, resources, and institutional capacity.
Huffaz or students	79.7% reported agreement; mean 4.10.	Only 61% agreed to follow an additional timetable; 68% agreed that TVET would not disturb hafazan; 67% agreed with interest in mini-projects.	Students value ICT and soft skills, but acceptance weakens when TVET increases time burden or threatens memorisation routines.
Parents or guardians	78.1% reported agreement; mean 4.07.	Only 52% agreed to pay extra fees; 67% agreed to external workshops; 63% were ready to register other family members.	Parents see future value but require affordability, safety, recognised certification, and proof that religious focus will

			remain intact.
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**Interpretive clarity is the first condition of legitimacy**

The FGD evidence indicates that stakeholders do not understand Tahfiz-TVET in a uniform way. Students tend to understand TVET through concrete fields such as computers, culinary skills, automotive exposure, agriculture, or digital entrepreneurship. Parents connect TVET to future employment, income, and self-reliance. Asatizah evaluate the idea through its effects on hafazan, curriculum discipline, teacher workload, and institutional identity. Agency officers interpret Tahfiz-TVET through governance, accreditation, funding, and monitoring.

This interpretive diversity matters because ambiguity can produce avoidable resistance. If Tahfiz-TVET is introduced only as a slogan, stakeholders may project different expectations and fears onto the programme. The FGD report shows that stakeholders need practical answers: What is the module? When will it be conducted? Who will teach it? What certificate will students receive? What are the costs? How will safety be ensured? How will hafazan be protected? The first task of policy design is therefore interpretive clarification.

**Hafazan protection is the core-mission test**

The most distinctive finding is that hafazan protection functions as the core-mission test for legitimacy. For asatizah and parents, the success of tahfiz education is not measured primarily by employability but by the quality of Qur'anic memorisation, murajaah, discipline, adab, and religious formation. The FGD report shows that Tahfiz-TVET becomes vulnerable when stakeholders imagine that practical training may take over the time, attention, and institutional atmosphere required for hafazan.

The survey report supports this interpretation. Among huffaz or students, only 68% agreed that TVET would not disturb hafazan, meaning 32% were neutral or disagreed. Only 61% agreed that they were willing to follow an additional timetable. Among asatizah, only 63% agreed that the existing timetable could be modified. These figures do not indicate rejection of TVET; they indicate a legitimacy condition. Tahfiz-TVET must be designed as a programme that protects core memorisation routines rather than merely adds more activities to an already demanding schedule.

**Capability-value gain gives TVET positive meaning**

Stakeholders are more favourable when TVET is framed as capability expansion. The survey report shows strong support for ICT and soft skills. Asatizah strongly agreed that computer skills and soft skills are important and that equipment and funding are required. Huffaz showed high interest in basic ICT, soft skills, career confidence, and the idea that modern-skilled tahfiz graduates are more valued. Parents strongly supported technical skills, soft skills, and scholarships or sponsorship.

The FGD report similarly identifies student interest in fields that are concrete, low-risk, and visibly useful, especially information technology, graphic and multimedia skills, digital entrepreneurship, agro-technology, and basic culinary skills. These fields are attractive because they are linked to daily life, digital culture, self-employment, school-based projects, and future opportunity. The key point is that stakeholders do not see skills as inherently problematic. They become problematic when they are detached from Islamic values, introduced without timetable protection, or implemented without credible certification.

**Implementation trust is built through cost control, safety, certification, and teacher capacity**

Parents, asatizah, and agency officers evaluate Tahfiz-TVET through implementation trust. Parents want assurance rather than slogans. The survey report shows that the weakest parental item was willingness to pay additional fees, with only 52% agreement. At the same time, 91% agreed that scholarships or sponsorship were needed. This pattern indicates that parental support is financially conditional. If Tahfiz-TVET is experienced as an added cost, legitimacy may weaken even when parents accept the idea in principle.

Safety and certification are also central. The FGD report shows that parents and asatizah are cautious about external workshops, training locations, supervision, travel, insurance, and workshop safety. Agency officers emphasise the need for accreditation, recognised certificates, standard modules, funding, and monitoring. Asatizah emphasise teacher training, curriculum control, equipment, and realistic scheduling. Implementation trust therefore requires visible governance structures: qualified trainers, clear learning outcomes, recognised microcredentials or certificates, parental consent, safety procedures, and mechanisms for monitoring hafazan before, during, and after participation.

**Governed modularization is the most legitimate route to scaling**

Both reports converge on the need for phased and modular implementation. The FGD report recommends a pilot model beginning with short exposure modules, followed by basic skills modules and only later by certification pathways. The survey report similarly recommends phased implementation beginning with ICT, soft skills, career literacy, mini-projects, cooperation with TVET agencies and industry, micro-certification, and eventually a structured state model.

Governed modularization is theoretically significant because it converts a potentially disruptive reform into a testable and adjustable innovation. Short, low-risk modules increase trialability, reduce parental anxiety, allow schools to monitor hafazan, and enable government agencies to estimate real costs and risks before scaling. A modular model also allows differentiated pathways. Not every huffaz student needs the same module or the same level of technical depth. Students with stable hafazan performance and clear interest can progress to more formal certification, while others may benefit from lighter modules in digital literacy, communication, teamwork, or entrepreneurship awareness.

**Table 4.** Cross-Stakeholder Logic of Support and Concern

Stakeholder	What makes Tahfiz-TVET attractive	What makes it fragile	Legitimacy requirement
Huffaz or students	ICT, soft skills, practical projects, digital entrepreneurship, career confidence, and modern identity as skilled huffaz.	Additional timetable burden, stress, disruption to hafazan, and fields that do not match interests.	Flexible modules that protect memorisation routines and offer meaningful choice.
Asatizah and administrators	Value-added education, stronger graduate futures, institutional reputation, and practical life skills.	Timetable disruption, teacher workload, lack of equipment, weak curriculum structure, and dilution of tahfiz identity.	Curriculum control, resources, training, and authority to protect hafazan standards.
Parents or guardians	Future pathways, self-reliance, employability, scholarships, and recognised skills.	Cost, safety, external workshops, uncertain certification, and fear of reduced religious focus.	Transparent communication, consent, subsidies, recognised certification, and safety governance.
Agencies and policymakers	Human-capital development, TVET access, state-level innovation, and coordinated skills policy.	Ad hoc implementation, unclear lead agency, funding gaps, weak monitoring, and poor sustainability.	Steering committee, standard modules, data systems, funding model, and evidence-based scaling.

**DISCUSSION**

**From acceptance to legitimacy**

The findings show why acceptance is an insufficient concept for analysing Tahfiz-TVET. The reported descriptive survey pattern suggests high agreement, but the FGD evidence reveals that stakeholders attach conditions to their support. In conventional policy reporting, this might be described as readiness with some concerns. Theoretically, however, the pattern is better understood as conditional legitimacy: stakeholders see

Tahfiz-TVET as acceptable only when it passes tests of religious compatibility, pedagogical non-disruption, affordability, safety, certification value, and governance credibility.

This insight contributes to educational change scholarship by showing that faith-based schooling reform is not governed by utility alone. The perceived employability value of TVET is important, but it is not sufficient. Stakeholders also ask whether the reform respects the core mission of the institution. In the Kedah case, that core mission is hafazan. The legitimacy of vocationalisation therefore depends on whether TVET is inserted below, alongside, and in service of the tahfiz mission rather than above it.

### **Value-compatible vocationalisation as institutional-logics negotiation**

The findings can be interpreted as a negotiation between religious and vocational institutional logics. The tahfiz logic values memorisation, religious discipline, moral authority, and family trust. The TVET logic values competence, certification, industry relevance, practical training, and employability. The stakeholder concerns identified in the reports are not evidence that these logics are incompatible. Rather, they show that compatibility must be designed. A value-compatible model translates TVET into the moral language of tahfiz: skills become amanah, entrepreneurship becomes ethical livelihood, communication becomes dakwah capacity, and digital literacy becomes a tool for service and self-reliance.

This interpretation extends institutional logics theory by showing how compatibility is not merely an abstract alignment of values but a practical accomplishment. Compatibility is produced through schedules, modules, trainers, certificates, parental briefings, safety procedures, and monitoring systems. In other words, values become credible through implementation design.

### **Capability expansion without mission displacement**

The capability approach offers a useful counterweight to narrow employability discourse. Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011) argue that development and education should be evaluated by the real freedoms and opportunities people have to become and do what they value. For huffaz, capability expansion should not require abandoning the religious identity that gives their education meaning. Tahfiz-TVET is legitimate when it expands possible futures while preserving the dignity and purpose of tahfiz formation.

This framing also avoids presenting TVET as a rescue mechanism for tahfiz graduates. Such a deficit framing would reproduce the stigma that TVET is a second option or that tahfiz education is incomplete. A stronger framing is that huffaz already possess disciplined learning, moral formation, perseverance, and community trust; Tahfiz-TVET adds digital, communicative, entrepreneurial, and practical capabilities that broaden their pathways into service, further study, work, and community leadership.

### **Policy design: pilot first, protect hafazan, then scale**

The Kedah evidence supports a policy design principle: pilot first, protect hafazan, then scale. A full state-wide Tahfiz-TVET model should not begin with heavy certification requirements or uniform technical streams across all institutions. It should begin with low-risk modules such as digital literacy, communication, teamwork, entrepreneurship awareness, basic multimedia, school-based projects, and career literacy. These modules can generate visible benefits while keeping time burden manageable.

Scaling should be conditional on evidence. A pilot should monitor hafazan performance, attendance, student stress, parental satisfaction, teacher workload, cost, safety incidents, certificate value, and module completion. This approach is consistent with global TVET policy emphasis on quality, relevance, teacher support, flexible pathways, and evidence-based decision-making (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank et al., 2023). It also aligns with Malaysia's National TVET Policy 2030 priorities of governance, quality pathways, industry collaboration, sustainable financing, and TVET status (Majlis TVET Negara, 2024).

## Contributions

The article contributes to knowledge by offering a theoretically oriented case analysis of Tahfiz-TVET readiness in Kedah. It highlights that stakeholders are not inherently opposed to vocational skills; instead, their support is shaped by conditional judgements related to the preservation of religious mission, as well as concerns about time, cost, safety, certification, and governance. Building on this, the study contributes to theory through the introduction of the Conditional Legitimacy Framework for Value-Compatible Vocationalisation. This framework explains vocational reform in faith-based education through five interrelated mechanisms: interpretive clarity, protection of the core mission, capability–value gain, implementation trust, and governed modularisation. In doing so, it extends existing TVET theory by incorporating dimensions of religious legitimacy and the safeguarding of core educational purposes into the analysis of skills reform.

Methodologically, the article demonstrates a transparent approach to transforming policy reports, particularly those based on aggregate survey data and thematic focus group discussions, into a rigorous documentary case study. It shows how researchers can avoid fabricating raw data, participant quotations, or unsupported statistical inferences by instead narrowing claims, clearly defining evidential boundaries, and prioritising theory-building over overstatement. In terms of practical contribution, the study identifies key design conditions that can help tahfiz institutions sustain stakeholder trust, including protecting core hafazan and murajaah routines, introducing low-risk skills modules, selecting students based on readiness and memorisation stability, training asatizah as coordinators, engaging certified trainers, and monitoring both skills development and memorisation outcomes. Finally, at the policy level, the article outlines a governance logic for implementing Tahfiz-TVET, recommending that state-level initiatives be piloted through structured mechanisms such as steering committees, clearly defined agency roles, recognised certification systems, financial support measures, safety protocols, parental consent processes, school-level monitoring, and phased expansion grounded in evidence rather than political urgency.

## Implications

The implications of this study extend across academic, practitioner, policy, and societal domains, highlighting the need to approach Tahfiz-TVET as a nuanced and value-sensitive form of educational change. From an academic perspective, the findings suggest that Tahfiz-TVET should not be understood simply as the insertion of vocational training into a new student population, but rather as a complex process shaped by competing institutional values and legitimacy concerns. Future research would benefit from integrating perspectives from Islamic education, TVET, institutional logics, capability theory, parental trust, and implementation studies, with a particular emphasis on legitimacy formation as the central analytical focus rather than relying solely on measures of stakeholder attitudes.

In practice, the study underscores the importance of cautious and context-aware implementation within tahfiz institutions. Administrators are advised to avoid rapid curriculum expansion without first evaluating critical factors such as timetable capacity, teacher readiness, student stress levels, and the stability of hafazan performance. A gradual approach, beginning with manageable and low-risk modules, is more likely to generate visible benefits while preserving the integrity of memorisation routines. At the same time, teachers and administrators should be empowered to make professional judgements, including the authority to delay or suspend student participation when there are signs of declining hafazan outcomes.

At the policy level, the Kedah case points to the necessity of embedding strong safeguards within any state-level Tahfiz-TVET model. These include protecting the core religious mission, ensuring affordability, maintaining safety standards, and securing recognised certification pathways. Effective implementation also depends on comprehensive funding structures that cover not only equipment and trainer fees, but also transport, insurance, materials, teacher coordination, and ongoing monitoring. Importantly, the burden of legitimising the reform should not fall on parents through additional fees, especially in the absence of clear and visible public investment.

From a societal perspective, a well-designed Tahfiz-TVET model holds the potential to reshape public perceptions of huffaz, presenting them as individuals who are not only grounded in religious knowledge but also equipped with technical skills, communication abilities, entrepreneurial capacity, and a strong sense of social contribution. However, this potential is contingent on careful and credible implementation. If stakeholders perceive that key concerns such as hafazan quality, student safety, or affordability are compromised, mistrust may deepen rather than diminish. Ultimately, the broader social promise of Tahfiz-TVET depends as much on its perceived legitimacy as on the actual skills it delivers.

## LIMITATIONS

The article has limitations. First, it is based on documentary reports rather than raw respondent-level survey data or original FGD transcripts. Therefore, it cannot conduct reliability analysis, factor analysis, regression, statistical comparison, or qualitative coding of verbatim transcripts. Second, the survey report presents aggregate descriptive figures based on a representative sample framework; the article treats these figures as report-level evidence rather than independently verified data. Third, the FGD report states that field details, participant counts, locations, dates, and verbatim quotations require verification. For this reason, the article does not include invented quotations or participant profiles.

Fourth, the article does not measure actual programme outcomes. It examines readiness and legitimacy conditions, not post-implementation effects on hafazan, skills acquisition, employment, income, or further education. Fifth, the Kedah case should not be generalised uncritically to all Malaysian states or to all faith-based schooling contexts. Its value lies in theory-building and policy design rather than population-level inference.

## Future Research Directions

Future research should proceed in five directions. First, researchers should collect raw survey data from asatizah, huffaz, parents, administrators, and agencies using a validated instrument that distinguishes acceptance, legitimacy, readiness, perceived capability gain, cost concern, safety concern, and core-mission protection. Reliability, construct validity, and measurement invariance should be tested before cross-group comparison.

Second, qualitative studies should analyse full FGD and interview transcripts with anonymised verbatim quotations. Sampling should include different types of tahfiz institutions, districts, gender groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and levels of memorisation progress. Third, pilot evaluations should track outcomes before, during, and after modular Tahfiz-TVET participation, including hafazan stability, attendance, student well-being, skills portfolios, parental satisfaction, teacher workload, and safety incidents.

Fourth, comparative studies should examine whether the Conditional Legitimacy Framework applies to other forms of faith-based schooling, including pondok, sekolah agama rakyat, madrasah, and religious boarding schools in other countries. Fifth, longitudinal studies should examine whether Tahfiz-TVET graduates experience expanded capabilities in further study, entrepreneurship, employment, religious service, community leadership, and digital work.

## CONCLUSION

This article has argued that Tahfiz-TVET readiness in Kedah is best understood as conditional legitimacy rather than simple acceptance. The survey report indicates favourable stakeholder orientation, while the FGD report shows that support depends on conditions that protect the religious mission of tahfiz education. Stakeholders are open to ICT, soft skills, entrepreneurship, career literacy, and practical skills, but they require assurance that hafazan and murajaah will remain central, schedules will be manageable, costs will be controlled, safety will be governed, certification will be meaningful, and implementation will be phased.

The proposed Conditional Legitimacy Framework explains this pattern through five mechanisms: interpretive clarity, core-mission protection, capability-value gain, implementation trust, and governed modularisation. The

framework contributes to TVET and Islamic education scholarship by showing that vocational reform in faith-based schooling is not legitimised by employability promises alone. It becomes legitimate when stakeholders believe that the reform expands learners' capabilities without displacing the sacred educational mission that defines the institution.

For Kedah, the practical implication is clear. Tahfiz-TVET should begin as a carefully governed pilot, not a universal curriculum imposition. It should prioritise low-risk, value-compatible modules, protect hafazan as a core KPI, and scale only when evidence demonstrates that students, teachers, parents, and institutions can sustain the model. Done well, Tahfiz-TVET can produce huffaz who are religiously grounded and practically capable. Done poorly, it risks undermining the trust on which tahfiz education depends.

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