

Navigating Language Deficiencies: Teachers' Perspectives on Tailoring English Modules for Tahfiz Students in Selangor

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Abstract

This study explores teachers' perspectives on the English language needs of Tahfiz students in Selangor, Malaysia, to inform the development of a specialised learning module. Utilising a qualitative approach within the Analysis phase of the ADDIE model, semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators from registered Tahfiz institutions. Findings reveal four primary themes: fundamental proficiency deficits where approximately 80% of students are classified as weak, the instrumental necessity of English as a lingua franca for global preaching (Da'wah), the urgent need for pedagogical customisation through kinaesthetic learning and Islamic content integration, and institutional barriers regarding teacher qualifications and time constraints. The data suggests that Tahfiz students possess a unique Islamic Drive, motivating them to master English for international religious outreach. The study concludes that an effective English module must bridge the gap between religious identity and linguistic competence by aligning with the students' cognitive styles. These insights provide the foundational elements required to design a module that empowers Tahfiz students to become well-rounded global leaders.

Keywords: *English Language, Global Preachers, Islamic, Module, Tahfiz*

Introduction

Tahfiz education, centred on the memorisation of the Holy Quran, remains one of the most significant traditional education systems in Malaysia and is experiencing a surge in popularity as parents seek to equip children with deep-rooted Islamic values. Despite the high religious expertise of these students, they are frequently perceived as being less motivated and having lower proficiency in the English language compared to their peers in mainstream education. This linguistic gap is particularly critical because English serves as the global lingua franca, and a lack of mastery limits the ability of future Muslim scholars to communicate Islamic teachings to international audiences (Abdullah et al., 2022).

In the contemporary landscape, the role of a Da'ie, or preacher, has evolved; they are no longer just local community leaders but are expected to function as global leaders. Previous research indicates that Tahfiz students possess a unique Islamic Drive, a motivational factor where the desire to spread Islamic knowledge acts as a primary catalyst for language acquisition (Abdullah et al., 2022). However, traditional English curricula might not align with the specific cognitive styles, religious identities, and institutional schedules of Tahfiz schools.

Addressing these challenges requires a tailored approach to curriculum design (OECD, 2020). While student perspectives are valuable, teachers serve as the primary observers of the academic reality and the institutional barriers that define the learning environment. Therefore, this study aims to identify the specific elements required for a tailored English language module by exploring teachers' perspectives within the Analysis phase of the ADDIE instructional design model. By understanding these needs, the research seeks to develop a pedagogical framework that empowers Tahfiz students to become effective global communicators without compromising their religious foundations.

Review of Related Literature

The Evolution of Tahfiz Education in Malaysia

Historically, Islamic education in Malaysia was conducted in traditional surau or pondok systems, focusing primarily on the Quran and Islamic teachings. The first official Tahfiz institution was founded in 1966 by Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, inspired by global Islamic scholars (Wahida Ana Sophia Mohd Dain et al., 2026). In the contemporary era, these institutions are defined by their accountability in educating students to memorise the entire Al-Quran. Despite the surge in popularity and public attention, Tahfiz education is often viewed through a secular-oriented lens that lacks an emphasis on students' roles as international Da'ie, creating a barrier between their religious expertise and the wider world.

The Islamic Drive and L2 Motivation

Motivation serves as the initial engine and ongoing driving force for second language (L2) acquisition. For Tahfiz students, traditional motivation models are insufficient without considering religious identity. Recent studies identify an Islamic Drive, a specific motivational factor where students seek to learn English to spread Islamic knowledge and preach good values to global audiences. This drive is characterised by the belief that English is an international language essential for global purposes and for accessing a broader range of Islamic information. Consequently, successful L2 acquisition in this context is heavily dependent on aligning language learning with the students' ideal L2 self as a representative of Islam (Abdullah et al., 2022).

Challenges in English Proficiency among Religious Learners

Tahfiz students are frequently perceived as being less motivated and weaker in English language performance compared to mainstream students (Abdullah et al., 2022). This deficit is often linked to a lack of communicative confidence and a limited vocabulary range (Mohamad Kamal et al., 2024). Furthermore, the full-time nature of many Tahfiz schools often results in the exclusion of academic subjects, leaving little room for formal English instruction. There is a critical need to humanise English language education by integrating it with the socio-cultural and religious reality of these learners (Abdullah et al., 2022).

Instructional Design: The ADDIE Model

To bridge the gap between traditional memorisation and modern linguistic needs, the ADDIE model provides a robust framework for systematic curriculum development (Szabo, 2022). The model consists of five iterative phases: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. The Analysis phase is particularly crucial as it identifies the fundamental needs, such as Islamic terminology and kinaesthetic learning preferences that ensure the resulting module is both complementary to Tahfiz education and sustainable for long-term use.

Objectives

This article are to examine the linguistic gap faced by Tahfiz students who excel in Quranic memorisation but often show lower proficiency in English compared to mainstream peers. It seeks to analyse the evolving role of Da'ie as global leaders who require strong English communication skills to share Islamic teachings internationally. The study aims to explore the Islamic Drive as a motivational factor for language acquisition, while recognizing that traditional English curricula may not align with Tahfiz students' cognitive styles, religious identities, and institutional schedules. Another objective is to address curriculum design challenges by tailoring English modules that respect religious foundations while enhancing global communication skills.

Furthermore, the research intends to investigate teachers' perspectives as primary observers of academic realities and institutional barriers, using the Analysis phase of the ADDIE instructional design model. It aims to identify specific elements required for a tailored English language module that empowers Tahfiz students. The study also seeks to develop a pedagogical framework that integrates Islamic values with effective language learning strategies. Ultimately, the objectives are to support Tahfiz students in becoming competent global communicators, reduce the linguistic gap, and ensure that their religious expertise is complemented by strong English proficiency without compromising their spiritual identity.

Methodology

Research Design

Being a part of a larger research project, this study adopts a mixed-methods research design framed within the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) to ensure a systematic approach to module development. This paper specifically reports on the Analysis phase, utilising a qualitative case study approach to explore the foundational needs of the target group. The qualitative data allows for a deep exploration of the participants lived experiences and institutional realities.

Research Setting and Participants

The empirical phase of this study was contextualized within registered Tahfiz institutions operating across the state of Selangor, Malaysia. This setting was strategically chosen due to the diverse landscape of Islamic education in the region. To gather rich, qualitative insights, the study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select the participants. The sample comprised Tahfiz educators who are actively engaged in the dual responsibilities of delivering daily academic curricula and religious instruction.

By focusing on teachers entrenched in this dual-role environment, the study secured a comprehensive and well-rounded perspective on contemporary pedagogical needs and classroom challenges. Furthermore, to ensure the credibility and suitability of the participants, candidates underwent a preliminary vetting process. The principals or administrative owners of the participating institutions, ensuring that the selected educators possessed the necessary experience and familiarity with the institutional framework to contribute meaningfully to the research, formally recommended them.

Data Collection

Data were primarily gathered through semi-structured focus group interviews and face-to-face interviews. An interview protocol adapted from Abdullah (2016) and Creswell (2008) was employed to structure the sessions and ensure consistency across interviews. The questions were specifically designed to probe four key areas, including (a) students' current English proficiency levels, (b) the relevance of English for the students' future roles, (c) preferred teaching and learning styles in the Tahfiz context and (d) institutional and logistical challenges.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The process involved several stages of data refinement:

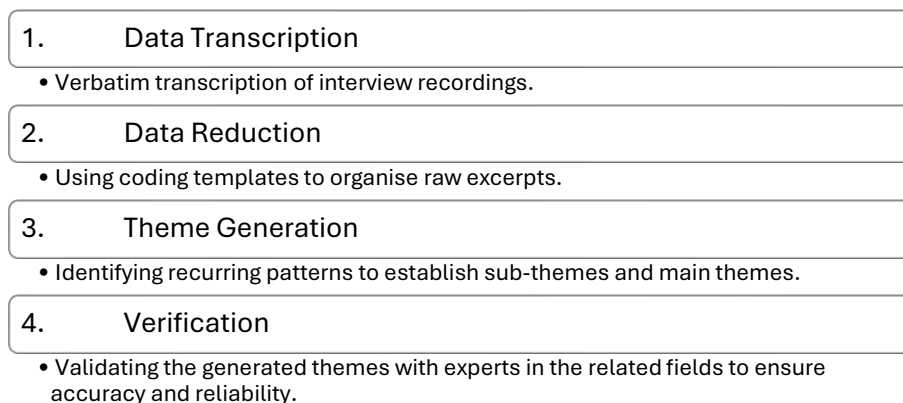


Figure 1. Process of Data Analysis

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted under the approval of the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) research Ethics Committee. Participation was voluntary, and the anonymity of the teachers and their respective institutions was maintained throughout the reporting process.

Analysis

The Analysis phase of this study has provided a comprehensive understanding of the English language needs within the Tahfiz education sector in Selangor. The findings indicate that while Tahfiz students suffer from fundamental proficiency deficits, particularly in vocabulary and productive skills, there is a strong instrumental motivation to learn the language for global religious mission (Da'wah). Teachers explicitly identify the need for a curriculum that moves away from traditional academic structures toward kinaesthetic, active learning and the integration of Islamic content. However, institutional

barriers, including the lack of dual-qualified teachers and severe time constraints, remain significant hurdles.

Pedagogical and Policy Implications

- **Module Content:** The proposed module must prioritise Islamic terminology related to the Quran and Hadith to leverage the students' existing knowledge base.
- **Instructional Approach:** Lessons should focus on Performance-Based Assessments, such as English preaching (Bersyarah), which aligns with the students' future roles as global leaders.
- **Flexible Delivery:** Given the logistical challenge of mixed-ability classes, the module must include adaptations to cater to varying proficiency levels within a single classroom.

Policy Alignment: The development of this module directly supports the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 regarding bilingual proficiency and the National Tahfiz Education Policy's goal of creating a curriculum compatible with mainstream education.

Following the ADDIE framework, the next stage of this research will involve the Design and Development phases. This includes the creation of a draft module that undergoes expert validation before being implemented in a pilot group. Subsequent evaluation using pre- and post-tests will be necessary to measure the module's effectiveness in improving communicative confidence among Tahfiz students.

Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis of qualitative interviews conducted with Tahfiz educators yielded critical insights, revealing four predominant themes that collectively characterise the English language landscape within these religious institutions. These emergent themes are significant, as they establish the empirical foundation required to inform the Analysis phase of the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) instructional design model.

Theme 1: Fundamental Proficiency Deficits and Skill Hierarchy

The first major theme identified centres on fundamental proficiency deficits and a distinct skill hierarchy among the student population. The gathered data explicitly highlights a critical, systemic gap between the rigid demands of the existing English curriculum and the actual language capabilities of the students. Teachers reported an overwhelmingly low baseline of English proficiency, with one teacher quantifying this crisis by noting that approximately 80% of their students are classified as weak language learners. A deeper examination of this deficiency reveals that a severe lack of basic vocabulary acts as the primary barrier to academic progression, severely affecting the students' ability to comprehend or process the language. Consequently, this lack of vocabulary directly impacts their productive skills, with teachers identifying speaking and grammar as the areas where students struggle most acutely. This inability to produce coherent language fosters a profound lack of confidence, ultimately paralysing students when they attempt basic communication. Furthermore, these foundational gaps run deep; teachers observed that fundamental grammatical structures, such as the proper application of basic copula verbs like 'is', 'are', and 'am', remain unmastered. Without these core linguistic building blocks, students are left fundamentally unequipped to construct even the simplest sentences, underscores the urgent need for targeted, remedial instructional design.

Theme 2: Instrumental English for Global Da'wah (Preaching)

The second theme that emerged from the thematic analysis centres on the concept of instrumental English for global Da'wah (Islamic preaching), highlighting that despite pervasive proficiency challenges, and educators identified a strong instrumental motivation for language acquisition among their students. This pronounced motivation closely aligns with the tenets of the Islamic Drive theory (Hazlina et al., 2022), which suggests that spiritual and religious duties can powerfully propel academic pursuit. Within this framework, English is not merely treated as an academic subject but is instead viewed as a vital lingua franca for international religious outreach and mission work within an increasingly interconnected global society. Consequently, the data indicates a pedagogical shift in focus from merely achieving passing grades on standardized exams toward fostering communicative confidence. The primary objective is to equip students with the linguistic tools necessary to speak persuasively with diverse populations, particularly non-Malay speakers and international communities. Furthermore, teachers observed an encouraging paradox in the classroom: despite the students' evident academic weaknesses in the language, they consistently display a genuine interest, enthusiasm, and intrinsic desire to master English, driven by this higher spiritual and practical purpose.

Theme 3: Curriculum Design and Pedagogical Customisation

The third theme underscores a critical need for strategic curriculum design and pedagogical customisation, with participating teachers strongly advocating for a definitive shift away from traditional, rote-learning methodologies. Instead, they emphasised the necessity of adopting instructional strategies that align more naturally with the unique cognitive profiles and learning habits of Tahfiz students. To achieve this, the data highlights a preference for kinaesthetic and active learning approaches, such as small-scale projects, interactive group work, and collaborative activities, over conventional, writing-heavy tasks that often fail to engage this student demographic. Furthermore, educators suggested that any newly developed instructional module should integrate localised Islamic content, including specialised Islamic terminology and Prophetic stories (*kisah Nabi*). This integration is deemed crucial for maintaining contextual relevance, as it directly bridges the gap between English language learning and the students' primary religious studies. Finally, to accurately gauge student progress, teachers recommended transitioning toward performance-based assessments. Rather than relying on traditional written examinations, these assessments should mimic real-world religious responsibilities, such as requiring students to deliver a formal sermon (*bersyarah*) in English, thereby reinforcing both practical language proficiency and ministerial competence.

Theme 4: Institutional and Resource Implementation Barriers

The fourth and final theme identifies the institutional and resource implementation barriers that create distinct logistical hurdles unique to the Tahfiz educational context. Foremost among these challenges is a structural dilemma termed the "Hafizah-Teacher" paradox. Participants highlighted the difficulty in recruiting English language teachers who concurrently possess formal religious qualifications, such as being a Hafizah (a female who has memorised the Quran). While this dual qualification is highly preferred by administrations to maintain institutional harmony and cultural alignment, it narrows the pool of available teaching talent. Furthermore, teachers face operational difficulties due to mixed-ability logistics within the classroom. Instructional delivery is frequently complicated by classes that combine students of vastly different ages and language proficiency levels, such as mixing 13- and 14-year-olds with much younger learners,

rendering standardised, one-size-fits-all lesson delivery virtually impossible. Compounding these classroom dynamics are severe curriculum time constraints. Because these institutions operate primarily as full-time Tahfiz schools, the academic schedule is dominated by Quranic memorisation, resulting in academic subjects like English being marginalised or, in some cases, entirely excluded from the daily timetable to prioritise religious mandates.

Discussion Summary

The findings from this study demonstrate that the Analysis phase confirms a pedagogical mismatch between standardised English language modules and the operational reality of Tahfiz institutions. While the "Islamic Drive" highlighted in contemporary literature is present among these students, its potential as a powerful motivational catalyst is hindered by the lack of foundational language proficiency. Consequently, the proposed instructional module cannot simply teach conventional English; instead, it must deliberately deliver language acquisition through the lens of Islamic identity to actively leverage and sustain student interest. Furthermore, to be successfully implemented within this unique educational ecosystem, the resulting module should be of a high degree of structural flexibility, allowing educators to accommodate mixed-ability student groups while operating efficiently within the strict, limited time constraints of a memorisation-heavy institutional schedule.

Conclusion

In conclusion, bridging the gap between religious identity and linguistic competence is essential for empowering the next generation of global Islamic leaders. By tailoring English language education to the specific socio-cultural and cognitive needs of Tahfiz students, institutions can produce well-rounded individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to the global community.

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