

DRIVING SUCCESS IN TAHFIZ SCHOOLS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF RISK MANAGEMENT BETWEEN LEADERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE

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Abstract: *For educational institutions to succeed and function well, effective leadership is crucial. This study investigates how risk management functions as a mediator between performance and leadership in Tahfiz schools, which focus on memorising the Quran and deal with difficulties that call for proactive risk management and strong leadership. Using a quantitative methodology, data was collected through surveys from 186 administrators across Tahfiz schools in Negeri Sembilan, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, Perak, Selangor, and Johor. The findings reveal that trust in leadership positively influences school performance ($\beta=0.373$, $t=3.145$, $p<0.002$, $f^2=0.161$). Additionally, risk management significantly impacts school performance ($\beta=0.551$, $t=4.846$, $p<0.01$, $f^2=0.352$). Importantly, risk management also mediates the relationship between leadership and performance ($\beta=0.485$, $t=4.861$, $p<0.01$), indicating that strong risk management practices amplify the benefits of effective leadership. These results suggest that adopting comprehensive risk management strategies enables Tahfiz schools to better address financial, operational, and educational challenges, ultimately improving student outcomes and ensuring sustainability. The study highlights the need to incorporate risk management training into leadership development programs for Tahfiz administrators. By aligning effective leadership with robust risk management, these schools can better navigate uncertainties and work towards their ambitious goal of producing 125,000 professional huffaz by 2050.*

Keywords: *Leadership effectiveness, risk management, Tahfiz schools' performance, quantitative analysis*

Introduction

Tahfiz schools, which focus on Quran memorization and recitation, are essential parts of the education systems in many Muslim-majority countries. Their primary goal is to develop individuals who are highly skilled in Quranic recitation while embodying strong Islamic values and morals (Zakaria, 2016). As of 2023, there are over 1,300 registered Tahfiz schools in Malaysia, with thousands more operating independently (JAKIM, 2023). Despite their important role, Tahfiz schools face several challenges that can hinder their effectiveness and the well-being of students. One major issue is the lack of standardized regulatory oversight, especially in unregistered schools, which can lead to inconsistencies educational quality, poor infrastructure, compromised student safety and organizational performance (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018). Notable incidents, such as the 2017 fire at a Tahfiz school in Kuala Lumpur that claimed 23 lives, highlight the critical risks associated with weak institutional management and safety protocols. To address these problems, improving leadership and implementing comprehensive risk management practices are critical. Leadership that lacks integrated risk protocols may be insufficient to sustain performance or ensure student well-being. Effective school leaders must be equipped not only to provide spiritual and academic guidance but also to enforce safety standards, ensure operational efficiency, and align institutional practices with national educational goals. Strong leadership can set clear visions, enforce standards, and motivate staff to uphold Islamic principles and educational excellence.

Moreover, risk management is often treated as a separate administrative function rather than a strategic component of leadership. This disconnection can result in reactive rather than proactive responses to threats such as financial instability, inadequate facilities, or curriculum misalignment. Integrating risk management into leadership practices could help schools better anticipate and mitigate challenges before they impact performance.

While general educational research supports the importance of leadership and risk management independently, empirical studies that examine their interrelationship particularly within the Tahfiz school context are limited. There is a lack of data-driven research analyzing how leadership influences school performance through the lens of risk management.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how effective leadership and risk management directly influence the overall performance of Tahfiz schools in Malaysia. It also explores whether risk management acts as a mediator, meaning that it could be a key factor through which leadership impacts school success. The insights gained from this research will empower school administrators to formulate better strategies, ultimately helping Tahfiz schools reach national targets like producing 125,000 qualified huffaz (memorizer of the Quran) by 2050 (Fauzan & Mohamad, 2017).

Literature Review

There are four points will be discussed in this literature review which are performance in tahfiz school, leadership as a key factor influencing tahfiz school achievement, risk management and tahfiz school achievement, the mediating role of risk management in the relationship between effective leadership and tahfiz school performance. While numerous studies have examined leadership and risk management in general education contexts, there is a notable lack of

empirical research focused specifically on Tahfiz schools, particularly regarding how these two factors interact. Although existing literature recognizes the importance of both leadership and risk management in enhancing school performance, few studies have explored their relationship within Tahfiz institutions using an integrated framework. Moreover, conflicting findings especially in under-regulated or informal school settings underscore the need for more nuanced, context-specific investigations. This study addresses these gaps by examining how leadership and risk management jointly influence the performance of Tahfiz schools and whether risk management serves as a mediating factor in this relationship.

Performance in Tahfiz School

School performance is a multifaceted concept that covers various aspects of a school's functioning and outcomes. It includes academic achievement, student progress, teaching quality, student behavior, engagement, and the overall school environment (Thapa et al., 2022). Performance is often measured using both quantitative and qualitative indicators, such as standardized test scores, graduation rates, and attendance (Fuller & Young, 2022).

Tahfiz school performance is complex, encompassing academic success, spiritual and moral development, ethical growth, and proficiency in Quranic studies (Abdullah et al., 2023a). Additionally, it is impacted by elements including parental satisfaction and student involvement (Latif et al., 2023a). Furthermore, the ability of Tahfiz schools to effectively manage resources, impart Islamic values, and have a beneficial influence on the community can be used to assess them (Thompson et al., 2021a). The Balanced Scorecard framework is used in this study to evaluate Tahfiz's academic achievement. This method considers learning and growth, internal processes, stakeholder viewpoints, and academic accomplishment (Kaplan & Norton, 1996).

Leadership as a Key Factor Influencing Tahfiz School Achievement

Leadership involves guiding and inspiring individuals or groups to achieve shared goals (Northouse, 2023). Effective leaders set a vision, motivate others, make informed decisions, and foster high-performing environments (Avolio & Bass, 2022). Leadership is characterized by strategic educational management, including planning, intervention, and alignment with institutional objectives (Kunalan et al., 2022).

In Tahfiz schools, where spiritual and academic missions intersect, leadership plays a vital role in sustaining quality and consistency. Leaders who demonstrate clarity of vision, communication skills, and ethical integrity can significantly enhance school performance (Saputra et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2022). Strong leadership positively correlates with improved student outcomes and institutional efficiency (Rahim et al., 2021). For example, Daud et al. (2024) found a moderate but significant positive effect of leadership on school performance ($\beta = 0.308$, $t = 4.276$, $p < 0.01$).

However, while general educational literature confirms a positive link between leadership and school outcomes (Day et al., 2020; Leithwood & Sun, 2021; Robinson et al., 2019), there is limited research contextualizing leadership practices within Tahfiz or faith-based schools. Moreover, most existing studies tend to isolate leadership from broader administrative mechanisms like risk management, thus overlooking the potential synergistic effects of integrated leadership and risk strategies.

These observations lead to the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant relationship between effective leadership and the performance of Tahfiz schools

Risk Management and Tahfiz School Achievement

Risk, defined as the chance of harm or loss associated with uncertainty, can hinder an organization's ability to achieve its goals (Renn, 2020). Effective risk management involves identifying, assessing, and mitigating threats, safeguarding resources, ensuring compliance, and improving decision-making (Hopkin, 2023). It fosters resilience, helping institutions adapt to change and minimize losses (Smith, 2023). Such proactive strategies lead to better resource management and compliance, directly improving student outcomes and institutional longevity (Zulkifli & Othman, 2019; Ahmad & Rahman, 2020).

In Tahfiz schools, managing risks requires sensitivity to unique challenges, such as maintaining religious integrity, aligning curricula with Islamic principles, ensuring physical safety in often under-resourced facilities and fostering a supportive spiritual environment is crucial (Salleh & Zainal, 2023). The 2017 Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah fire tragedy in Malaysia serves as a stark reminder of the real and present risks in poorly regulated religious institutions.

Studies by Harris & Jones (2022) and Walker & Smith (2023) show that strong risk management frameworks improve academic and operational outcomes. In Tahfiz schools, Daud et al. (2024) observed a strong and significant positive relationship between risk management and school performance ($\beta = 0.618$, $t = 5.225$, $p < 0.01$). Effective risk mitigation supports stakeholder trust and institutional reputation that are crucial elements for schools aiming to meet national religious education goals.

However, there is a scarcity of studies investigating how risk management practices are developed, implemented, or evaluated specifically in Tahfiz schools. Most existing literature either examines risk management in general education or Islamic finance, leaving an empirical gap in Islamic school governance.

These observations lead to the following hypothesis:

H2: There is a significant relationship between risk management practices and Tahfiz school performance.

Risk Management as a Mediator

Including risk management in educational institutions' strategic planning is essential for improving overall performance. By proactively identifying and preparing for potential disruptions, schools can create a stable and conducive learning environment (Cluver, 2023; Ismail et al., 2019). Risk management acts as a mediator in the relationship between leadership and school performance, meaning that strong and effective leadership enhances a school's ability to implement risk management strategies successfully (Othman & Rahman, 2014). Schools led by capable leaders who also have solid risk management frameworks tend to achieve better outcomes, such as higher student achievement levels.

The connection between leadership and school performance becomes stronger when effective risk management provides a structured approach to minimizing threats, ensuring that schools can navigate challenges more effectively (Rahman et al., 2022). Risk management techniques work as a mediator in Tahfiz schools, balancing the connection between academic achievement

and the calibre of leadership. This results in higher student achievement and greater organizational stability (Zain et al., 2023). In the Malaysian context, research confirms that risk management plays a vital mediating role, with effective leadership leading to better application of risk strategies, ultimately improving school performance.

Furthermore, the integration of strong leadership with comprehensive risk management practices leads to better educational outcomes, supporting Malaysia's broader educational development goals (Daud et al., 2024). Schools adopting these strategies are more capable of meeting national targets, such as producing 125,000 qualified hafaz by 2050 (Daud et al., 2024).

Yet, these findings are not universal. Some studies suggest that in less formal school systems like unregistered Tahfiz institutions, the absence of policy enforcement and leadership training limits the effectiveness of risk management frameworks, raising questions about the generalizability of mediation effects in such contexts.

These observations lead to the following hypothesis:

H3: Risk management practices mediate the relationship between effective leadership and Tahfiz school performance.

The suggested research framework for this study is depicted in Figure 1. In this model, dependent variable is Tahfiz school performance while the independent variable is effective leadership. Risk management acts as a mediator in the relationship between leadership and performance.



Figure 1: Research Framework of The Study

Source: Author (2025)

Methodology

To investigate how risk management mediates the connection between Tahfiz school performance and effective leadership, this study adopts a quantitative approach, with purposive sampling used to select the participants. The expected sample size required is determined through the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. These researchers suggested that a sample size of 165 respondents is sufficient to conduct both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. To improve the likelihood of reaching this target, a total of 570 structured questionnaires were distributed to administrators, principals, and senior teaching staff at selected Tahfiz institutions across Malaysia. Ultimately, 190 completed responses were returned, yielding a response rate of 33.3%, which meets the minimum threshold to minimize response bias (Nulty, 2008). After data cleaning and outlier removal, 186 valid responses were retained for analysis.

The survey instrument was developed based on a comprehensive review of existing literature on school leadership, risk management, and performance, with items adapted from validated

scales used in previous studies (e.g., Avolio & Bass, 2004; Hopkin, 2023; Kaplan & Norton, 1996). Items were carefully contextualized for the Tahfiz school setting to ensure cultural and institutional relevance.

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with statements about several indicators of school governance and management procedures using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) in a structured survey (Kline, 2011). A pre-test was carried out to ensure consistency in responses and assess the survey's dependability prior to the primary data collecting. It was conducted with 10 school administrators and academic experts in Islamic education who were not part of the final sample. Their feedback helped assess the clarity, language, and contextual appropriateness of the items. Based on the feedback, minor revisions were made to improve wording and eliminate ambiguity. Internal consistency was shown by a Cronbach's alpha value of more than 0.6, which was deemed adequate for reliability.

The data analysis involved two main stages: first, measurement of the items and variables, and second, testing the structural relationships among variables. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), a statistical method appropriate for analysing complicated models with mediating factors, and correlation analysis were used in the study to achieve this (Henseler et al., 2015). Descriptive statistics were generated using SPSS version 23.0, providing insights into the data's distribution and characteristics. To assess the validity and linkages within the suggested model, the measurement and structural model analyses were carried out using SmartPLS 4.

Data Analysis and Results

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample consisted of 186 respondents, with a slight majority (53.8%) being male. The participants' ages ranged across different groups, with the largest segment (28.5%) aged between 31 and 35 years. The smallest group (5.9%) was those aged 46 to 50 years old. Educational backgrounds among the respondents varied, but most held bachelor's degrees, accounting for 78% of the sample. The remaining respondents included those with master's degrees (11.3%), diplomas (9.7%), and a small portion with doctorates (1.1%). In terms of their roles within Tahfiz schools, most respondents were Tahfiz coordinators, making up 44.6% of the sample, followed by vice-principals at 41.4%. Principals were the smallest group, comprising only 14% of the respondents. Geographically, the state of Terengganu had the highest representation with 28%, while Johor had the lowest at just 0.5%. Other states included Kelantan (22.6%), Kedah (17.2%), Selangor (13.4%), Pahang (8.6%), Negeri Sembilan (5.9%), and Perak (3.8%). These demographic details are summarized in Table 1, which provides a comprehensive profile of the respondents involved in the study.

Table 1: Respondent Profile

Category	Subcategory	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	100	53.8
	Female	86	46.2
Age Group	Less than 30 years	29	15.6
	31–35 years	53	28.5
	36–40 years	37	19.8

Category	Subcategory	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Qualification	41–45 years	20	10.8
	46–50 years	11	5.9
	More than 50 years	36	19.4
	Bachelor's Degree	145	78.0
	Master's Degree	21	11.3
	Diploma Certificate	18	9.7
	Doctorate Degree	2	1.1
Years at Tahfiz School	Less than 5 years	49	26.3
	6 to 10 years	52	28.0
	11 to 15 years	26	14.0
	More than 15 years	59	31.7
Position	Tahfiz Coordinators	83	44.6
	Vice Principals	77	41.4
	School Principals	26	14.0
State	Terengganu	52	28.0
	Kelantan	42	22.6
	Kedah	32	17.2
	Selangor	25	13.4
	Pahang	16	8.6
	Negeri Sembilan	11	5.9
	Perak	7	3.8
	Johor	1	0.5

Source: Author (2025)

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model's reliability and convergent validity results are shown in Table 2. Convergent validity assesses how well multiple indicators or items that are intended to measure the same construct relate to each other. In other words, it checks whether different questions or measurements that aim to capture a particular concept are indeed consistent and correlated positively (Malhotra, 2002). According to Hair et al. (2021), an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value greater than 0.5 is considered acceptable, indicating that the indicators collectively represent the construct effectively. Similarly, a Composite Reliability (CR) greater than 0.7 signifies good internal consistency and reliability of the measurement items.

In this study, all the survey items demonstrated high internal consistency, with CR values exceeding 0.7, and had AVE scores above 0.5. These results confirm that the measurements possess good convergent validity, meaning the items reliably measure the intended constructs, and the indicators are strongly related to each other, supporting the validity of the measurement model (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 2: Convergent Validity

Construct	Item	Loading	Cronbach	CR	AVE
LD	LD1	0.771	0.899	0.9	0.53
	LD2	0.792			
	LD3	0.636			
	LD4	0.665			
	LD5	0.774			
	LD6	0.755			
	LD8	0.739			
	LD9	0.675			
RSK	RSK1	0.811	0.967	0.967	0.787
	RSK2	0.870			
	RSK3	0.900			
	RSK4	0.877			
	RSK5	0.907			
	RSK6	0.892			
	RSK7	0.905			
	RSK8	0.931			
SP	SP2	0.636	0.899	0.899	0.562
	SP3	0.824			
	SP4	0.719			
	SP5	0.753			
	SP6	0.688			
	SP7	0.861			
	SP8	0.744			

SP: School Performance, LD: Leadership, RSK: Risk Management, CR: Composite Reliability, AVE: Average Variance Extracted

Source: Author (2025)

Traditionally, researchers used the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criteria to evaluate discriminant validity, which ensures that different constructs are truly distinct from one another. However, in recent years, this method has faced criticism because it sometimes fails to detect certain issues where constructs are not adequately separate (Henseler et al., 2015). As a result, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio has become the preferred method for assessing discriminant validity, as recommended by Henseler et al. (2015).

Table 3 shows that the HTMT values for all the constructs are below the threshold of 0.90, which is the cutoff point suggested by Gold et al. (2001). Specifically, the HTMT ratio in this research is 0.879, indicating that the constructs are sufficiently distinct from each other, and that discriminant validity has been established. Additionally, Table 3 provides detailed information on each HTMT ratio, confirming that all the constructs meet the criteria for discriminant validity using this more robust method.

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	LD	RM	SP
LD			
RSK	0.879		
SP	0.856	0.878	

SP: School Performance, LD: Leadership, RSK: Risk Management.
Source: Author (2025)

The analysis of the HTMT ratio verified that all the survey items accurately measured the specific constructs they were intended to assess. This means each set of items reliably represented its respective concept, and there were no problems with multicollinearity issue where variables are highly correlated, which can distort results and undermine the validity of the analysis.

After confirming the discriminant validity and ensuring no multicollinearity issues, the next phase is to evaluate the structural model. This involves testing the proposed relationships between the constructs (such as leadership, risk management, and performance) and assessing the hypotheses put forward in the study.

Structural Model Assessment

Before evaluating the structural model, model quality was assessed using beta (β) values, R^2 , effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). To test the hypotheses, a bootstrap analysis with 5000 samples was performed (Hair et al., 2021). Table 4 and Figure 2 present the results.

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	BCI LL	BCI UL	f^2
H1	LD -> SP	0.373	0.119	3.145	0.002	0.136	0.606	0.161
H2	RSK -> SP	0.551	0.114	4.846	p<.001	0.326	0.773	0.352
H3	LD -> RSK -> SP	0.485	0.100	4.861	p<.001	0.296	0.690	

SP: School Performance, LD: Leadership, RSK: Risk Management.
Source: Author (2025)

To determine the significance of the correlations in the model, a bootstrapping analysis was conducted using 10,000 resamples, following the guidelines provided by Hair et al. (2021). Important data from this research, including t-values, confidence intervals, and p-values, aid in determining the statistical significance of the associations. Table 5 displays the findings of this investigation.

The findings reveal that the variables in the model explain 77.4% of the variance in Risk Management and 80.5% of the variance in Tahfiz School Performance, respectively. According to Chin (1998), such high explained variance is classified as “high” (R^2 values of 0.67 and above). This indicates that leadership, along with both leadership and risk management together, are strong predictors influencing these outcomes. Specifically, the R^2 values are 0.774 for Risk Management and 0.804 for Tahfiz School Performance, meaning these factors account for a large portion of the variability in the outcomes.

Effect sizes (f^2) were also examined following Cohen (1988)'s guidelines. The ranges for small, moderate, and large effects are 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, respectively, while an effect size in this study between 0.161 and 0.342 is regarded as moderate. Based on Hair et al. (2021), both leadership and risk management showed significant predictive relevance for Tahfiz school performance, with a Q^2 (predictive relevance) value of 0.425, which is well above zero. This indicates that these variables are meaningful predictors of performance.

The relationships between leadership and Tahfiz school performance (H1), as well as risk management and performance (H2), were tested through the standardized path coefficients. Leadership was positively associated with performance ($\beta = 0.373$, $p = 0.02$), supporting the first hypothesis. Similarly, risk management also showed a strong positive relationship with school performance ($\beta = 0.551$, $p < 0.01$), supporting the second hypothesis.

Lastly, the study used Preacher and Hayes' (2008) bootstrap method to evaluate whether risk management mediates the relationship between leadership and performance. As shown in Table 3, the indirect effect path (Leadership \rightarrow Risk Management \rightarrow Performance) was significant ($\beta = 0.485$, $p < 0.01$), and the confidence interval did not include zero, confirming that risk management indeed mediates the relationship. This supports the hypothesis that risk management plays a mediating role between leadership and school performance (H4).

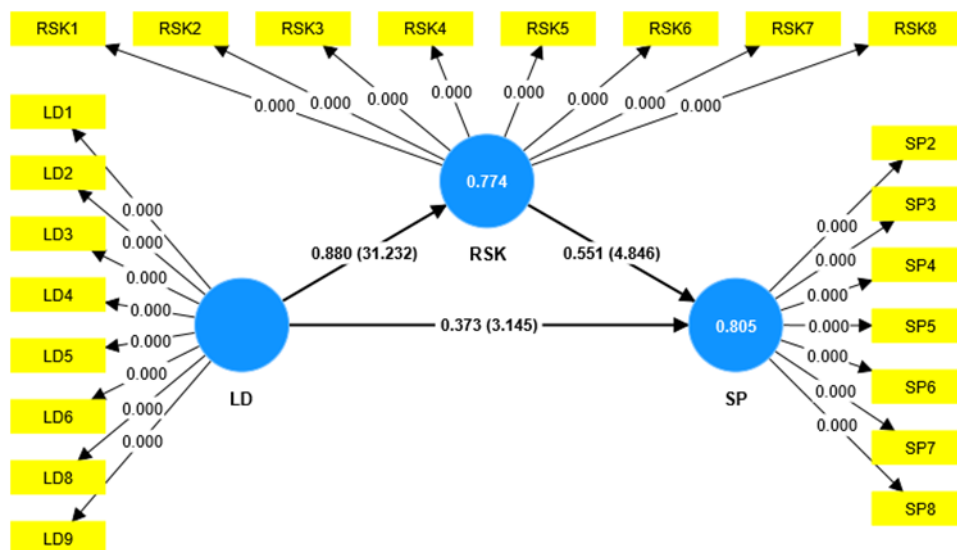


Figure 2: Results of Bootstrapping Analysis

Source: Author (2025)

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that risk management is a key mediating factor in enhancing the correlation between overall Tahfiz school performance in eight Malaysian states and effective leadership. The strong support for all three hypotheses underscores the reliability and robustness of these relationships.

The high R^2 values of 0.774 for risk management and 0.804 for school performance indicate that leadership combined with risk management explains a large share of variability in school outcomes. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing that effective leadership is fundamental in creating positive learning environments and driving academic achievement (Ismail et al., 2022). With a standardised beta of 0.373 ($p < .005$), the results consistently show

a very substantial positive correlation between leadership and academic performance. This suggests that confident, visionary leaders significantly enhance school performance by fostering a proactive approach especially focusing on early detection and mitigation of risks, which is vital for the long-term stability of Tahfiz schools (Northouse, 2021).

Additionally, the direct impact of risk management on school performance is also significant, with a beta of 0.551 ($p < .01$). These results highlight that effective risk management is essential not only for ensuring operational stability and safety but also for supporting academic excellence. Such findings are consistent with prior research indicating that systematic, proactive risk strategies enable schools to effectively face and navigate challenges, thereby sustaining growth and resilience over time (Zulkifli & Othman, 2019).

Importantly, the mediating effect shown by a beta of 0.485 ($p < .01$) confirms that risk management significantly amplifies the positive influence of leadership on school performance. This suggests that strong risk management practices act as a catalyst, enabling leadership to implement strategies more effectively. Previous studies support this, indicating that environments with robust risk management frameworks are better equipped to realize leadership decisions and foster organizational success (Ismail et al., 2022b).

Based on these insights, Tahfiz schools should focus on strengthening both leadership and risk management to build resilience and ensure long-term success. Practical applications include integrating risk management training into leadership development programs, which will equip school leaders with the skills to anticipate challenges and respond proactively. Fostering a culture of proactive risk management will not only improve current operational effectiveness but also lay the foundation for sustainable growth and academic excellence in Tahfiz education (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Overall, these results emphasize that a strategic approach combining strong leadership with effective risk management is vital for achieving enduring school success and organizational resilience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that risk management is not just a secondary function but a vital component that significantly strengthens the positive influence of leadership on Tahfiz school performance. For Tahfiz schools aspiring to produce 125,000 huffaz by 2050, adopting a comprehensive leadership approach that integrates strong risk management strategies is crucial for effectively navigating uncertainties and achieving their long-term goals (Yukl, 2022). Effective leaders focus on sustainable success and encourage their teams to embrace proactive risk management practices, ensuring stability and growth.

Furthermore, this research deepens understanding of how risk management intersects with strategic planning, decision-making, and leadership within faith-based educational settings. It emphasises how crucial strong leadership is to encourage prudent risk management, which in turn improves academic achievement, guarantees sustainability, and aids in the accomplishment of strategic goals. Future research should consider longitudinal studies, qualitative approaches, and cross-context comparative analyses to gain broader insights (Ismail et al., 2022). Incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives, such as parents and donors, could also enrich understanding of sustainability in faith-based schools.

However, this study has limitations, including its focus on the unique religious and cultural environment of Tahfiz schools, the limited existing research on similar faith-based institutions, and a relatively small sample size. Future research should address these limitations to gain a more thorough understanding of the role of risk management in faith-based educational systems worldwide.

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