

Philippine Madrasah Education: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract—This study examines the current state of Philippine madrasah education, particularly the challenges and potential opportunities under the BARMM government. Utilizing a descriptive-qualitative approach, the research analyzes existing research and relevant documents. The findings reveal a long history of madrasah education in the Philippines, initially focused on Quran and Arabic instruction. This program evolved and became institutionalized as the ALIVE program nationally, with the BARMM region implementing the ISAL program. Additionally, the upcoming "Public Madrasah System" signifies further development. However, despite progress, significant challenges remain, with the exception of a recent salary increase for ISAL teachers in the BARMM region. This positive step highlights the need for further research on program effectiveness and the broader landscape of madrasah education beyond the ISAL program. Drawing on successful international reforms, collaboration among stakeholders, teacher training, and modern technology-integrated curriculums that balance religious and practical skills are identified as key areas for improvement. Prioritizing girls' education is also crucial. By learning from international models and addressing Philippine-specific challenges, improvements can ensure a well-rounded madrasa education that prepares students for both faith and the contemporary world. Further research into various madrasa programs is recommended for a holistic understanding.

Keywords— Madrasah Education, Challenges, Opportunities.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines, situated on the Asian continent, is recognized as the only predominantly Christian country. Christianity was introduced by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, a Spanish explorer, in 1565 (Religion in the Philippines, n.d.). However, even before the arrival of Christianity, Islam had already been established in the Philippines by Muslim Arab and Malay merchants since the late 14th century (Islam in the Philippines, n.d.). The existence of madrasah education in the Philippines can be traced back to the early 13th and 14th centuries (Pontino Guleng et al., 2017), specifically during the period of Islamization in Sulu (Bustamam-Ahmad & Patrick, 2011). Madrasahs in the Philippines are often referred to as Muslim private schools and are primarily led by religious leaders and educators (Samid, 2022). These institutions place a strong emphasis on Islamic studies and Arabic literacy, relying on the support of the local community or donations from Islamic or Muslim countries (Latif, 2014).

While many madrasahs continue to adhere to traditional practices, some have started adopting new curricula and are

considered integrated madrasahs. Further discussion on this topic and additional information can be found in the subsequent chapter. It is widely acknowledged that the fundamental goal of madrasah, or Islamic education, as noted by Syed Muhammad Al Naquib Al-Attas, is to foster balanced growth in individuals, encompassing their spiritual, intellectual, rational, emotional, and physical aspects. The aim is to infuse faith into every dimension of a person's being (Tahira & Saadi, n.d.).

Based on an analysis of the available literature, it is apparent that despite the long existence of madrasah education, its current development has not been adequately emphasized. This paper aims to fill this gap by examining the state of madrasah education in the Philippines, with a specific focus on challenges, and highlighting any ongoing opportunities in the BARMM region under the governance of the Bangsamoro government. The existing studies on this topic primarily predate the establishment of the new Bangsamoro government. Therefore, this research will be valuable for the researcher in understanding the current issues and the government's approach and policies towards madrasah education in the Philippines. It will shed light on the contemporary development or opportunities and address unresolved challenges in the field.

The Philippines is composed of three (3) major islands, which are the Luzon where it comprises eight (8) regions; and Visayas it comprises three (3) regions; and lastly Mindanao, which has six (6) regions and one of them is the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) ("Island Groups of the Philippines," 2022). (see illustration 1 below)



(Illustration 1)

Source: ("Island Groups of the Philippines," 2022)

And to emphasize the existence of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao government, see illustration 2 below.

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao



(Illustration 2)
Source: (Bangsamoro-Autonomous-Region-in-Muslim-in-Mindanao.Jpg
900x536 Pixels, n.d.)

Based on the latest data from the United Nations, the population of the Philippines is 113,552,660 (Philippines Population (2023) - Worldometer, n.d.) However, if we look at the 2020 Philippines census with the 108,667,043 household population the 6.4% of it is Islam (Religious Affiliation in the Philippines (2020 Census of Population and Housing) | Philippine Statistics Authority, n.d.) but during the 2015 census, the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) claims that it is around 10% to 11% for the reason of being reluctant in civil registrar registration or formal survey participation (“Philippines,” n.d.).

Birth of Madrasah System

As mentioned earlier, the Muslim presence in the Philippines dates back to the early 13th and 14th centuries (Pontino Guleng et al., 2017), indicating that they had their own methods of spreading Islam and teaching Islamic principles. One of the well-known educational systems employed by Muslims is the madrasah education system. During the pre-colonial era, the madrasa system served as the primary form of Islamic education, with teachers known as Gurus who focused mainly on teaching the Quran. Another method of instruction was through tutorials, referred to as the Guru system, which was highly regarded for preserving the Muslim worldview, beliefs, and culture (Lantong, 2018).

According to Kulidtod's study (2017), the earliest form of education in the Moro territories during the pre-Spanish era was conducted in small household groups known as maktab, which means "library" or "book center." The religious leader in the village, called the Guru, taught a small group of children the basics of Islam, including reading and writing in the Arabic language. Over time, the role of the Guru was passed on to the Pandita, who became the spiritual leader in the community. Subsequently, the madrasah approach was introduced, and some teachers had the opportunity to pursue formal education abroad. Furthermore, Madrasah education in the Philippines has played a significant role in Islamization, cultural identity preservation, promoting brotherhood, and empowering communities. This was made possible through the establishment of various agencies and institutions, as highlighted by Latip (2014).

Abolition of Madrasah System

In 1898, the American colonizers abolished the madrasah system and replaced it with the western secular curriculum, where western values of democracy are taught using the English language. When the Philippines got their independence in 1946, the Filipino leaders used an education approach to integrate Muslims into Philippine society. To implement this, they built the university (Mindanao State University), which is located in Mindanao (Lantong, 2018). However, this kind of education does not totally represent purely madrasa education, as it mostly focuses on western education.

Revival of Madrasah System

The revival of the Madrasa system took place in the early 1950s, facilitated by the involvement of foreign scholars invited by madrasa administrators. Over time, Muslim Filipino scholars who had completed their studies abroad also began leading madrasas. This gradual progression continued as graduates from existing madrasas became assets for establishing new madrasas in different areas. This theory of development has been evolving ever since (Lantong, 2018).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the madrasa system, it is important to recognize the various types and curricula associated with it. These include the traditional madrasah, the integrated madrasah, the madrasah toril, the madrasah in public schools (Cayamdoin, 2019), and the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) program (Samid, 2022). Additionally, Tahdirriyah is identified as the fifth type. These different types of madrasahs illustrate the diversity within the madrasa education system in the Philippines.

Different Types of Madrasah

Based on the above-mentioned illustration, it is concluded that the curriculum of Philippine madrasa education is developing. It was started with just a kind of Guru approach, and then maktab, until in the following generation it adopted the so-called madrasah system. It is better understood that the curriculum, as John Dewey (1902) defines it, "is a continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies...the various studies...are themselves experiences—they are that of the race." And furthermore, the curriculum can also be described as "A curriculum often includes a declaration of goals and precise objectives; it shows how content has been chosen and arranged; and it either suggests or demonstrates particular teaching and learning methodologies... Ultimately, it comprises an assessment program for the results (Taba, 1962).

The development of the curriculum here is based on the changes in the system of madrasah education. Every type of madrasah has its own unique curriculum; even the traditional madrasah alone has no standard unified curriculum. To see the differences between these curricula, let's look at the illustration below.

Type	Definition
Traditional Madrasah	The instruction is basically religious and informal; classes are held on Saturdays and Sundays only or days agreed upon by the teacher and the students or pupils; it does not have a formal curriculum; it is non-graded and may have multi-age grouping; and it only requires its teachers to be graduates of a madrasah or to be an imam (Muslim religious leader) (Kulidtod, 2017).
	This is considered the oldest type of madrasah education approach (Cayamodin, 2019).
Developmental or Formal Madrasah	In other studies, like Cayamodin (2019), he considered or categorized this type of madrasah as traditional. This type is just like the western formal education system. It operates in ladder form, where its students go from pre-school to high school. Its curriculum integrates Islamic religious and cultural subjects with some secular subjects, such as mathematics and sciences, but still uses Arabic as the medium of instruction. This system of education does not implement the standard curriculum of the Department of Education; therefore, its students are not eligible for transfer to regular government schools (Kulidtod 2017).
Standard Private Madrasah	This type of madrasah is recognized and accredited by the Department of Education. Its curriculum has been harmonized, upgraded, and modified to become a component of the Philippine education system through the issuance of DepED Order No. 51, s. 2004, prescribing the Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris (Kulidtod, 2017) and amended by DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2011, where it is to implement the Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum (REMC) (Cayamodin, 2019).
Madrasah Toril	This is not included among the madrasah categories as defined by the Department of Education. This is a stay-in approach where the curriculum is just the same as the traditional madrasah, and it could be similar to the pondok or persantren of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand (Cayamodin, 2019).
Madrasah in Public School (Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) Program)	The Philippine government is considering ethnic customs and traditions, religious beliefs, and shared interests as stated under the Presidential Decree (1083) or the Code of Muslim Personal Laws of the Philippines (H. M. Harad & Arriola, n.d.). Therefore, one of the Philippine’s approaches is to mainstream madrasah into public schools, initially called as integration, and the implementation of this policy can be traced back to 1982 under the presidency of President Ferdinand Marcos for the purpose of optimizing the development of the human resources of the nation and to enhance the nation’s Islamic heritage, but it was finally approved through the issuance of implementing guidelines detailed under Department of Education Order No. 51 s. 2004 on August 15, 2004. The ALIVE program started in the school year 2005-2006 and became a new subject for Muslim students in public schools in Muslim-dominated areas (Bustamam-Ahmad & Patrick, 2011).

Type of Madrasah	Curriculum/Subjects
Traditional Madrasah	1. Fiqh 2. Tawhid 3. Hisab 4. Qawa'id 5. Qira'a 6. Sirah 7. Hifdul Qur'an 8. Tafsir 9. Hadith 10. Mutaala'a 11. Imla 12. Tarih 13. Nu-shuws (Samid, 2022). These are just some examples of the subjects in elementary level and these vary in different madrasah.
Developmental or Formal Madrasah	see (Traditional Madrasa Curriculum)
Standard Private Madrasah	Refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum which is composed of; 1. Arabic Language 2. Quran 3. Sirah and Hadith 4. Aqidah and Fiqh (Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum (REMC), n.d.) (This curriculum is standard curriculum to all private madrasah who have permit to operate)
Madrasah Toril	1. Quran Memorization 2. Arabic Language 3. Islamic Studies 4. Halaqah Qur-aniyah (Facebook, n.d.-a) (These vary in every toril)
Madrasah in Public School (Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) Program)	Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum which has two subjects; 1. Arabic Language and 2. Islamic Values Education(Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum (REMC), n.d.)

In conclusion, this development has already been discussed, and the implementation of this program has started since before the creation of the Bangsamoro government; therefore, this study aims to explore more about its current status under this new government (BARMM) and also give a glimpse of its challenges.

II. METHODS

The researcher utilized a descriptive-qualitative research approach to investigate the topic at hand. Data were gathered from articles, journals, and relevant documents. The collected data were carefully examined and organized to address the research questions formulated for the study (Nugrahani, 2014). Content analysis, which involves systematically coding and identifying themes or patterns in textual data, was employed as the research method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach was used to analyze the historical background of Madrasa education in the Philippines as well as its curriculum development and challenges (Sarwono, 2006).

III. RESULTS

Curriculum Development

Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education

In 2004, the integration of Madrasa education into the Philippine curriculum was initiated through the issuance of DepED Order No. 51, Series of 2004, titled "Standards Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private MADARIS." This order was later amended in 2011 by DepED Order No. 40, Series of 2011, which recommended a thorough review and refinement of the curriculum, textbooks, teachers' manuals, and other learning materials. This led to the introduction of the "Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum (REMC)" in two models: the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) program for public schools and the Refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum (RSMC) for private madrasahs (Kulidtod, 2017).

However, challenges persist in the implementation of the ALIVE program, both within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and in other regions. These challenges and uncertainties regarding the program's sustainability have been highlighted in various studies (Cayamodin, 2019; Harad & Arriola, n.d.). The ALIVE program holds significant importance as it promotes peace and understanding between Christians and Muslims, works

towards combating Islamophobia, provides employment opportunities for Muslim Ustadzes, ensures equal education, and fosters recognition of the Muslim community (Deporos et al., 2022; Guleng, 2017).

Although the ALIVE program is still in effect in most regions, it has been replaced by the Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (ISAL) program in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. This change was implemented through the Bangsamoro Education Code (BEC) under the Public School System, specifically Section 62, which mandates the teaching of Islamic subjects and Arabic Language Curriculum to Muslim learners (BEC, p. 21–22).

Madrasah System of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

Under the Bangsamoro Education Code, it is stated under Basis of Section 2, Chapter One (1) of General Provisions that: "The Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao provides that the Bangsamoro Government shall establish, manage, and support a complete and integrated system of quality education, which shall be a subsystem of the national education system" Which covered the Madaris education system as stated in Section 5 (BEC, p. 1)

1. Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (ISAL) Program

This program refers to subjects such as the Quran, Aqeedah, Fiqh, Hadith, Seerah, Islamic Values, and Lughatul Arabiyyah (Mmaa_303_7a.Pdf, n.d.); furthermore, this is the replacement of the ALIVE program after the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. This is stated under the Bangsamoro Education Code (BEC) under the Public School System, Section 62, which says "Islamic Subjects and Arabic Language Curriculum shall be taught to Muslim learners" (BEC, p. 21–22); and it was clearly emphasized in the BEC-IRR under Section 50, which states "The teaching of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language to Muslim learners shall be strengthened as an integral part of the Basic Education Program" (BEC-IRR, p. 22).

This program is taught in the public schools, as stated above; it is included and shall be strengthened as an integral part of the Basic Education Program, and for this purpose, the Director-General For Basic Education (DGBE) shall coordinate with the Director-General for Madaris Education (DGME), and there are thousands of ISAL teachers throughout the region as of now. Moreover, there are currently 4,868 ISAL teachers all over BARMM (Facebook, n.d.-b)

2. Public Madrasah

Among the newly created programs under the BARMM government is the so-called Public Madrasah. This program has not yet been implemented, but it is already under the BEC and the newly formulated BEC-IRR, wherein there is a specific title called "Public Madrasah System" and stated under Section 91 entitled "Levels in the Public Madrasah System" that in the Public Madrasah System, the levels or key stages are the following: a. Tahderiyah, including early childhood care and education b. Grades 1 to 3 (Lower Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah); c. Grades 4 to 6 (Upper Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah); d. Grades 7 to 9 (Madrasah Mutawassitah); e. Grades 10 to 12 (Madrasah Thanawiyyah) (BEC, p. 25).

furthermore, according to Prof. Tahir Nalg, Director General of Directorate General for Madaris Education when he was interviewed by sheikh Abdulrasid Angeles, this program will be expected to materialized this coming school year 2023-2024 as expected by the Minister of the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) at least one madrasah, and besides, they already visited the site where the public madrasah will be built (Facebook, n.d.-c)

3. Madrasah Teacher (Mudarris)

This means a teacher who is teaching Arabic Language and Islamic studies subjects either in a public school or in a private madrasah. In addition, if a certain individual wants to apply under the ISAL program or the soon-to-be public madrasah program, he or she should possess the minimum qualification standard as stated in Chapter 3 of the Public Madrasah System, Section 103, entitled "Qualifications, where it says that "the Ministry shall provide for the qualifications of Asatidz and Mudarris taking into consideration the relevant educational background, such as but not limited to Tarbiyyah (Bachelor's Degree in Education) and other relevant bachelor's degree, eligibility, proficiency in Arabic language and/or Islamic Studies, together with their ability to read and write in English and Filipino." The mudarris position under the name of ISAL teacher is under contract of service.

What is new to this position, which is among the essential points, is that the government of Bangsamoro is still looking forward to making this position permanent, as stated under Section 105 "Special Eligibility" of the BEC states that "the Ministry shall develop and administer special qualifying examinations for permanent appointment to Mudarris positions in the Ministry in order to meet the eligibility requirement for the position of Mudarris. In coordination with the Civil Service Commission for BARMM, the Ministry shall grant a special license for Mudarris to those who passed the special qualifying examinations, provided That the eligibility herein granted shall only qualify the appointee for permanent appointment to Mudarris and shall not be considered as a substitute for second-level eligibility unless authorized by the Civil Service Commission" (BEC, p. 28).

The challenges of the Madrasah

In every institution, it is always accompanied by challenges. Some may perceive that these challenges are the tools that make the program or institution stronger, but most of the time the challenges become threats. Based on the Solaiman (2017) study regarding the ALIVE program in Marawi, among its challenges, he presented them in chronological order from the most to the least: delayed salary; lack of support from local government units; insufficient textbooks; insufficient salaries; lack of training/seminars; qualified teachers; and supervision. In addition to that, according to Harad & Ariola's (n.d.) study, some of the major problems and challenges that the school heads have encountered pertaining to the ALIVE program are a lack of financial and instructional resources, monitoring, and evaluation policies.

Based on the data above, it is similarly the same when it talks about the challenges and problems until the current time, except for the salary. It may be assumed that there would be a quite difference between the past and the current situation, but

this only applied in BARMM, where the salary of the ISAL teachers from 6000 during the ALIVE program (DM-No.-321-s.-2021---ASATIDZ-Allowance-for-Teaching-Materials.Pdf, n.d.) has increased to 16,200 a month (Office, 2021).

Regarding the traditional madrasah, a study conducted in Basilan, an island within the BARMM region, identified the most significant problems faced by madrasahs. These problems were ranked as follows: teaching strategies, madrasah facilities and equipment, teaching resources, expertise, lesson preparation, classroom management, and policies and administration (Lamla, 2018). Similarly, outside the BARMM region, issues faced by madrasahs include financial constraints, a lack of teaching and learning resources, faculty development, curriculum, and inconsistent admission policies (Jamaluddin & Cadir, 2017).

Based on the analyzed documents, there is no evidence of significant progress or solutions to address the existing problems in madrasahs. However, it is important to note that the information available is limited to published sources found on the internet. It is possible that progress has been made but has not been widely documented. Furthermore, the challenges mentioned above specifically pertain to the ALIVE program, and there is currently no study available on the implementation of the ISAL program in BARMM. Additionally, other madrasah programs, such as standard private madrasahs and madrasa toril, have not been explicitly addressed within the stated challenges of the traditional madrasah.

In expanding the discussion of Philippine madrasa education through a comparative lens, we can look at how similar reforms have played out in different contexts. By examining these parallels, we can identify effective strategies, note the challenges faced, and extrapolate lessons that might be applied across these diverse educational landscapes.

The Philippine madrasah education is looking to align itself with national educational standards while incorporating Islamic values. Efforts are made to blend religious instruction with general education subjects to ensure students can thrive in modern society. In Bangladesh, for instance, there has been a move to modernize madrasa education by introducing a market-oriented curriculum, aiming for economic relevance and employability (Hashim & Jemali, 2017). When religious schools have managed to successfully integrate modern education, it's usually because of a few things. First, the government plays a big role in supporting these changes. Second, they make sure teachers get the training they need and develop curriculums that respect both religious and cultural traditions. Finally, economic pressures often push these schools to update their programs. This is similar to what happened in Indonesia and Malaysia, where economic changes and a more modern job market led Islamic schools to offer a wider range of classes (Hashim & Jemali, 2017). Building on the idea that successful integration involves government support, teacher training, and adapting to economic needs, countries like Indonesia and Malaysia prove that Islamic schools can find a balance. These schools have diversified their offerings, driven by economic changes, without compromising religious principles. This focus on practicality

extends to technology. Just like Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (pesantrens) that are incorporating digital tools, there's a growing trend to embrace technology in Islamic education globally. This ensures students have the skills to not only be strong in their faith but also participate effectively in the modern, tech-driven world. (Salsabila et al., 2022). This effort often requires investment in infrastructure and teacher training to be effective.

Challenges include maintaining the balance between religious studies and modern secular education, and ensuring that reforms take root within the unique context of Muslim communities in the Philippines. Countries like Pakistan have faced similar challenges, where reforms aimed at improving girls' education in public sector schools, including madrasahs, encountered issues such as societal resistance and resource scarcity (Khan et al., 2020). In order for improvements to Islamic education to stick and be widely accepted, everyone involved needs to be on board. This includes religious leaders, government officials, parents, and community groups. Teachers also need extra training to effectively use new teaching methods and materials in religious schools. Technology is another area that needs investment, as it can make learning more engaging and help Islamic education keep pace with the rest of the world. When designing the curriculum, it's important to find a balance between religious teachings and preparing students for the modern world. Educating girls is especially important, as it can empower women and benefit the whole community.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Philippines boasts a long and respected history of madrasah education. However, this traditional system faces ongoing challenges. The government's implementation of the ISAL program in the BARMM region represents a positive step towards creating a more standardized and supported system. The recent salary increase for ISAL teachers is a welcome improvement, but further research is needed to fully understand the program's effectiveness. Additionally, a broader look at the situation in other types of madrasahs, beyond the ALIVE/ISAL programs, is crucial.

Fortunately, valuable insights can be gleaned from successful reforms in madrasa education undertaken in other countries. Here, collaboration between all stakeholders – government, religious leaders, parents, and community members – has proven essential. Equipping teachers with the skills to deliver modern, technology-integrated curriculums is also key. These curriculums should strive for a balance, effectively integrating religious teachings with the practical skills students need to thrive in the contemporary world. Finally, prioritizing girls' education is not just about fairness, but also empowers women and strengthens society as a whole. By learning from international best practices and addressing the specific challenges faced in the Philippines, significant improvements can be made to madrasa education. This will ensure a well-rounded educational experience that prepares students to be strong in their faith while also equipping them with the tools they need to succeed in the modern world. Further research is needed on the ISAL program and other

madrasah education forms to improve Philippine madrasah education.

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