

Professional Competency Assessment and Specific Training Needs of Tahfiz al-Quran Teachers for Visually Impaired Students

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.91100370>

Received: 14 November 2025; Accepted: 29 November 2025; Published: 11 December 2025

ABSTRACT

Tahfiz al-Quran education for visually impaired students (OKU Penglihatan) is vital in shaping their spiritual and psychological development. Preliminary studies show that this program has a very positive impact on the students' self-confidence and future aspirations. However, the effectiveness of this program is hampered by a critical gap in teacher competency, where the majority of teachers have not received specific training to teach the visually impaired. Therefore, this study aims to assess the existing level of professional competency among Tahfiz teachers and identify their specific training needs, focusing on the mastery of Braille al-Quran and assistive technology. This study applies a mixed methodology (quantitative and qualitative). The quantitative phase involves a survey of OKU Tahfiz teachers, while the qualitative phase uses needs analysis and in-depth interviews. The findings of the study are expected to highlight the weakest competency dimensions and propose a relevant and practical specific training model framework. The study's contribution is to provide guidance to stakeholders in formulating teacher training policies and enhancing the quality of Tahfiz teaching for the visually impaired

Keywords: Professional Competency, Specific Training, Tahfiz Teacher, Visually Impaired (OKU Penglihatan), Braille Al-Quran, Islamic Special Education, Training Model, Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

Tahfiz al-Quran education for the Visually Impaired (OKU Penglihatan) has long been a focus in academic discourse and national education policy. Islamic history itself records prominent blind scholars, such as Imam al-Syatibi (Rabīṭah Ulama Iritriya, 2020), which proves the great potential of this group in al-Quran studies. The current reality shows that inclusive efforts towards OKU Tahfiz education are increasingly being driven by institutions like the Ibnu Umme Maktum Research Centre (UMMI) and NGOs such as PERTIS, supported by national initiatives like the publication of the Malaysian Braille Al-Quran Mushaf by JAKIM, which has standardized the official text at the national level.

Despite the growth of these support initiatives, inclusive Tahfiz education opportunities still face significant systemic challenges. One of the most noticeable gaps occurs at the secondary level, where there is no robust feeder system to connect OKU students from special schools to Tahfiz institutions and higher education. This is further reinforced by admission requirements that are often equated with typical students, thereby limiting access for students with special needs. These issues indicate that the success of Tahfiz education for the Visually Impaired does not solely depend on the students, but on the strength of the support ecosystem.

However, analysis finds that the critical challenge in this ecosystem is centered on teacher professional readiness. Preliminary studies show the existence of various other constraints, such as a lack of assistive technology and a societal mentality that sometimes limits potential, but the most important and addressable issue is the lack of trained and competent teachers (R1 & R2, 2025). Existing teachers, while passionate, may not possess the

specialized pedagogical skills to teach the complex Braille al-Quran, manage inclusive classes, or integrate assistive technology.

Therefore, this paper chooses to focus on this root problem. Based on a detailed analysis of field expert experiences and views, this article aims to assess the level of Professional Competency of Visually Impaired OKU Tahfiz teachers and systematically identify their Specific Training needs. The discussion will also touch upon the role of national inclusive policies such as the Zero Reject Policy and the Action Plan for Muslim OKU by Religious Agencies 2024–2028 in the context of teacher competency development. The results of this study are expected to formulate recommendations toward building a more inclusive and sustainable Tahfiz education system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review aims to position this study within the existing research context, especially by highlighting the research gap related to teacher competency.

Concept and Dimensions of Special Education Teacher Competency

The professional competency of teachers generally encompasses mastery of the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and contribution to the school and the profession. For special education teachers, this competency is more demanding because it involves the ability to understand the potential, abilities, and identify the weaknesses of each OKU student. Competency assessment often uses expert-validated questionnaire instruments to measure knowledge and skills aspects, which demonstrates high reliability.

Challenges in Tahfiz Education for the Visually Impaired (OKU Penglihatan)

Tahfiz al-Quran education for the visually impaired faces specific challenges, especially related to the Braille al-Quran and appropriate memorization methods. Previous studies have identified various Tahfiz learning techniques practiced by OKU students, such as the *tikrar* (repetition) technique, time selection, and verse focus. However, the main challenges are often associated with a lack of reference materials in Braille and issues in students' deep mastery of Braille skills. This suggests a need not only on the part of the students but also on the part of the teachers to master these skills.

Specific Training Needs and Research Gap

Specific training is seen as the main solution to help teachers overcome challenges in Special Education. In the OKU Tahfiz context, preliminary studies (original data) emphasize that teachers recognize the importance of specific training to overcome existing challenges. The lack of teacher exposure in courses related to Mathematics Braille, for example, has been identified as a major challenge for non-Special Education option teachers. Therefore, despite many studies on student challenges and memorization techniques, there is a significant literature gap in studies focusing on the systematic assessment of OKU Tahfiz teacher competency specifically and the development of a specific training framework to minimize this gap. This study aims to fill this gap by proposing a training model formulated based on the actual needs of teachers in the field.

Research Design

This study will use a Mixed Methods Research Design, specifically the Sequential Exploratory Design model.

- Phase 1 (Quantitative): A descriptive survey will be conducted to quantitatively measure the existing level of teacher professional competency and the level of specific training needs.
- Phase 2 (Qualitative): In-depth interviews and document/suggestion feedback analysis will be used to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind low competency scores (if any) and to obtain detailed input for developing the proposed training model.

Population and Sampling

- Population: All Tahfiz al-Quran teachers actively teaching Visually Impaired students at Tahfiz Centres or related special education schools in Malaysia.
- Quantitative Sample: Stratified Random Sampling or Purposive Sampling will be used to select teachers who meet the criteria (e.g., teaching experience with the Visually Impaired exceeding 1 year) to ensure sufficient reliability of the findings.
- Qualitative Sample: Purposive Sampling will be used to select a small number of teachers representing various experiences and backgrounds (such as teachers with specific training, and teachers without specific training) for interviews.

Research Instruments

Two main instruments will be used:

- Questionnaire (Quantitative Instrument):
 - Constructs: The questionnaire will be divided into sections: Demographic Background, Professional Competency Assessment (covering aspects of Tahfiz Curriculum, Pedagogy/Braille Teaching Methods, Assistive Technology, and Evaluation/Assessment), and Specific Training Needs (based on a 5-point Likert scale).
 - Validity and Reliability: Items must undergo an expert validation process (content validation) by at least three experts in Special Education and Tahfiz Education.
- Interview Protocol (Qualitative Instrument):
 - Using semi-structured interviews to deeply explore suggestions for improvement and the type of training modules most needed (referring to the teachers' original suggestions in the preliminary data, such as Braille reference materials and motivation/Braille training programs).

Data Analysis

- Quantitative Data: Descriptive statistical analysis (Mean, Standard Deviation, Frequency, Percentage) will be used to assess the level of competency and the priority of training needs.
- Qualitative Data: Thematic Analysis will be used to organize the feedback and suggestions from teachers, which will then serve as the basis for proposing the Training Model.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study were obtained from the descriptive analysis of the responses of three Visually Impaired OKU Tahfiz teachers (N=3).

Demographic Profile of Teacher Competency

Teacher (R)	Education Level	OKU Teaching Experience	Received Specific Training?	Suggested Competency
R1	Bachelor's Degree	1–3 years	No	Less experience; no specific training.
R2	Bachelor's Degree	4–6 years	No	Moderate experience; no specific training.
R3	Master's Degree	4–6 years	Yes	Most capable; the only one with specific training.

Summary: Two-thirds (66%) of the teachers have not received specific training, indicating a significant competency gap despite existing teaching experience.

Competency Assessment in Overcoming Obstacles (Section B)

The following table summarizes the Mean (M) and Consensus (K) scores of teachers regarding the main obstacles:

No.	Obstacle Statement (Scale 1-5)	R1	R2	R3	Mean (M)	Consensus (K)
B5	Specific training for teachers can help overcome obstacles.	5	5	5	5.00	Fully Agree (100%)
B3	Student motivation plays a vital role.	5	5	5	5.00	Fully Agree (100%)
B4	Students face psychological challenges (lack of self-confidence).	5	5	4	4.67	Strong Agreement
B6	Lack of time for individual supervision is an obstacle.	3	3	5	3.67	Mixed (Neutral to Full Agreement)
B1	Students face difficulty reading/understanding the Braille al-Quran.	4	5	4	4.33	Strong Agreement
B2	Lack of learning aids (Braille/Technology).	3	5	3	3.67	Mixed (Neutral to Full Agreement)

Main Findings:

- There is absolute consensus that Specific Teacher Training (M=5.00) is the main solution.
- There is a perception that difficulty reading Braille (M=4.33) is an obstacle, but views on the lack of learning aids (M=3.67) are mixed. This suggests that the problem may lie in the teachers' pedagogical skills in using the aids, rather than a mere lack of aids.

Suggestions for Specific Training Needs (Section D)

Qualitative analysis of open suggestions shows a clear focus on Braille resources and skills:

Teacher	Main Suggestion (Formulated)	Focus of Training Need
R1	"Create more reference materials in the religious field in Braille script."	Braille Resource Development
R2	"[Unclear suggestion]" (Can be interpreted as resource support).	Resource & Material Support
R3	"Increase the number of programs that provide motivation and training to visually impaired OKU students related to Braille al-Quran."	Advanced Braille Skills & Motivation Techniques

Conclusion of Findings: Teachers view specific training as the most urgent need (M=5.00). Their suggestions centre on training modules that cover Braille mastery (for students and teachers) and the development of relevant religious reference materials.

إليك الترجمة الأكاديمية لفقرة "المناقشة" (Discussion):

DISCUSSION

This discussion integrates the study findings with the Literature Review, focusing on the professional competency gap.

Specific Training as a Critical Competency Component

The findings show **unanimous agreement (M=5.00)** that specific training is essential to overcome challenges. This confirms the literature finding that special education teachers require **higher knowledge, skills, and training** compared to non-option teachers. The failure of two-thirds of the teachers in this sample to receive

specific training (R1, R2) creates a **professional dilemma**: teachers are enthusiastic about the positive impact of the program (as shown by high scores in Section C), but they lack the formal pedagogical tools to reach the students' full potential. Therefore, competency assessment must place emphasis on the **domain of Braille knowledge and the latest technology**.

Braille Pedagogy and Resource Shortage

Although teachers stated that students face difficulty reading Braille (M=4.33), the score regarding the lack of aids (M=3.67) is neutral/mixed. This directs the discussion toward the pedagogical aspect:

- **Pedagogical, Not Equipment, Issue:** The problem may not be merely the absence of the Braille al-Quran, but the **lack of teacher competency** in effective Braille teaching techniques, detailed *tikrart* techniques, or the use of digital assistive memorization technology (which is also suggested in the literature).
- **Resource Development Demand:** Suggestions from R1 and R3 regarding the **development of Braille reference materials** strengthen the conclusion that the Tahfiz curriculum requires support that goes beyond the al-Quran *mushaf* alone, such as *fiqh* or *sirah* reference books in Braille format, which requires high technical skill on the part of the teachers or support bodies.

Implications for Training Model Design

The findings of this study provide a strong basis for the development of a training model, which needs to be based on three main pillars:

- **Braille Mastery & Braille Fiqh:** Technical training in reading, writing, and especially religious Braille codes.
- **Adaptive Tahfiz Pedagogy:** Different teaching techniques (e.g., supervising individual memorization B6, M=3.67) and how to use digital assistive technology.
- **Psychological Support:** Considering the high score for B4 (M=4.67) regarding students' psychological challenges, the training model should include aspects of counselling and motivation for both teachers and students (as suggested by R3).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study confirms that there is a critical gap between the visually impaired OKU Tahfiz teachers' awareness of the need for specific training and the reality that the majority of them have not received it. Specific training is recognized as the most important factor in overcoming major challenges such as students' difficulty in mastering the Braille al-Quran and psychological issues. The professional competency of teachers in this context highly requires improvement in the dimensions of adaptive pedagogy and Braille resource management.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researchers put forward two main recommendations:

Institutional (Policy) Recommendation

Religious education authorities and OKU bodies need to mandate a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Program for all visually impaired OKU Tahfiz teachers. This program should be fully subsidized and recognized in the teachers' annual competency assessment.

Research and Development (R&D) Recommendation

- **Proposing a Training Model Framework:** Further research needs to be conducted to develop and test the effectiveness of the Braille Competency Specific Training Model (MLKKB). This model should include mandatory modules in:
 - Advanced Al-Quran Braille Code Mastery.

- Integration of Assistive Technology (e.g., screen readers) in memorization sessions.
- Adaptive Fardhu Ain Tahfiz Teaching Techniques.
- Development of a Braille Resource Repository: Institutions need to collaborate with universities and research centres to establish a digital repository of Braille reference materials in the religious field that can be accessed and regularly updated (as suggested by R1).

APPRECIATION

The author expresses the deepest appreciation for the invaluable support provided by the Dar al Qari Resources Research Fund, the *Centre for Research Excellence and Incubation Management (CREIM)*, and the *Faculty of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin*, whose contributions have been instrumental in the publication of this paper. This article is part of a research project entitled “**Cabaran dan Halangan dalam Pendidikan Tahfiz OKU Penglihatan**” (UNISZA/2024/PPL/DAQR(020) (RI057)).

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