Assessing Governance Practices of Private Tahfiz Institutions in Selangor

Nor Tasik Misba[1], Azrizal Husin[2*], Rosmini Ismail[2]

[1]Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kampus Alor Gajah, 78000 Alor Gajah Melaka, Malaysia

[2]Faculty of Management and Economics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjung Malim Perak, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

This study aims at evaluating the governance practices of private Tahfiz institutions in Selangor by addressing the challenges arising from a lack of standardized regulatory frameworks and operational guidelines. Using a preliminary survey conducted across 34 institutions and analyzed through descriptive analysis, the study examines key aspects such as curriculum offerings, registration status, and ownership structures to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Our findings revealed that 76.5% of these institutions were individually owned, 79.4% were registered with the State Islamic Religious Council (SIRC), but only 17.6% had achieved full registration. Additionally, 38.2% of the institutions integrate Tahfiz in their academic education, reflecting an increasing emphasis on a balanced curriculum. These results underscored the need for a unified regulatory framework, periodic audits, and enhanced collaboration among stakeholders to improve governance, accountability, and the sustainability of these institutions. This research provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and administrators, contributing to the enhancement of private Tahfiz institutions in Malaysia.

Keywords: Governance Practice, Private Tahfiz Institutions, Islamic Education, Preliminary Survey, Descriptive Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the Tahfiz institution has gained interest among Malaysians, and it is said that Tahfiz has the potential to be part of mainstream education in Malaysia. The phenomenon of sending children to Tahfiz institution has increased in popularity among parents in urban and rural areas. Among the main reasons for the growing popularity of Tahfiz institutions is parents' confidence that these institutions can instil good character in their children (Hassan, Fakhruddin, Mutalib, & Jaafar, 2015). The increasing awareness of parents about the importance of religious education caused the number of enrolments in schools based on religious education like Tahfiz institution is increasing (Ridza, Jalil, Sipan, & Nukman, 2017).

Despite the advances of public Tahfiz institutions, such development is not evident among privately funded Tahfiz institutions. This is probably due to a lack of systematic framework or governance in managing Tahfiz institution in the country. Currently, the overall curriculum and schooling system in Tahfiz institution is not standardized due to the different objectives of the owner or founder of Tahfiz institution. This intends to influence the governance of the institution as well (Ridza et al., 2017).

Each organization possesses its unique governance framework. The Tahfiz institution is not exempt from this.

The primary goal of establishing the Tahfiz institution is solely to cultivate individuals who have memorized the entire Quran, known as Huffaz. Nevertheless, there exist disparities in the execution and administration of Tahfiz institutions in Malaysia. Currently, the governance structure of Tahfiz institutions can be classified into two main types: government and private (Hashim, Tamuri, & Jemali, 2015a).

Tahfiz institutions at the government level are subject to regulations imposed by the governing bodies that oversee them. The process encompasses fundamental aspects such as curriculum, certification acknowledgment, quality assurance procedures, teacher qualifications, and student qualifications. The purpose of this bond is to guarantee that the certificates of graduate students are acknowledged for their jobs in the government or private sector at both the federal and state levels (Abdullah, Sabbri, & Isa, 2018). The certificate is widely acknowledged by both domestic and international colleges for pursuing advanced education. Consequently, the Malaysian government has assigned the role of coordinating matters connected to the policy to the Darul Quran. Darul Quran is a unit under the Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM).

Meanwhile, in the private sector, however, Tahfiz institutions are more traditional which involves only the process of learning the basics of the al-Quran itself. It was later developed by establishing a religious curriculum (al-dini ulum). High demand from parents and limited space in government Tahfiz institution has given the private sector a huge advantage to grow making private Tahfiz institution open to the public (Hashim, Tamuri, & Jemali, 2015b). It is even more exciting when private Tahfiz institutions offer Tahfiz programs ranging from pre-school to higher education. It has become a new attraction for the whole community to join. Currently, private Tahfiz institutions offer four levels of Tahfiz education, namely, pre-school, primary, middle, and high school. Most certificates by private Tahfiz are not recognized by the government unless they participate in the Tahfiz certification program organized by Darul Quran.

Consequently, there exist three institutional models of Tahfiz institution in Malaysia that will be discuss in the next section. However, within the three models, the governance structures and leadership of private Tahfiz institutions in Malaysia are critical to their overall effectiveness and the quality of education they provide. Effective governance can ensure that these institutions adhere to relevant regulations, maintain financial transparency, and deliver high-quality educational experiences for their students. Since the number of private Tahfiz institution in Selangor is one-third of the total number of all private Tahfiz institution in Malaysia (Haneefa, 2019), this study will investigate the current governance practices of private Tahfiz institutions by identifying areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

Governance Structure of Tahfiz Institution in Malaysia

Consequently, there are three existing institutional models of Tahfiz institution in Malaysia as explained below.

Model 1 Prime Minister's Department - JAKIM

The first model refers to the institution of the Prime Minister's Department, which is a ministry of the federal government in Malaysia. The purpose is to assess the implementation of services across all divisions in accordance with policy, legislation, rules, and current recommendations. The leadership of Malaysia is held by the Prime Minister, who is assisted by another Minister in the Prime Minister's Department. There are about 50 agencies and companies operating within the Prime Minister's Department (Basir, 2019). The Malaysia Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) operates as one of the agencies of the Prime Minister's Department. JAKIM primarily serves three key functions: i) formulating and standardizing Islamic legislation, ii) coordinating Islamic governance, and iii) facilitating the advancement of Islamic education. Darul Quran is a department within JAKIM that has the primary responsibility of overseeing all affairs about Tahfiz in Malaysia.

The inception of the Darul Quran commenced in 1966, following the proclaimed aspiration of Malaysia's inaugural prime minister, Tuanku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, to build an educational institution dedicated to

al-Quran studies in the country. This concept was conceived with the establishment of Majlis Musabaqah Al-Quran in 1960, and it was further reinforced by the visit of Sheikh Mahmud Syaltut, the Rector of Al-Azhar University, during the inauguration of the National Mosque (Ariffin, Abdullah, & Ahmad, 2015). Therefore, on March 1st, 1966, the *Kelas Pengajian Menghafaz al-Quran*, dan Ilmu Qiraat was founded as a department inside the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department in Kuala Lumpur. The lesson took place at the National Mosque and was established as the inaugural Tahfiz institution in Malaysia under government auspices. A total of eight students have been chosen and sent as pioneers by seven states, namely Terengganu with two students, Negeri Sembilan, Kedah, Selangor, Perak, Perlis, and Pahang with one student each. The class was conducted by Dato' Hj Mohd Nor Hj. Ibrahim was concurrently serving as the Mufti of Kelantan during that period (Ismail, 2018).

In 1972, this institution expanded and underwent upgrades to become Maahad Tahfiz al-Quran Wal-Qiraat. Between 1966 and 1978, this institution was under the supervision of the National Mosque Administration Committee and the National Council Secretariat for Islamic Religious Affairs of Malaysia. However, in 1979, this institution came under the jurisdiction of the Islamic Research Centre, which is part of the Religious Department in the Prime Minister's Department, before being transferred to the Institut Dakwah dan Latihan Islam (INDAH) unit. In 1984, Maahad Tahfiz was established as a subsidiary of the Religious Department, complete with its distinct organizational framework. In 1997, Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Wal-Qiraat was elevated to the status of a department inside the Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) and was given the name Darul Quran. Darul Quran has been relocated from its previous facility to Kompleks Darul Quran, which now serves as its permanent campus in Ampang Pecah Kuala Kubu Bharu, Selangor.

Figure 1 below shows the timeline of the establishment of the Darul Quran from 1960 to 1997.
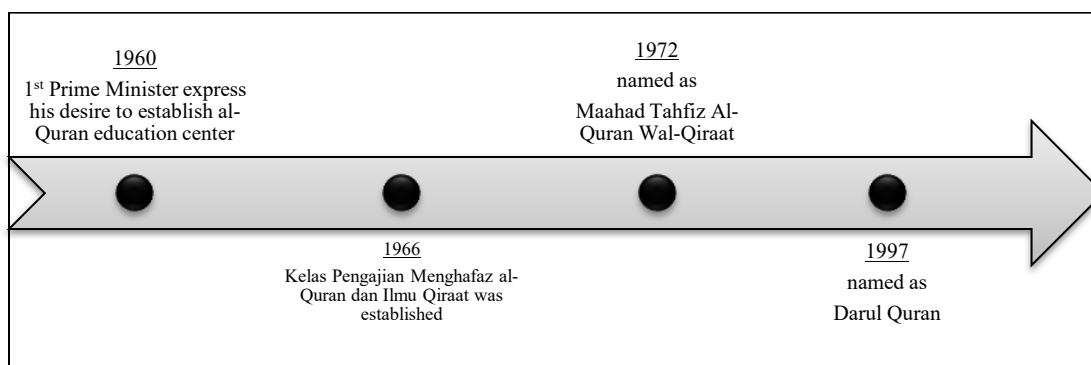

Figure 1 Timeline of the establishment of Darul Quran

Darul Quran offered a Diploma Tahfiz Darul Quran program. This program was created and gained recognition from the Public Service Department in 1983. This program lasted for six semesters, which is comparable to a length of three years. The program provides six specializations for students, namely Syukbah Qiraat, Syukbah Dakwah, Syukbah Syariah, Syukbah Hadith, Syukbah Muamalat, and Syukbah Halal Management. Between 1966 and 2018, student enrolment had a significant growth, rising from a mere eight students in 1966 to a substantial 4688 students in 2018 (Quran, 2020).

Darul Quran has established multiple tiers of its educational curriculum, including the Tahfiz certificate program, Diploma Tahfiz program, Degree in Quran Sunah, and Short-term program. The Tahfiz certificate program now involves three institutions: International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), and Cyberjaya University College of Medical Science (CUCMS). The Diploma Tahfiz program is available at Darul Quran and Maahad Tahfiz al-Quran Negeri (MTQN) in 14 states. Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) has been the sole provider of a Degree in Quran Sunah since 2009.

While the short-term program offers six programs: Sijil Tinggi Tarannum al-Quran, Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia, Pensijilan Tahfiz Al-Quran Orang Kelainan Upaya Masalah Penglihatan (OKUMP), Sijil Asas Tahfiz, Sijil

Tahfiz Malaysia (STM), and Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia. The duration of the program ranges from a minimum of two months to a maximum of two years. The partnership between Darul Quran and other universities has resulted in substantial transformations for Tahfiz institutions in Malaysia. This relationship has provided students with additional chances to become professional Huffaz, who are officially recognized by the government. This, in turn, indirectly assists them in establishing a successful career in the future.

Model 2 Ministry of Education

The second type represents an institution under the Ministry of Education. The former Minister of Higher Education, Honourable Dato 'Seri Idris bin Jusoh, has proposed the inclusion of Tahfiz education in the secondary education system. This program aims to establish Terengganu as a center for Islamic education in Malaysia. It is known as the Tahfiz Ulul Albab Programme and is being implemented in seven Sekolah Menengah Imtiyaz Yayasan Terengganu (Arshad, 2015). Subsequently, the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) introduced the Tahfiz Model Ulul Albab (TMUA), which focuses on the Qur'anic, Ijtihadic, and Encyclopaedic aspects. In addition, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has adopted a comparable strategy by introducing the Test of Mathematics for University Admission (TMUA) in secondary schools within its jurisdiction. The program is alternatively referred to as Kurikulum Bersepadu Tahfiz (KBT) (Ariffin, 2018). The program was initiated in 2014, with three schools located in Pahang (SMAP Bentong), Kuala Lumpur (SMKA Kuala Lumpur), and Kedah (SMKA Kedah). There are two options available to the students, and the entry criteria are either form one or form four (Talib, Shafie, & Tamuri, 2017). In 2015, this program was extended to more states and successfully covered all states in Malaysia by 2017.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education also provides alternative curriculum options, such as the Kurikulum Bersepadu Dini (KBD). This curriculum was introduced in Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR), Sekolah Menengah Agama Negeri (SMAN), and Sekolah Agama Bantuan Kerajaan (SABK). The curriculum is a combination of the Azhari Curriculum and the current National Curriculum in mainstream schools. The authors of this study employed Arabic as a mediator language (Talib et al., 2017; Yazit & Husaini, 2018).

Model 3 State Government

Currently, under the state government, there exist two categories of Tahfiz institutions: public and private. Public institutions are officially referred to as Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Negeri (MTQN), whereas private Tahfiz institutions are known as private Tahfiz institutions.

Maahad Tahfiz Quran Negeri (MTQN)

The third model entails a configuration in which the SIRC possesses ownership of the Tahfiz institution. Currently, there are 14 Maahad Tahfiz al Quran Negeri (MTQN) operating as Tahfiz institutions in Malaysia. All these institutions, except for one MTQN in Perak, are under the jurisdiction of the state government. The MTQN in Perak, on the other hand, is a privately owned institution. The establishment of this MTQN is directly linked to the inception of the Darul Quran. The first MTQN was established by the State Islamic Religious Council Kelantan in the form of Maahad Tahfiz al Quran MAIK in Kelantan. All 14 MTQN organizations have entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Tahfiz al Quran Diploma program. The program was initiated by KITAB Pulau Pinang in 2007 and the most recent MoU was signed in 2014 by MTQ ADDIN Perak. The list of MTQN in Malaysia and the corresponding year of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Darul Quran are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: List of MTQN in Malaysia

No	Name of Institution	State	Year of MoU
1	Maahad Tahfiz Al Quran Qal Qiraat Yayasan Islam Perlis	Perlis	2008

2	Kolej Islam Teknologi Antarabangsa	Pulau Pinang	2007
3	Institut Quran Darul Aman	Kedah	2012
4	Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Wal Qiraat Negeri Perak	Perak	2008
5	Kolej Pengajian Islam Johor (MARSAH)	Johor	2008
6	Maahad Tahfiz Al-Quran Masjid Sayidina Ali (MTQMSA)	Melaka	2011
7	Institut Tahfiz Al-Quran Negeri Sembilan	Negeri Sembilan	2009
8	Maahad Tahfiz Al Quran Qal Qiraat Negeri Pahang	Pahang	2008
9	Institut Al-Quran Terengganu	Terengganu	2009
10	Maahad Tahfiz Al Quran Qal Qiraat (MAIK)	Kelantan	2009
11	Maahad Tahfiz Al Quran Qal Qiraat Negeri Sabah	Sabah	2009
12	Institut Kemahiran Islam Malaysia Sarawak (IKMAS)	Sarawak	2011
13	Maahad Tahfiz Al Quran Qal Qiraat Addin	Perak	2014
14	Institut Pengajian Islam Terengganu (INSPI)	Terengganu	2011

Source: (Nordin et al., 2018)

Private Tahfiz Institution

Conversely, the fourth type entails schools being operated by individuals who have obtained legal authorization from the state government, specifically referred to as private Tahfiz. During the initial establishment of the government-operated Tahfiz institution, only high-achieving students who had completed their SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) and had exceptional academic performance were recruited. This is because the government has limited financial means to provide scholarships to the potential Huffaz. This scenario has created a chance for the private sector, including people and organizations, to establish Tahfiz institutions as an alternative for persons who aspire to become Hafiz but do not meet the government's needed credentials. Private Tahfiz institutes have provided the option to learn Tahfiz throughout the early stages of education.

According to historical records, the initial private Tahfiz institution in Malaysia was Maahad Tahfiz wal Qiraat in Jeram Selangor, established in 1981. The Madrasatul Quran Kubang Bujuk Terengganu was established in 1982, as documented by Ismail (2018) and Nawi, Yusuff, Yaacob, & Salleh (2014). The early stages of establishing and owning a private Tahfiz institution are undertaken by individuals. Most of these initiatives are spearheaded by individuals who are actively engaged in the operations of Jama'ah Tabligh. This is because a significant number of Jama'ah Tabligh members have traveled internationally, particularly to India and Pakistan, to engage in their preaching endeavors. The methodology and method of memorizing employed by the other country were deemed intriguing and perhaps applicable in Malaysia. Consequently, numerous individuals have founded private Tahfiz institutions to disseminate the expertise of memory acquired from foreign nations (Ismail, 2018).

Private Tahfiz institutions in Malaysia are required to register their organization with their respective State Islamic Religious Council (SIRC) to obtain recognition from the state government. Nevertheless, a significant

number of private Tahfiz institutes have not yet registered with any authorized body. Furthermore, the present situation in Malaysia reveals a distinct circumstance where numerous Tahfiz institutions are operating unlawfully because of registration complications. Therefore, many private institutions lack effective and organized governance for their operations, which exacerbates the situation when the curriculum fails to facilitate students' progression to the next level of study.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a preliminary survey to explore the governance practices of private Tahfiz institutions in Selangor. The survey targeted a total of 34 institutions, which were selected to represent a diverse range of operational characteristics, including ownership structures, registration status, and curriculum offerings. Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to administrators and stakeholders within the selected institutions. The survey focused on gathering quantitative and qualitative information regarding curriculum design, registration compliance, ownership types, and student-teacher ratios.

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current governance practices. This method enabled the identification of key trends and variations among the institutions, such as the proportion of fully registered versus partially registered institutions, curriculum integration, and the predominant ownership models. By employing descriptive analysis, the study was able to pinpoint areas requiring improvement while highlighting existing strengths in governance practices.

The methodology was designed to provide actionable insights into the governance landscape of private Tahfiz institutions in Selangor. Future research could expand upon this preliminary investigation by incorporating larger samples and advanced analytical methods to enhance the generalizability and depth of findings.

FINDING AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the outcomes of governance practices implemented by all Tahfiz institutions included in this study. These practices encompass the private Tahfiz profile (year of establishment, total current students, curriculum and ownership) and registration authority and registration status.

Table 2: Private Tahfiz Profile

Year of Establishment	Number of TI	Year of Establishment
5 to 10 years	22	5 to 10 years
11 to 19 years	8	11 to 19 years
20 years and above	4	20 years and above
Total Current Students	**Number of TI**	**Percentage (%)**
1 to 50	14	41.2
51 to 100	15	44.1
101 to 150	3	8.8
151 above	2	5.9
Curriculum Offered by Tahfiz	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**

Tahfiz Only	11	32.4
Tahfiz + Academic	13	38.2
Tahfiz + Alim	7	20.6
Others	3	8.8
Ownership	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Individual	26	76.5
Company	2	5.9
NGO	5	14.7
Foundation	1	2.9

The governance methods of the private Tahfiz institution participating in this study are presented in Table 2 above. The profile includes two specific pieces of information: the year of establishment and the number of Tahfiz institutions. The result classifies the year of establishment into three distinct ranges: 1) 5 to 10 years, 2) 11 to 19 years, and 3) 20 years and above. There is a total of 22 TIs that have been in operation for a period of 5 to 10 years.

Additionally, there are eight TIs that have been operating for 11 to 19 years, and four TIs that have been in operation for 20 years or more. The large number of TIs functioning for 5 to 10 years can be attributed to the growing population of private Tahfiz schools, which are meeting the rising demand among Malaysians. Furthermore, the adaptability in the process of creating Tahfiz schools is also a contributing element to the rise in the number of new schools.

According to the guidelines provided by DPTN, the ideal teacher-to-student ratio is 1:12, and the ideal classroom-to-student ratio is 1:35 (JAKIM, 2021). Regarding the overall number of current student categories, there are 14 TIs with a minimum of 1 to 50 students and 15 TIs with 51 to 100 students. The reason these two categories rank highest is because private Tahfiz institutions, mostly owned by individuals, typically require a minimum number of pupils to begin operating. Certain schools have constraints regarding the quantity of educators, while others have severely restricted facilities. Tahfiz institutions with a substantial student population are often founded and fully sponsored schools, either by the federal or state government. This study includes two educational institutions, each of which has a student population above 151. These two TIs have been in operation for over two decades.

Presently, the regulation of Tahfiz schools, particularly private Tahfiz institutions, lacks a standardised framework. Consequently, the curriculum provided varies depending on the school. SIRC's primary role is to oversee the curriculum and assure its compliance with the guidelines provided by the authority. Consequently, private Tahfiz schools typically provide several types of curriculums. According to Table 2, private Tahfiz institutions included in this study offer four distinct curriculums, specifically, 1) Tahfiz exclusively. 2) Tahfiz and academic education 3) Tahfiz and Alim (Arabic language and hadith) and 4) Other combinations such as Tahfiz and technical subjects, and Tahfiz and sports. According to the data, schools that exclusively offer Tahfiz education have the highest percentage, at 32.4%. Nevertheless, 38.2% or 13 out of 34 Tahfiz schools in this survey offer the Tahfiz and academic curricula, indicating a strong recognition of the significance of academic learning in these institutions. According to the guidelines for Tahfiz institutions provided by JAKIM for the year 2021, it is mandatory for each school to utilise a curriculum that has been certified by the appropriate SIRC. The curriculum utilised must be selected from the three established models, namely

Kurikulum Tahfiz Bersepadu, Kurikulum Tahfiz Turath, and Kurikulum Tahfiz Kemahiran. Meanwhile, tahfiz institutions that have students below the age of 12 are required to implement the Standard Elementary Schools Curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education in addition to their own tahfiz curriculum.

Ownership status pertains to the individual or entity that possesses the Tahfiz Institution. As previously stated, there are two primary categories of Tahfiz ownership in Malaysia: public and private. The ownership of public Tahfiz institutions is a matter of determining whether it belongs to the state or federal government. Nevertheless, the ownership structure for private Tahfiz institutions differs. The study categorises owners into four types: individual, corporate, non-profit organisation (NGO), and foundation. The individual owner is the most prevalent form of ownership for private Tahfiz institutions in Malaysia. Conversely, business ownership indicates that the Tahfiz institution is possessed by a corporate entity. Therefore, the company developed the Tahfiz institution as a component of their business or corporate social responsibility. Regarding NGOs, the Tahfiz institution is under the ownership of the organization, whereas the foundation ownership status indicates that the Tahfiz institution is owned by a foundation. According to the data presented in Table 2 above, the category with the highest percentage of ownership is individuals, accounting for 76.5%. The second highest category is NGOs, with a percentage of 14.7%. The corporation and foundation hold ownership stakes of 5.9% and 2.9% respectively.

Registration Authority and Status

At present, the oversight of Tahfiz institutions falls under the purview of the religious authority, SIRC, as mandated by the legislation that oversees Islamic religious schools in the state. Consequently, the registration of Tahfiz schools is indirectly under the authority of SIRC. Nevertheless, the lack of legislation about Tahfiz has led to the registration of Tahfiz institutions with entities other than the Social and Islamic Religious Council (SIRC), such as the Registrar of Societies (ROS) and foundations.

Table 3: Registration Authority and Status

Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Registration Authority		
State Islamic Religious Councils	27	79.4
Registrar of Society	3	8.8
Yayasan	4	11.8
Total	34	100.0
Registration Status		
Fully Registered	6	17.6
Partially Registered	28	82.4
Not Registered	0	0
Total	34	100.0

According to the data in Table 3, 79.4% of Tahfiz institutions are registered with SIRC, 11.8% are registered with foundations, and the remaining 8.8% are registered with ROS. The high registration percentage at SIRC is attributed to the strong determination of SIRC in Selangor to establish strict rules for the registration of private

Tahfiz schools. Furthermore, the presence of a highly engaged private Tahfiz school association also contributed to the motivation of all association members to enrol with SIRC.

According to the data in the table above, 17.6% of the 34 Tahfiz institutions have achieved full registered status, while the remaining 82.4% have temporary registered status. No unregistered Tahfiz institution was included in this analysis.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has conducted an examination of the governance protocols adopted by private Tahfiz groups in Selangor. The survey encompassed a grand total of 34 Tahfiz institutions. The results of this study suggest that there are still certain areas that need additional attention and enhancement. The role of Islamic governance is essential in strengthening Tahfiz reporting and promoting openness and accountability within these organisations (Bani, Jaaffar, Katan, & Mohd Noor, 2017). Theoretical framework for governance in independent schools identifies leadership behaviours as crucial components to be considered in the governance of private Tahfiz institutions (Jaaffar, Bani, Fatah, Muhammad, & Misba, 2022). The following proposals are recommended to improve the governance procedures of private Tahfiz institutions in Selangor. Firstly, implementing a comprehensive regulatory framework that covers all aspects of governance, such as financial management, curriculum development, and student welfare, would set a precise and uniform standard for these institutions to follow. Furthermore, the enforcement of periodic audits and performance assessments, carried out by appropriate authorities, will effectively guarantee that private tahfiz schools adhere to the necessary governance criteria and promptly address any identified areas of concern. Finally, the encouragement of cooperative endeavours among private tahfiz schools, government agencies, and other stakeholders will cultivate a culture characterised by openness, responsibility, and ongoing enhancement within the sector. Implementing these recommendations will enhance the governance processes of private Tahfiz institutions, thereby ensuring their ability to deliver excellent Islamic education and foster the comprehensive development of their students.

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