

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF HOLISTIC WELL-BEING IN 21ST CENTURY TAHFIZ EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA: A MAQĀSID AL-SHARĪ'AH FRAMEWORK

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Abstract: *Tahfiz education in Malaysia serves as a cornerstone in preserving the Qur'anic tradition, yet its modern implementation faces critical challenges in fulfilling the broader aims of Islamic education. This study examines the issues surrounding the holistic well-being of Tahfiz students through the lens of Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah, encompassing the preservation of religion (ḥifẓ al-dīn), life (ḥifẓ al-nafs), intellect (ḥifẓ al-'aql), lineage (ḥifẓ al-nasl), and wealth (ḥifẓ al-māl). Using qualitative content analysis, key findings point to an excessive emphasis on memorization with little attention paid to comprehension and application, which raises questions about students' spiritual and cognitive growth. Their physical and mental health are at risk due to safety, emotional welfare, and governance issues, and their intellectual development and social mobility are impeded by the disregard for academic instruction. These problems are made worse by moral decay and poor financial management, which compromises the main goals of Tahfiz education. In order to guarantee that Tahfiz graduates are socially resilient, intellectually prepared, and spiritually anchored members of contemporary Malaysian society, the study promotes a well-rounded, integrated model based on Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah that harmonizes traditional religious objectives with modern educational standards.*

Keywords: *Tahfiz education, Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah, Holistic well-being.*

Introduction

Tahfiz education has experienced significant global growth and is increasingly becoming a preferred choice among Muslim communities. Despite its expansion, it continues to face various challenges, particularly those that impact the holistic development of students. As noted by Hamdy Abdullah et al. (2025), Tahfiz institutions worldwide are struggling to effectively integrate religious and academic learning within their educational frameworks.

In the Malaysian context, the aspiration to produce a generation of quality huffaz al-Qur'an is gaining widespread attention from individuals to national stakeholders. The increasing popularity of Tahfiz institutions across all states in Malaysia reflects the desire of many parents to raise a young generation grounded in Qur'anic knowledge, noble character, and exemplary conduct (Fahmi Abdul Hamid et al., 2025)

Programs for Tahfiz al-Qur'an are currently available across the country through a number of public and private educational institutions. However, modern issues like the quick development of technology, shifting social contexts, and generational disparities necessitate a change in teaching methods. Memorization alone is no longer enough; a strategy that promotes students' spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and social well-being is becoming more and more necessary (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2021; Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013). This article examines these topics from the perspective of the Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah, providing a framework for comprehending and resolving the complex problems that Tahfiz education faces in the twenty-first century.

Literature Review

In the past, tahfiz education has been essential to preserving the Qur'anic legacy and forming Muslims' spiritual identities in Malaysia. However, in the twenty-first century, Tahfiz institutions' focus must extend beyond memorization and address students' overall wellbeing in accordance with both religious and modern educational requirements. The framework of Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah offers a comprehensive lens to evaluate these challenges, encompassing the preservation of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and wealth (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). Each of these dimensions highlights critical issues that directly affect the quality and sustainability of Tahfiz education. The following sections will therefore examine in detail the issues and challenges faced in each of the five maqāsid, providing a clearer understanding of their implications for the holistic well-being of Tahfiz students.

Preservation of Religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*)

While the primary objective of Tahfiz al-Qur'an is to fulfil the Maqasid al-Shariah of preserving religion (*hifz al-din*) through the safeguarding of the Qur'an, recent studies have highlighted a critical concern: many students in Tahfiz institutions demonstrate weak memorization quality and limited understanding of the Qur'anic text. This undermines not only the purpose of memorization itself but also challenges the holistic development intended by Islamic education. A study by Siti Aisyah Johan et al. (2023) found that the level of Qur'anic understanding among Tahfiz students in Malaysia is generally low, with only a small number of students achieving a good level of comprehension, while the majority fall within moderate or low levels.

This raises questions about the effectiveness of the current approach, which overly emphasizes memorization without allocating sufficient focus on tadabbur (reflection) and understanding. In the context of preservation of religion, the ability to reflect upon the meanings of Qur'anic

verses plays a significant role in shaping character of a good muslim. Without tadabbur, students are at risk of becoming mere memorizers of text, with little to no application in real life. Therefore, Qur'anic appreciation through comprehension of meaning and context must be made a core component in the development of Tahfiz students, in line with the aspirations of Islamic education to produce holistic individuals in all aspects.

In terms of student development specifically in relation to Qur'anic memorization, findings by Mardhiah Yahaya (2017) on the Tahfiz education system in Maktab Rendah Sains Mara (MRSM) Ulul Albab further reinforce the reality of the quality issues within Malaysia's Tahfiz education. The study found that nearly half of the students at that institution were unable to complete their memorization of the Qur'an, even though they had been following the school's Tahfiz program from form 1 to form 5 (Mardhiah Yahaya, 2017).

The problem of weak memorization quality was also identified among students of the Tahfiz al-Qur'an Certificate Program under Darul Qur'an JAKIM-IIUM, where students undergo an intensive memorization program over a very short period of just 18 months or three semesters. This was demonstrated in a study by Mohamad Nazir (2013), who found that the memorization quality of most students enrolled in this program was unsatisfactory. Based on tests conducted on 60 students to evaluate their memorization proficiency, more than half failed the assessment. This highlights a critical issue requiring serious attention, as students' memorization quality is likely to deteriorate further after completing the program (Mohamad Nazir, 2013).

The issue of Qur'anic memorization quality has now become a trend not only in Malaysia but across the broader Nusantara region. This was raised in a study by Muhamad Hafiz Saleh (2019), who evaluated the curriculum of Tahfiz education systems in Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. According to the findings, the root causes of these challenges include unclear educational objectives, weak memorization and revision techniques, and insufficient time allocated for the memorization process. The researcher warned that if no comprehensive evaluation is carried out on Tahfiz education systems, it may result in a generation of Huffaz who do not meet the true standards of Qur'anic memorization, yet will return to society to serve as imams and Qur'an teachers themselves (Muhamad Hafiz, 2019).

Meanwhile, A study conducted at Selangor Islamic University (UIS) revealed ongoing issues related to the quality of Qur'anic memorization among students enrolled in the Bachelor of Quran and Qiraat Studies program. Although admission into the program requires students to have completed the memorization of all 30 juz' of the Qur'an at the school or diploma level, they are still mandated to undergo the university's Tahfiz program. This includes restarting the memorization process from the first juz' and completing a structured memorization syllabus of five juz' per semester. However, it was found that a majority of students struggle to meet this requirement, failing to complete the expected five juz' each term. This raises critical concerns regarding the actual progress and effectiveness of memorization development among students, despite having previously completed Tahfiz studies prior to their university enrollment. (Noorhidayah Syed Aziz et al., 2024)

Preservation of life (hifz al-nafs)

The development of students' character one of the intended outcomes of Qur'an memorization in religious and Tahfiz schools has shown to be unsatisfactory in many cases (Abdul Latiff & Jaafar, 2024; Hashim & Jemali, 2014). This raises serious concerns when viewed through the lens of Maqasid al-Shariah, particularly the objective of Hifz al-Nafs (preservation of life),

which encompasses not only physical safety but also the emotional, and psychological well-being of individuals.

According to data from the Islamic Education Division (BPI) in 2021, Government-Aided Religious Schools (SABK) in Johor, Melaka, and Negeri Sembilan recorded 4,027 disciplinary cases involving 3,292 students between 2016 and 2020 (Saharia Ismail et al., 2022). This highlights a systemic issue in fostering ethical behaviour and self-discipline among students. Compounding the problem, the National Social Council (MSN) has acknowledged weaknesses in the governance, registration, safety monitoring, teaching quality, and curriculum implementation in many Tahfiz schools, necessitating urgent multi-stakeholder intervention (Berita Harian, 2019).

In the context of preservation of life, there have been several juvenile cases that involved the Tahfiz students. For example, the tragic case of a student's death in a Maahad Tahfiz Sains in Kelantan whose body was discovered under suspicious circumstances in a school toilet, has further intensified public scrutiny and raised critical questions about student safety and institutional accountability (Adila Sharinni Wahid, 2025). These events expose the risks that emerge when systems designed to nurture spiritual excellence fail to ensure even the most basic protection of life.

Another example is one of the biggest juvenile tragedies that happened in the history of Malaysia in which a serious *hifz nafs* (protection of life) issue happened in 2017 at a tahfiz school in Kuala Lumpur. A fire broke out at Pusat Tahfiz Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah and killed 23 people (21 students and 2 teachers). The fire was started on purpose by two teenagers who used petrol. The school had barred windows, and many students could not escape. The building also lacked proper safety measures. This tragedy shows that some tahfiz schools are not safe and do not follow fire safety rules. In Islam, protecting life is very important. This case shows the need for better safety standards in all tahfiz institutions to protect the lives of the students (Bernama, 2023).

From the perspective of *Hifz al-Nafs*, this situation demands serious attention. While formal education institutions often provide structured support systems including trained counsellors, many Tahfiz institutions operate without such safeguards. The lack of regulation, awareness of student rights, and the presence of permissive cultures that tolerate unchecked teacher authority significantly increase the vulnerability of students (Ana Yasmin Azmi, 2023). Therefore, failing to safeguard pupils from physical, mental, and emotional injury not only betrays the intentions of Tahfiz education but also runs counter to the core principles of Islam, which are centered on the sanctity and protection of life.

Preservation of intellect (*hifz al-'aql*)

In Malaysia, a growing trend has emerged where some parents entirely bypass the national education system or any academic education by enrolling their children in private Tahfiz schools that focus solely on Qur'anic memorization, particularly during the secondary school years. In such institutions, no academic subjects are taught, leaving students without formal academic exposure. This situation has led to challenges when these students attempt to transition into higher education, particularly those who never followed academic studies during their memorization period and are therefore unprepared to sit for the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM).

According to Mohd Azrin Abd Rahim (2017), there are many situations involving Tahfiz students in Malaysia where they only complete formal studies up to primary school, most of them continue their studies at Tahfiz institutions for three to five years to memorize the Quran. However, the question is, what happens after they finish memorizing? Without a clear educational direction, where does their future go? This situation also raises a big question: does the current system really provide a sustainable path for their future?

To address this issue, particularly the academic dropout among Tahfiz students due to systemic neglect, a new implementation model of Tahfiz education has been introduced at the university level, especially in private higher education institutions. These institutions offer a special academic pathway tailored for Tahfiz graduates lacking formal academic backgrounds. One notable initiative is the Fast-Track SPM Program introduced by the Selangor Islamic Development Foundation (YAPIS) in collaboration with the University of Selangor (UNISEL). This program offers a second chance to students who have dropped out of mainstream education by providing free academic instruction over ten months, covering the equivalent of the standard two-year secondary school syllabus in preparation for the SPM examination. As a result, many participants have successfully passed the SPM (some with distinction) and continued their academic pursuits at the tertiary level (Abd Rahim, 2017). This program enables them to further their studies either at UNISEL or other institutions in Malaysia upon obtaining their SPM qualification. (Mesyuarat Kedua Penggal Kedua Dewan Negeri Selangor Tahun 2019, 2019).

Neglecting academic education in the pursuit of Qur'anic memorization has raised concerns regarding the preservation of intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), one of the fundamental objectives of the Maqasid al-Shariah. The implications extend beyond educational gaps, giving rise to broader social challenges that affect the well-being and integration of these students into mainstream society. According to Kamaruddin Abu Hassan et al. (2020), due to the independent nature of these institutions and the absence of government oversight, it has been discovered that if the government does not regulate the establishment of private Tahfiz schools, which have been growing quickly in recent years, there is a fear that this could result in the emergence of a generation of religious people with extremist tendencies. This phenomenon has already happened in other nations.

In the context of preservation of intellect also, among the challenges faced by the Muslim community today is the increase in the phenomenon of Islamophobia. Recognizing this fact, the Sultan of Selangor, Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah, has ordered that the learning module of tahfiz students be strengthened with broader knowledge, including aspects of national politics, so that they not only become hafiz al-Qur'an, but also individuals who are knowledgeable about current issues and are competitive at the global level. In response to his majesty's order, the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) plans to introduce a new syllabus that emphasizes a balance between memorization of the Qur'an and mastery of contemporary knowledge such as Arabic and general knowledge. (Azrul Naimi, 2024). Referring to this problem, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim also ordered that Tahfiz students be prepared with true Islamic teachings to face Islamophobic groups and those who sow hatred through Islam in this country (Bernama, 2024).

Preservation of lineage (*hifz al-nasl*)

Islam places great importance on the preservation of human lineage, granting individuals honor and distinct status. This is emphasized in Surah al-Isra, verse 70: "Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam, carried them on land and sea, provided them with good and lawful

sustenance, and elevated them above many of Our other creations." Similarly, the Qur'an affirms that humans are created in the best form in Surah al-Taghabun (64:3) and Surah al-Tin (95:4). These verses highlight the inherent dignity bestowed upon every human being, which must be upheld and respected.

According to Kamali (2017), safeguarding human dignity also encompasses how Muslims interact with others. The Qur'an emphasizes the values of brotherhood and compassion towards all individuals, both within and beyond the family circle, including neighbors—regardless of their faith. In this regard, the Qur'an instructs Muslims to communicate with others politely and respectfully, as stated in Surah al-Baqarah (2:83), and to uphold fairness in speech: "And when you speak, speak with justice."

In the context of Tahfiz education, the preservation of human lineage fostering family values, social ethics and moral character among the students (Abdullah et al., 2025). In Malaysia several issues and challenges of this Maqasid can be seen from the challenges of the postmodern era that has introduced unpredictable and harmful influences into the Tahfiz environment. Social ills and moral crises including vaping, the sharing of explicit content, theft, drug use, and same-sex relationships, have increasingly affected Tahfiz students, with modern technology and social media playing a major role. (Abdul Latiff & Jaafar, 2024)

Alarmingly, juvenile delinquency is rising within Tahfiz institutions, especially private Maahad Tahfiz enrolling students as young as six years old. Personality and behavioural issues are becoming more pronounced, with reported cases of severe misconduct including bullying and sexual abuse. For instance, a case of sexual harassment linked to a Tahfiz school operated by Global Ikhwan Sdn. Bhd. (Maszureen Hadzman, 2024) and another case involving violent bullying in a private Tahfiz institution in Selangor (Amirul Aiman Hamsuddin, 2020) underscore the urgency of the matter.

Preservation of and wealth (ḥifẓ al-māl)

The preservation of and wealth (ḥifẓ al-māl) in this context involves financial management, diverse funding sources and economic sustainability of the Tahfiz institution. (Abdullah et al., 2025) In the context of Tahfiz education in Malaysia, a study on the direction of the Tahfiz education system in the state of Kelantan revealed that many Tahfiz institutions lack clear educational goals and direction. While the founders of these institutions often hold lofty aspirations for the schools they establish, these ambitions are frequently unsupported by well-defined educational philosophies or structured implementation plans. This disconnect significantly affects the quality and consistency of educational delivery within these institutions. (Noor Hisham Md Nawi et al., 2014).

The existence of many unregistered and unregulated Tahfiz institutions has caused various problems. Since these institutions are not monitored by the authorities, they often operate independently and use different models and curricula based on the preferences of their founders. According to Muhamad Hafiz Muhamad Haneef et al. (2023), a study in the state of Selangor alone found that there are seven different types of Tahfiz models in which many of them are not even registered. As of 2025, the latest records in Selangor show that a total of 606 Tahfiz institutions have remained unregistered since 2008. This raises serious concerns regarding the distribution of government financial assistance, as unregistered institutions are not eligible to receive official funding or support (Bernama, 2025).

This situation raises concerns from the perspective of Hifz al-Mal (preservation of wealth), one of the objectives in Maqasid al-Shariah. When institutions are not managed properly, the financial resources such as public donations and community funds may be used inefficiently or wasted. In other hand, the private tahfiz institutions that are officially registered under the State Islamic Religious Department (JAIN) and the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) will be subject to monitoring and are eligible to receive government funding based on the annual national budge. (Mohd Yusof et al., 2022).

Therefore, without government funding, unregistered private Tahfiz institutes can lack enough facilities, a defined plan, or enough competent teachers. Resources that were intended to help kids and the community are lost as a result. Therefore, the Islamic principle of Hifz al-Mal, which emphasizes the responsible and constructive use of wealth, is violated if these monies are not protected and managed intelligently without enough planning and coordination. The concept of Hifz al-Mal, which emphasizes the moral and intentional management of entrusted resources, is thus violated in addition to having an impact on student outcomes when instructional clarity and sustainability are not ensured.

Table 1: Summary of Tahfiz Education Issues Based on the Maqasid al-Shariah Framework

Maqasid al-Shariah	Description	Key Issues Identified in Tahfiz Education
Preservation of Religion (Hifz al-Dīn)	Safeguarding the religion through Qur'an memorization and understanding.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Weak memorization quality 2. Lack of Qur'anic comprehension and reflection (tadabbur) 3. Overemphasis on rote memorization - Failure to complete memorization despite years of study 4. Lack of integration between memorization and real-life Islamic values
Preservation of Life (Hifz al-Nafs)	Ensuring physical, emotional, and psychological safety of students.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cases of bullying, abuse, and sexual misconduct 2. Fatal fire incidents due to safety negligence 3. Absence of counseling and protection systems 4. Institutional failures to safeguard students' lives and emotional well-being
Preservation of Intellect (Hifz al-'Aql)	Protecting the mind through balanced academic and religious education.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some Tahfiz schools neglect academic education completely 2. Students unprepared for national exams

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Reliance on fast-track academic recovery programs 4. Lack of exposure to current issues and critical thinking 5. Risk of extremism due to isolated and unregulated education systems
Preservation of Lineage (Hifz al-Nasl)	Upholding human dignity, morality, and social ethics.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rise in moral misconduct (e.g., vaping, sexual behavior, same-sex relations) 2. Juvenile delinquency in some Tahfiz institutions 3. Negative influence of unfiltered digital media 4. Lack of structured character development
Preservation of Wealth (Hifz al-Māl)	Managing institutional and public resources ethically and sustainably.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High number of unregistered and unregulated Tahfiz institutions 2. Ineligible for official funding 3. Mismanagement of public donations and waqf 4. Lack of financial planning and transparency 5. Inadequate infrastructure and unqualified staff in unregulated schools

Source: (Ahmad Thaqif et al., 2025)

Conclusion & Recommendation

The results of this study show that Malaysia's Tahfiz education system finds it difficult to handle students' holistic well-being in accordance with the Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, despite the admirable goal of raising a generation of huffaz based on Qur'anic memorization. The prevalence of memorization by rote with little attention to comprehension, critical thinking, or character development indicates a limited fulfillment of ḥifẓ al-dīn and ḥifẓ al-'aql. Furthermore, ḥifẓ al-nafs and ḥifẓ al-nasl are seriously threatened by problems with safety, discipline, and misuse, while ḥifẓ al-māl is put at risk by institutional fragmentation and financial inefficiencies. These disparities necessitate immediate educational reform that incorporates intellectual, theological, and psychological elements in a framework that is student-centered and guided by Maqāṣid. To guarantee that Tahfiz institutions not only produce Qur'anic memorizers but also comprehensive, capable individuals who exemplify Islamic values and can actively contribute to the moral and intellectual fabric of the country, policymakers, educators, and religious authorities must collaborate.

To overcome these challenges, Tahfiz institutions should reform their curriculum by moving beyond rote memorization and integrating comprehension, critical thinking, and tadabbur in Qur'anic learning, thereby strengthening both ḥifẓ al-dīn and ḥifẓ al-'aql. At the same time, attention to students' welfare is crucial through the provision of safe learning environments, access to counseling and mental health support, as well as structured physical and co-curricular activities that safeguard ḥifẓ al-nafs. In order to enhance intellectual development and social

mobility, a dual-curriculum model that balances Qur’anic studies with academic and vocational subjects should be promoted, enabling students to navigate both religious and contemporary demands effectively. Furthermore, the preservation of ḥifẓ al-naṣl requires systematic character education, strict safeguarding policies, and the cultivation of positive peer culture within Tahfiz institutions. Equally important is the protection of ḥifẓ al-māl through transparent financial management, professional governance, and collaborative partnerships with government agencies and the community. These recommendations underscore the need for a holistic, Maqāṣid-oriented framework in Tahfiz education that can produce not only memorizers of the Qur’an but also resilient, competent, and socially responsible graduates.

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