

Career Development Profile of Private Tahfiz Madrasah Graduates in Malaysia: Planning, Exploration, Information, and Career Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore career development among graduates of private tahfiz madrasahs in Malaysia, focusing on four key dimensions: planning, exploration, information, and career decision-making. Tahfiz education is often associated with religious fields, but the reality of the modern job market requires tahfiz graduates to possess additional skills to enhance their employability. This study employs a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey design involving 174 respondents from various private tahfiz madrasahs. The findings reveal that the levels of career planning, career exploration, and career decision-making among tahfiz students are moderately low, while access to career information is relatively better but still needs improvement. The study also found that the main factors influencing the career development of tahfiz students included limited exposure to various job options, imbalances in the tahfiz education curriculum, and a lack of industry networking. Therefore, several recommendations have been proposed, including the introduction of career guidance modules into the tahfiz curriculum, improving access to career information, and strengthening the relationship between tahfiz madrasahs and industries to provide students with training opportunities and work experience. With more systematic efforts, tahfiz students can develop clearer career paths aligned with the needs of the modern job market.

Keywords: Career planning, tahfiz education, graduate employability, career exploration, career guidance.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The private *Madrasah Tahfiz* education system in Malaysia plays a vital role in producing a generation that is not only proficient in religious knowledge but also competent in other fields relevant to contemporary challenges. While Quranic studies remain the core focus, the demands and opportunities of the globalized era require that this education be expanded through the integration of other academic disciplines such as science, technology, and soft skills [1]. Therefore, to ensure that *tahfiz* students succeed in both worldly and spiritual aspects, a more balanced and holistic approach must be adopted in their curriculum.

In this regard, career development is a crucial element in an individual's life. It not only determines a person's source of income but also influences their quality of life, social status, and personal development. Choosing a suitable career can lead to job satisfaction and economic stability, whereas an unsuitable choice can result in stress, financial instability, and dissatisfaction with life [2]. Thus, strategic career planning becomes a critical aspect in ensuring a person's success in their chosen profession.

However, the reality in Malaysia shows that unemployment remains a major challenge, including among graduates of private *tahfiz* madrasahs. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) reported that the youth unemployment rate for those aged 15 to 24 reached 292.9 thousand, while the unemployment rate for adults aged 25 to 64 was 268.2 thousand [3]. This issue affects not only mainstream academic students but also *tahfiz* students who face challenges in adapting to the modern job market. Employment opportunities for *tahfiz* graduates are often limited, especially for those who lack additional skills beyond religious studies.

In addressing this issue, career experts have proposed career guidance approaches to help individuals plan their career paths more systematically [4]. Scholars have also emphasized that structured career planning can enhance graduate employability and reduce unemployment among educational institutions, including private *tahfiz* madrasahs ([5],[6],[7]). This highlights the importance of exposure to various career pathways and additional skills in ensuring the livelihood of *tahfiz* students after graduation.

Furthermore, Islam emphasizes the balance between worldly life and the hereafter, including in the realm of employment. Allah SWT states in Surah Al-Qasas, verse 77:

“But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and yet, do not forget your share of the world...” (Al-Qasas: 77).

This verse underlines the importance of seeking halal sustenance while upholding religious principles. In the context of *tahfiz* students, while focusing on religious studies, they must also have clear plans to develop stable careers—whether in religious fields or other areas that match their skills.

This study aims to explore the career development profile of graduates from private *tahfiz* madrasahs in Malaysia by examining the key factors that influence their career pathways, including planning, exploration, information, and decision-making. By understanding the challenges, they face and the opportunities available, this study can offer strategic recommendations to enhance the employability of *tahfiz* graduates and ensure that they can contribute effectively to society and national development.

Problem Statement

Although the importance of career planning has been widely discussed in various studies, the reality in Malaysia shows that unemployment remains a major challenge—including among graduates of private *tahfiz* madrasahs. As stated in the background of the study, DOSM reported that the unemployment rate among youth aged 15 to 24 has reached 292.9 thousand, while the unemployment rate for adults aged 25 to 64 stands at 268.2 thousand [3]. This situation highlights the urgent need to develop more systematic strategies to help graduates of educational institutions, including *tahfiz* students, adapt to the increasingly challenging job market.

Traditionally, *tahfiz* graduates are often associated with careers in religious fields such as imams, religious teachers, and preachers. While these roles are crucial for the development of the Muslim community, the job opportunities in these areas are limited and do not always guarantee economic stability. A study has emphasized that *tahfiz* students are highly regarded by society for their religious knowledge, but they must also be prepared to face real-life challenges that require stable sources of income [8]. As a result, many of them struggle to secure jobs that meet their needs.

Furthermore, the private *tahfiz* education system in Malaysia has yet to offer a comprehensive approach to career guidance that can help students explore diverse job options and build broader career pathways. According to studies, systematic career planning is a key element in helping individuals choose suitable career paths and enhancing their employability ([5],[6],[7]). However, many *tahfiz* students lack sufficient exposure to alternative career options, which leaves them ill-prepared to enter a highly competitive job market.

In Islam, the balance between worldly life and the hereafter is highly emphasized, including in matters of employment. Allah states in Surah Al-Jumu'ah, verse 10:

“And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah...”.

This concept of balance is further reinforced in a hadith of the Prophet narrated by Ibn Asakir and Anas:

“The best among you is not the one who forsakes the world for the Hereafter, or forsakes the Hereafter for the world, but the one who balances both. Indeed, this worldly life leads you to the Hereafter. Do not become a burden to others.”

This clearly indicates the importance of working to earn a halal livelihood as part of a Muslim's responsibility. However, without strong strategies and adequate support, many *tahfiz* graduates fail to balance the religious knowledge they've acquired with the employment demands of the modern world. The absence of clear planning not only affects the individuals themselves but also has implications for society at large.

Therefore, this study is conducted to identify the main challenges faced by graduates of private *tahfiz* madrasahs in their career development and to formulate more effective strategies to support their success across various fields. By understanding the factors that influence their career development, this study can contribute to efforts in enhancing the employability and competitiveness of *tahfiz* graduates in the modern job market, in line with Islam's emphasis on balancing worldly and spiritual responsibilities.

This study aims to identify the profiles of private *tahfiz* students in their career planning, including the factors that influence their career choices and future directions. Additionally, it will examine the challenges faced by students in planning their careers and the opportunities available for them to develop their potential in areas related to *tahfiz* education. The findings of this study are expected to provide a clearer picture of the awareness and preparedness of *tahfiz* students in facing the job market.

Significance of study

This study holds significant importance in enhancing the employability of graduates from private *tahfiz* madrasahs and contributing to educational policies and human capital development in Malaysia. The primary significance of this study lies in its aim to improve the employability of *tahfiz* graduates who often face difficulties in securing employment that aligns with current market needs. According to studies, systematic career guidance can increase employment opportunities, especially for individuals with limited exposure to alternative career options ([6],[7],[9]).

Overall, this study plays a crucial role in strengthening the employability of private *tahfiz* graduates in line with the demands of the current job market. By emphasizing the importance of structured career guidance, the study not only opens more job opportunities for *tahfiz* graduates but also contributes to national education policies and human capital development in Malaysia. Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a valuable reference for various stakeholders in formulating more effective strategies to enhance the competitiveness and employability of this group across diverse career fields.

Concept of Career Development

Career development is a continuous process that involves planning, exploration, self-adjustment, and decision-making related to one's career. The career development theories frequently referenced in this study are the Career Development Model [4] and the Career Aspirations Theory [10]. Both theories emphasize the importance of career maturity, individual readiness, and the factors influencing one's decisions in choosing a career path aligned with their interests and abilities.

One of the main aspects of career development is career planning, which involves setting a direction in the world of work based on educational pathways, training, and strategies relevant to achieving set goals. A study emphasized that effective career planning plays a vital role in shaping a more secure future, with individuals who have clear plans being more likely to succeed in their chosen fields [11].

Additionally, career exploration is a crucial phase in career development, as it involves individuals actively seeking and gathering information about potential job sectors. This process helps individuals understand the demands of the labor market and build professional networks to facilitate their entry into the workforce. Career exploration is a critical step to ensure that individuals can identify a career path that suits their interests and abilities [12].

In the context of labor market information, a deep understanding of job requirements, job descriptions, career prospects, and salary expectations can assist individuals in making better-informed decisions about their future. Subsequently, career decision-making is an important element that requires maturity and a comprehensive

understanding of the available options. This concept is based on Super's Career Maturity Theory [4], which emphasizes that individuals need to have adequate knowledge to make the best decisions aligned with their goals and potential.

In conclusion, career development involves planning, exploration, and decision-making based on personal interests, abilities, and labor market needs. The theories of Super and Gottfredson highlight the importance of maturity and individual readiness in selecting a career path. Systematic planning and exploration contribute to building a more secure future, while a good understanding of the job market enables wise and strategic career decisions.

Career Prospects and Challenges for Tahfiz Graduates

The career prospects and challenges faced by *tahfiz* graduates in Malaysia are increasingly gaining attention within the context of national human capital development. *Tahfiz* graduates often face various challenges in adapting to the needs of the modern job market; however, with the right approach, their opportunities for building broader careers can be improved.

In terms of career prospects, studies have shown that *tahfiz* graduates have potential to grow not only in religious sectors but also in other areas such as education, the halal industry, business, and entrepreneurship [13]. Although they are more commonly known as religious teachers or imams, there is potential for them to explore other professional fields if provided with appropriate training. *Tahfiz* institutions should integrate academic education and career training to better prepare graduates for the modern workforce [14]. Therefore, efforts to strengthen the *tahfiz* education system by emphasizing additional skills such as communication, critical thinking, and technology are essential to help graduates adapt to the Fourth Industrial Revolution [15].

Nevertheless, there are several major challenges that must be addressed to ensure the career sustainability of *tahfiz* graduates across various sectors. One of the greatest challenges is the lack of suitable job opportunities, as most employers prioritize candidates with mainstream academic qualifications and strong soft skills [16]. Moreover, the lack of standardization in the curriculum of private *tahfiz* madrasahs also contributes to the difficulty graduates face in finding employment. This is because most *tahfiz* institutions operate independently without standardized curricular guidelines, which reduces their students' marketability [13]. In addition, societal stigma that views *tahfiz* graduates as only suitable for religious roles also becomes a barrier for those who wish to venture into other fields such as business and entrepreneurship. Therefore, more initiatives are needed to introduce career development programs that can help them plan for their future more systematically [11].

In conclusion, the career prospects for *tahfiz* graduates in Malaysia are broad and promising, with opportunities in religious fields, education, the halal industry, and entrepreneurship. However, the main challenges they face include a lack of suitable job opportunities, inconsistent educational systems, and societal stigma limiting their career options. To ensure their success in the modern job market, it is essential for *tahfiz* graduates to plan their futures systematically. This includes enhancing additional skills such as communication, critical thinking, and technology, and integrating academic and career training within *tahfiz* institutions. Only through a more structured and comprehensive approach can they adapt to the dynamic changes in the job market and seize opportunities across various sectors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey design to identify the level of understanding and awareness among students of private *tahfiz* madrasahs in Malaysia regarding career planning, exploration, information, and decision-making. This approach was chosen as it allows for systematic and objective collection of data to reflect the actual situation among the respondents. Additionally, the quantitative approach enables more detailed statistical analysis to measure the relationships between the variables studied and to draw more meaningful conclusions. The study also considers the need to understand the factors influencing career choices among *tahfiz* students and how these can be enhanced to ensure a brighter future across various employment sectors.

Population and Sample

The study population consists of students from private tahfiz madrasahs in Malaysia who are either currently studying or nearing the completion of their studies. The sample was selected using purposive sampling to ensure that only students who met specific criteria were involved in the study. A total of 174 respondents were selected from various states, considering demographic aspects such as educational background and access to career information.

The selection criteria for respondents were as follows:

- Tahfiz students are currently studying in their final year of study.
- I aspire to pursue a career after completing tahfiz education.
- I am willing to participate in the study and provide honest and transparent responses.
- Not involved in any career development training or additional educational programs.

The study focuses on students who are still in the transition phase and have not made final career decisions, to gain deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities they face.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was used as the primary instrument to collect data systematically from the respondents. This questionnaire was adapted based on a study by Mohd Nor (2016) and reviewed by a panel of experts in *tahfiz* education and career development. The reliability value (Cronbach's Alpha) for the questionnaire is 0.81, and it consists of five main sections: (1) Demographics – Basic information such as age, gender, education level, and plans after graduation, (2) Career Planning – Measures students' awareness and planning toward their career paths, (3) Career Exploration – Analyzes how far students have explored job options relevant to their interests and skills, (4) Career Information – Assesses the students' access to information about job opportunities and further education pathways, and (5) Career Decision-Making – Examines the key factors influencing students' career decisions.

Each item in the questionnaire is measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) to obtain accurate perceptions and analyze respondents' tendencies toward aspects of career development.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected through various methods to ensure broader participation among *tahfiz* students:

Online Questionnaires – Distributed via social media, academic platforms, and the networks of participating *tahfiz* madrasahs.

Physical Distribution – For madrasahs with limited access to digital devices, printed questionnaires were distributed manually.

Interview Protocols – Conducted to gain deeper insights from selected respondents. Each session was recorded for documentation and more detailed analysis.

Data Collection Period – Data was collected over a two-month period to ensure sufficient response numbers and to avoid bias in the study findings.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected was analyzed using *IBM SPSS Statistics software* to provide a more systematic and scientific overview. The analysis techniques used include:

Descriptive Statistics – Used to analyze the distribution of respondent data, including mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values for each main construct.

Thematic Analysis – Conducted to explore critical factors that influence the career paths of private *tahfiz* madrasah students. This approach aims to uncover key elements that determine the effectiveness and challenges of their career journeys.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, the following tests were conducted:

Reliability – Cronbach’s Alpha test was applied to each section of the questionnaire to measure internal consistency, with a reliability value above 0.81 considered acceptable.

Content Validity – The questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts in career development and *tahfiz* education to ensure all items were relevant to the study objectives.

Pilot Test – Conducted with a small group of *tahfiz* students prior to full distribution to identify any confusing or inaccurate questions.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on the interpretation scale of mean scores [17], the researcher used the mean scale (Table 1) as a reference to interpret and analyze the level of career development among graduates of private *tahfiz* madrasahs.

Table I Mean Score Interpretation

| Mean Score | Career Development Level |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| 1.00 – 2.00 | Low |
| 2.01 – 3.00 | Moderately Low |
| 3.01 – 4.00 | Moderately High |
| 4.01 – 5.00 | High |

Accordingly, by using this scale, the researcher was able to gain a clearer understanding of the respondents' level of career development and identify areas that need improvement or continuation to achieve better career progress.

Analysis of Research Findings

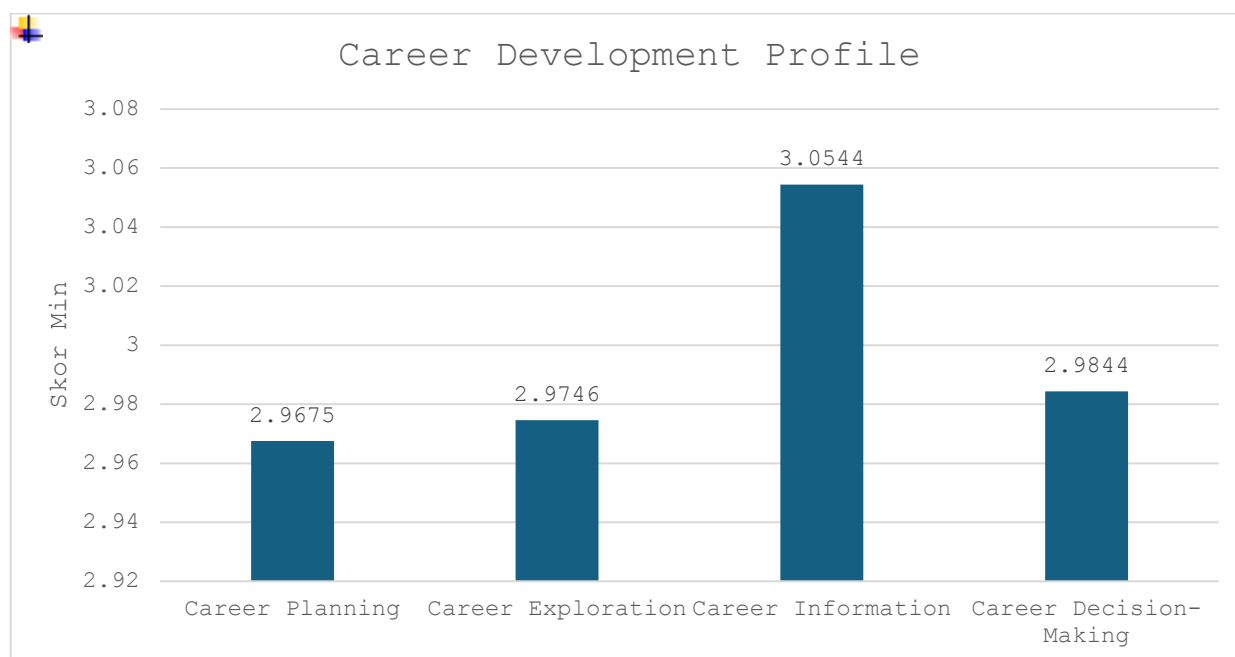


Figure 1: Career Development Levels of Private *Tahfiz* Madrasah Graduates

Based on the study conducted (Figure 1), the analysis of the data obtained using IBM SPSS Statistics focused on the career development levels of private *tahfiz* madrasah graduates across four main dimensions: Career Planning, Career Exploration, Career Information, and Career Decision-Making. The mean scores for each dimension are as follows:

- Career Planning: Mean = 2.97 (Moderately Low)
- Career Exploration: Mean = 2.97 (Moderately Low)
- Career Information: Mean = 3.05 (Moderately High)
- Career Decision-Making: Mean = 2.98 (Moderately Low)

These findings indicate that the majority of private *tahfiz* students fall within the moderately low category in terms of career planning, exploration, and decision-making, while their level of access to career information is relatively better, though still in need of enhancement.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The analysis found that the level of career planning among *tahfiz* students remains moderately low. Interview results indicated that *tahfiz* students have not made adequate preparations in determining their career direction. Studies have proven that systematic career planning is key to students' success in selecting their future careers.

The main factors contributing to this situation include the lack of systematic career guidance and the absence of comprehensive training programs that could help students identify suitable career options. The strong emphasis on religious-oriented education without integrating soft or technical skills also hampers *tahfiz* students from expanding their abilities into various career fields. The absence of a comprehensive curriculum in *tahfiz* institutions makes it difficult for students to adapt to the demands of modern industries [4].

Moreover, the low level of career exploration among *tahfiz* students suggests that they have limited exposure to job opportunities outside the religious field. This could stem from the lack of industrial networks that could provide direct exposure to the job market. Research shows that *tahfiz* institutions should not focus solely on Quran memorization but also integrate academic education and career training to broaden job opportunities for their graduates [14].

However, this study found that the level of access to career information is relatively better compared to the other dimensions, with a mean score of 3.05. This indicates that some *tahfiz* students are already aware of the importance of obtaining job-related information before making decisions about their future. Nonetheless, the information obtained may still be insufficient or lacking in depth, which prevents them from making more strategic career decisions. Students with low career self-efficacy face difficulties in making career decisions because they lack confidence in their own abilities [18]. Therefore, there is a need to provide more relevant and up-to-date information sources to *tahfiz* students to better prepare them for the increasingly challenging job market.

Career decision-making difficulty is also one of the main challenges faced by *tahfiz* students. With a mean score of 2.98, this finding suggests that their confidence in determining their career direction remains moderately low. Uncertainty about industry requirements, lack of work experience, and concerns about societal acceptance of *tahfiz* graduates outside the religious sector contribute to this situation. Employment is a crucial aspect of human life, and individuals will be more confident about their future if they have a clear career direction [19]. Therefore, support from various parties, including *tahfiz* institutions, industries, and the government, is greatly needed to assist them in making better career decisions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, several improvements can be proposed to enhance the employability of *tahfiz* students so that they are better prepared to face the competitive job market. *Tahfiz* institutions should take proactive steps by incorporating career guidance modules into their curriculum to ensure that students are exposed early to various career options. This will allow them to strategize earlier in planning a future career that provides greater economic stability.

In addition, access to career information needs to be strengthened through seminars, workshops, and industrial training programs so that students gain a better understanding of the realities of the working world and are equipped with sufficient information to make informed decisions about their career paths [20].

Moreover, training in additional skills such as soft skills, entrepreneurship, and digital technology should be introduced to boost their competitiveness in the growing job market. Tahfiz students with these additional skills will not only adapt more easily to industry demands but also have the potential to venture into entrepreneurship or technology—sectors that are increasingly prominent in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0). Furthermore, stronger collaboration between tahfiz institutions and industry players should be reinforced to provide students with more opportunities for training and practical experience that can support them in making more strategic career choices.

The findings of this study show that graduates from private tahfiz madrasahs still face significant challenges in planning and exploring their career paths. Although they have some access to career information, their levels of planning and exploration remain low, making it difficult for them to make accurate career decisions. Therefore, more systematic and comprehensive efforts are needed to ensure that tahfiz students have a clearer career direction that aligns with the demands of the modern labor market. With the implementation of more holistic and inclusive measures, tahfiz students can not only enhance their employability but also contribute more effectively to the economic and social development of the nation.

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