Strategies of Ma'had Leaders in Enhancing Teacher Motivation and Performance in Integrated Tahfiz-Vocational Education

Ilham Nur Rachmadi*, Ida Faridah

Institut Agama Islam An-Nawawi Purworejo, Indonesia
Email : nilhamjr20@gmail.com , faridahida242@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The integration of Tahfiz and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curricula necessitates dual competencies for teachers, frequently precipitating excessive workloads and professional burnout, and potentially jeopardizing the objectives of the National Tahfiz Education Policy (DPTN) 2.0. This research aims to analyze the leadership strategies at Ma'had Tahfiz Vokasional Aman Bistari (MTVAB), Malaysia, in mitigating these challenges. Utilizing an exploratory single case study design, data were collected through methodological triangulation involving in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document review, and were subsequently analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model. The results reveal the implementation of a "Value-Based Hybrid Leadership" model that synergizes three key strategies: (1) Visionary-Spiritual Leadership by the founder who performs "Meaning Reframing" of workloads as "Educational Jihad"; (2) Structured Instructional Leadership by the Principal who standardizes mentoring methods to reduce teachers' "Extraneous Cognitive Load"; and (3) Strategic Partnerships as resource buffers. This study concludes that the synergy between transcendental motivation and structured operational support successfully transforms the "dual burden" into "dual competence," thereby enriching the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model within the Islamic education ecosystem.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern Islamic education ecosystem, the integration of Tahfiz and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curricula positions teachers in a central yet dilemmatic role. In Malaysia, this paradigm is reinforced through the launch of the National Tahfiz Education Policy (DPTN) 2.0, which aligns with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 to enhance the access

and quality of Islamic education (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013); this policy sets an ambitious target to produce 125,000 professional Quran memorizers possessing industrial technical competencies by 2050 (Jembatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2023). This policy necessitates a fundamental transformation of the tahfiz teacher's role: from a mere guardian of memorization traditions (muhaffiz) to a facilitator of dual competencies who must balance spiritual attainment (sanad) with industrial skill standards or the Malaysian Skills Certificate (Wulandari & Hayati, 2025).

To comprehend the magnitude of this challenge, it is essential to understand the operational mechanisms of TVET within this ecosystem. Unlike general academic education, TVET is entirely competency-based, operating under National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS). Within this system, the curriculum is divided into specific 'Competency Units' (CU), where students must demonstrate practical mastery—such as computer network installation or automotive troubleshooting—to obtain the Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM). This mechanism creates a unique pedagogical dichotomy: while the Tahfiz curriculum requires hours of static repetition (Tikrar) and spiritual contemplation to maintain memory, the TVET curriculum demands active physical engagement, environmental noise, and logical problem-solving. Consequently, the 'work' of a teacher in this context is not merely teaching, but also constantly bridging these two contrasting epistemologies. This structural conflict produces the 'dual burden' phenomenon, making the role of leadership strategies crucial in preventing burnout (Marwani et al., 2024).

This phenomenon is not unique to Malaysia but is also relevant to the context of vocational boarding schools (pesantren vokasi) in Indonesia, where teachers often face "dual burden" challenges due to high administrative demands and a lack of adequate industrial experience (Putri & Haifaturrahmah, 2025). Similar challenges in integrating tahfiz programs into technical curricula are also found in polytechnics, requiring specific strategic approaches so as not to sacrifice the quality of memorization for technical skills Azmil & Kaltsum, (2023). The complexity of this role makes teacher motivation and performance vital variables determining the success of integrating these two educational epistemologies. Demands for dual competence often trigger role conflicts that lead to excessive workloads. Recent literature indicates that teachers in integrated educational institutions are prone to physical and emotional burnout due to the pressure to meet academic targets alongside spiritual standards (Nurrizki et al., 2026).

Specifically, within the tahfiz school context, Masita Mt. Zin (2024) highlights that teacher job satisfaction is significantly influenced by organizational support, where instability in professional status and high

administrative burdens has been proven to decrease teaching commitment. If not managed effectively, the accumulation of this pressure can lead to depersonalization or a loss of empathy toward students, which ultimately lowers the quality of memorization and students' vocational achievement (Marwani et al., 2024). Therefore, the presence of adaptive leadership strategies is an urgent necessity to prevent burnout and ensure the sustainability of such integrated education.

Amidst the complexity of these challenges, Ma'had Tahfiz Vokasional Aman Bistari (MTVAB) in Puchong, Selangor, has emerged as a pilot institution offering a unique integration model. Under the vision of its founder, Tuan Mohd Asri bin Yunus, the institution is determined to produce graduates with the profile of 'Skilled, Technological, and Entrepreneurial Huffaz'. Although the educational model at MTVAB has garnered academic attention, existing literature is still dominated by evaluations of the effectiveness of learning methods on student memorization, as evidenced by the study by Wulandari & Hayati (2025). However, the managerial dimension—specifically the leader's strategy in managing teacher motivation to implement this rigorous curriculum—remains under-explored.

This gap poses a significant risk: without effective strategies to manage the high-pressure 'dual burden' environment, the ambitious national target to produce 125,000 professional huffaz could be compromised by teacher resignations and burnout. Therefore, investigating how leaders successfully navigate these conflicting demands is not merely an academic gap but also an urgent practical necessity to ensure the sustainability of the National Tahfiz Education Policy (DPTN) 2.0. Consequently, this study aims to achieve two primary objectives: (1) to examine the specific leadership mechanisms implemented at MTVAB in reducing teacher burnout while maintaining high performance; and (2) to construct a theoretical leadership model that aligns spiritual and vocational demands. Unlike previous research that relied solely on document reviews, this study utilizes empirical fieldwork to propose a 'Value-Based Hybrid Leadership' framework, offering a strategic blueprint for other vocational boarding schools facing similar human resource challenges.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory single case study design. This design was selected because the leadership phenomenon within the integrated TVET-Tahfiz curriculum is contemporary, complex, and deeply embedded in a real-life context, aligning with the criteria established by García-Montoya & Mahoney (2023) for the suitability of case studies. The single-case approach enables an in-depth understanding of leadership strategies in a

unique institutional setting, offering insights that are not easily generalizable but are critical for theory building. Ma'had Tahfiz Vokasional Aman Bistari (MTVAB) was intentionally chosen as the unit of analysis because it represents a pioneering institution implementing the DPTN 2.0 policy, providing rare insights into the successful synchronization of dual-competency education that remains largely unachieved by other institutions.

The study was conducted at MTVAB, located in Puchong, Selangor, Malaysia. This location was selected due to its unique characteristics as a pilot institution integrating spiritual education (Tahfiz) and industrial skills training (TVET) within a single ecosystem. The research participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance and depth of insight. Key informants included the Foundation Leader (Founder) and the School Principal (Mudir), who hold strategic and operational authority, while supporting informants comprised five vocational Tahfiz teachers and ten students. This multi-perspective approach ensured data richness and validity, capturing both leadership intent and its practical implementation.

Data collection was conducted through methodological triangulation to enhance credibility, combining semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document review (Sugiyono, 2022, 2024). Interviews with key informants explored leadership styles, workload perceptions, and teacher motivation management. Participant observation was carried out over a full week in August 2025, focusing on 'Talaqqi' and 'Halaqah' mentoring sessions to assess alignment between institutional SOPs and actual practice. Document review included the DPTN 2.0 policy framework, mentoring SOP modules, and internal teacher performance reports, which served to corroborate the evidence obtained from interviews and observations.

Data were analyzed using the Interactive Model by Miles et al. (2023), comprising three concurrent and continuous stages. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and abstracting raw field notes and interview transcripts to identify core themes related to leadership strategies. Data display organized the condensed information into structured matrices and narrative text, facilitating comprehensive understanding of the hybrid leadership patterns. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification involved formulating initial interpretations of the relationship between leadership style and teacher motivation, which were validated through cross-source triangulation to ensure the reliability and plausibility of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

This study reveals that Ma'had Tahfiz Vokasional Aman Bistari (MTVAB) implements a distinct management model identified as "Value-Based Hybrid Leadership". This model is characterized by functional synergy between the foundation leadership (visionary domain) and the school administration (operational domain). By triangulating data from field interviews, observations, and document reviews, four core findings were identified:

Building Spiritual Resilience through Visionary Reframing

The first strategic finding reveals that the Foundation Leader (Founder) utilizes a "Visionary-Spiritual" approach to address teacher burnout. The core mechanism employed is "Meaning Reframing," where heavy dual workloads are not presented as mere administrative burdens but are conceptually reconstructed as "Educational Jihad". Interviews confirmed that this narrative serves as a powerful intrinsic motivator. As stated by the Founder: "We aspire to foster a generation that is not only excellent in technological innovation but also *Hafiz*... This is our jihad to reclaim the intellectual standing of the *Ummah*" (Field Interview, August 2025). This strategy effectively shifts the psychological state of teachers from feeling "overwhelmed" by professional demands to feeling "honored" by a spiritual mission. This finding aligns with Spiritual Leadership Theory proposed by Fry (2003), which asserts that effective leadership must facilitate the need for the "spiritual survival" of members through transcendental vision, thereby enhancing organizational commitment and productivity.

Operational Stability through Standardized Instructional Routines

Complementing the spiritual vision, the principal (*Mudir*) implements a "Structured Teaching" strategy designed to minimize role ambiguity. The study identifies this as a "Cognitive Load Reduction" mechanism. By strictly standardizing the five mentoring pillars (*Talaqqi, Halaqah, Tikrar, Saba', and Manzil*), the leadership eliminates the need for teachers to design their own lesson plans from scratch. This "methodological certainty" allows teachers to reallocate their cognitive resources solely toward execution and quality assurance (*tajwid* correction) rather than curriculum planning. As noted by one teacher: "Clear SOPs act as rails; we only need to drive the train without worrying about building the tracks" (Field Interview, August 2025). Theoretically, this strategy validates Cognitive Load Theory by (Costley et al., 2024; van Nooijen et al., 2024), which states that reducing "Extraneous Cognitive Load" (unnecessary mental burden due to unclear instructions) is an absolute prerequisite for individuals to effectively process core information ("Germane Load").

Strategic Partnerships for Resource Support

The third finding indicates that MTVAB actively mitigates internal resource scarcity through collaboration networks. Field data confirms the formalization of this strategy through the signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) between MTVAB and several higher education institutions in Indonesia, including STAINU Purworejo, INISNU Temanggung, and IAI An-Nawawi Purworejo. These partnerships function as a "Resource Sharing" mechanism, where partner institutions provide support in curriculum development and expert exchange, thereby alleviating the administrative and academic burden on MTVAB teachers. This formal collaboration serves as an external buffer that maintains institutional educational quality despite internal personnel limitations. This supports the view of Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani et al. (2014) regarding effective school management, which emphasizes that under resource constraints, school leaders must be proactive in building external networks to ensure operational sustainability and educational quality.

Portrait of a Teacher with Dual Competency

To illustrate the effectiveness of these leadership strategies, the study recorded the daily routine of a typical teacher at MTVAB, referred to as 'Ustadh A'. His schedule reflects a high-pressure environment: the day begins before dawn with *Qiyamullail* and the first *Halaqah* session, followed by vocational teaching duties during the day, and concluding with *Murajaah* (review) in the evening. Under normal circumstances, such a schedule would lead to rapid cognitive exhaustion. However, observations show that standardized SOPs act as a vital support system. During *Talaqqi* sessions, Ustadh A does not need to improvise his teaching methods; he strictly follows the *Tikrar* and *Saba'* flow mandated by the principal. He commented: "The system runs automatically. My energy is only used for listening and correcting, not for thinking 'what should I do next?'" (Field Notes, August 2025). This narrative evidence confirms that Structured Instructional Leadership effectively absorbs workflow complexity, allowing teachers to manage a 15-hour workday without compromising their psychological well-being.

Realization of Dual Competency Goals

The final finding validates the effectiveness of the hybrid leadership model through educational outcomes. Interview data shows a consensus among stakeholders regarding graduate quality. Both teachers and school leaders explicitly stated that the institution has "successfully produced a generation that is not only expert in their vocational fields but also dedicated *Hafiz Al-Qur'an*" (Field Interview, August 2025). This finding serves as empirical evidence that the

synergy of spiritual motivation, structured guidance, and external partnerships has effectively overcome the "dual burden" challenge, transforming it into a "dual competency" success story.

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the findings through the lens of educational management theory, arguing that the "Value-Based Hybrid Leadership" model serves as a strategic mechanism to balance the high demands of the TVET-Tahfiz curriculum with adequate organizational resources.

Hybrid Leadership Synergy within the JD-R Framework

The structural configuration at MTVAB validates (Warshaw & Ciarimboli, 2024; Ho et al., 2025) Hybrid Leadership theory, specifically the pattern of institutionalized synergy. However, this study extends the theory by analyzing it through the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. The JD-R model postulates that an imbalance between high job demands and low resources is the primary cause of exhaustion (Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023). In the MTVAB context, the dual curriculum represents high "Job Demands" that typically lead to burnout. Hybrid leadership functions as a balancing "Job Resource". The Foundation Leader acts as a provider of psychological resources (motivation/vision), while the Principal acts as a provider of instrumental resources (SOP/technical support). This division of labor is crucial; without the visionary aspect, strict SOPs would feel oppressive (bureaucratic), and without structural SOPs, the vision would become chaotic. The success of MTVAB lies in these complementary roles, aligning with findings by (Welsh, 2023; Williams III et al,. 2023), which emphasize that effective school management depends on leaders' strategies in managing resources.

Spiritual Leadership as a Mechanism for Meaning Creation

The strategy of reframing workload as "Educational Jihad" aligns with Spiritual Leadership Theory, which states that leaders must fulfill the need for "spiritual survival" to foster organizational commitment. This finding confirms that for religious teachers, intrinsic motivation is driven by a "Transcendental Purpose" rather than mere financial incentives. By building a narrative where teaching is a form of worship, the leader successfully transforms the teachers' Psychological Contract. Exhaustion is no longer interpreted as "exploitation" but as "devotion" (*lillah*). This supports Masita Mt. Zin's (2024) findings, showing that a strong Islamic Work Ethic functions as a buffer against stress. In this ecosystem, spiritual validation acts as a high-value intangible reward that maintains retention despite rigorous demands.

Standardization and Cognitive Load Theory

From an instructional management perspective, the strategy of standardizing mentoring methods provides a practical solution to the "dual burden" problem, explained by Cognitive Load Theory. Human working memory has limited capacity, and instructions must be designed to reduce unnecessary cognitive load (Costley et al., 2024; van Nooijen et al,. 2024). Teachers in integrated curricula often experience "Extraneous Cognitive Load"—mental effort wasted on determining how to teach or manage administration. By implementing strict SOPs, leadership effectively minimizes this load. This is also supported by Himawati Khoirunisa (2025), who shows that memorization retention effectiveness depends heavily on method consistency. This "operational automation" allows teachers to redirect their limited mental energy toward "Germane Load"—the actual process of *tajwid* correction and meaningful interaction.

Importance of Social Capital in the TVET-Tahfiz Ecosystem

The strategic partnership strategy underscores that the success of TVET-*Tahfiz* institutions cannot be achieved in isolation. By outsourcing aspects of curriculum development and expert resources, MTVAB creates a "resource buffer" that prevents teacher burnout. This implies that sustainability in private religious-vocational education requires an ecosystem-based approach rather than a standalone operational model.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the sustainability of the integrated TVET-Tahfiz curriculum at MTVAB is systematically achieved through the "Value-Based Hybrid Leadership" model. The key lesson from this research is that the potential "dual burden" of producing professional Quran memorizers can be transformed into "dual competency" when leadership effectively balances spiritual inspiration with operational support. The institution's resilience relies on three synergistic pillars: Visionary-Spiritual Leadership, which reframes heavy workloads as "Educational Jihad"; Structured Instructional Leadership, which standardizes mentoring methods to reduce unnecessary cognitive load; and Strategic Partnerships, which expand resources and prevent administrative burnout. These findings highlight the importance of aligning motivational and structural strategies to ensure both teacher well-being and student achievement in dual-competency educational settings.

The study's theoretical contribution lies in advocating an "ambidextrous" leadership approach that integrates spiritual inspiration with technical rigor, challenging the conventional reliance on a single leadership style. Practically, it

provides a strategic blueprint for policymakers and educational leaders implementing integrated curricula under the National Tahfiz Education Policy (DPTN) 2.0. However, the study is limited to a single institutional case, which may affect generalizability. Future research could explore comparative analyses across multiple Tahfiz-Vocational schools or longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of hybrid leadership on teacher motivation, burnout prevention, and student outcomes.

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