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Teacher Shortage and Quality of Madrasah Education in the Philippines:

An Analysis of Madrasah Teachers' Support System and Qualifications

ARLYNE C. MARASIGAN*

ABSTRACT

Improvement on the quality of education cannot be defined by merely looking at the expertise and competence of teachers who play as front liners in delivering instructions for students. The number of teachers in an institution does not also guarantee quality. Nor do improved school facilities bring significant learning experiences to students. The scarcity of qualified teachers in the Philippine educational system has been an underscored problem since time immemorial. Thus, this discussion paper is an initiative which seeks to further describe the qualifications of madrasah education teachers set by the Department of Education (DepEd) and to critically review and analyze policies on teacher recruitment. Analysis of teachers' qualification and recruitment has only revealed perennial problems such as (1) inadequate qualified teachers to teach madrasah education in both public and private madaris especially in remote areas, (2) limited training on pedagogic skills, (3) training and educational attainment mismatch, (4) low and delayed allowance or salary, and (5) the lack of clear guidelines in monitoring of teachers qualifications in private madaris. This discussion redirects government to strengthen the teacher support system in the implementation of madrasah education through further policy reviews and future research.

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KEYWORDS

Madrasah education, teachers' support system, teacher qualification, Department of Education

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Muslim education

Ahmad Salah Jamjoom (1977, v), chairman of the Follow-up Committee of the First World Conference on Muslim Education, lamented that:

Education is the creation of the “global righteous man” who worships Allah in the true sense of the term, builds up structure of his earthly life according to the Sharia (Islamic law) and employs it to subserve his faith.

He explained every educational system has its own imbued sense of philosophy and educational policy. In addition, he elucidated that Islam represents a general and comprehensive concept, which maintains a “self-contained, unique, and distinctive educational policy” (Jamjoom 1977, vi). Basically, the aim of Islamic education is to produce a good man, where the spiritual and material life are deeply rooted in the teachings of Islam. However, nowadays, Islamic education has been challenged in inculcating the moral teachings of Islam to young Muslims of today’s generation due to the negative connotations about madrasah education linking it to terrorism. Nevertheless, there is hardly ever enough evidence supporting this claim. According to al-Naquib al-Attas (1977, 2–3), some of the highlighted problems were:

- (1) Confusion error in knowledge, creating the condition for
- (2) The loss of *adab* (moral discipline) within the Community. *Adab* refers to prescribed Islamic etiquette. The condition arising out of (1) and (2) is
- (3) The rise of leaders who are not qualified for valid leadership of the Muslim community, who do not possess the high

moral, intellectual, and spiritual standards required for Islamic leadership, who perpetuate the condition in (1) above and ensure the continued control of the affairs of the Community by leaders like them who dominate in all fields.

He underscores that the social problems of Muslim communities around the world are rooted in the issues of education as a whole.

In the Philippines, for example, government has attempted to address the issues of madrasah education through circulating memoranda that urge the deployment of competent and quality teachers who share the same advocacy in Islamic education. However, building the identities and qualifications of madrasah teachers who are qualified to teach Islamic education is a primary concern that is yet to be dealt with. The quality and the capacity of teachers to educate Muslim learners about Islamic education are crucial in that teachers should have adequate pedagogical skills, content expertise, and knowledge in teaching Islamic education which are imperative to the holistic development of Muslim students. Producing a systematic approach to teaching and learning is also essential to avoid the confusions and misconceptions about the teaching of Islamic values among Filipino-Muslim children, which may lead to deviations and extremes in Islamic beliefs and practices.

Abu Bakar (2011) underscores that the period of Islamization in the Philippines began on the island of Sulu during the 13th century where the Qur'anic schools commenced to teach young children to read and recite the Qur'an. Subsequently, Qur'anic schooling developed a formal structure, which is now known as the madrasah. She further explained that the madrasah is an educational institution that plays a significant role among young Filipino-Muslims to receive religious instruction and acquire Islamic knowledge, values, and culture. Since madrasah education is not part of secular public education, many Filipino-Muslim learners have limited access to Islamic education due to the distance of schools from the children's houses and the lack of educational materials, infrastructure, and most especially, madrasah school teachers. Given these barriers and challenges in accessing and acquiring madrasah education, Muslim

communities operate madrasah on a volunteerism basis and many of them are not officially registered at the Department of Education. Given this scenario, adamantly, there is still a big challenge on how to strengthen the implementation of madrasah education under the new K to 12 Curriculum program in terms of proper assessment, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the madrasah Education Program, most especially the recruitment of qualified teachers who are madrasah education curriculum implementers.

Creating inclusive madrasah education

The Tripoli Agreement in 1976 stipulated the rights of authorities in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) to set up schools, colleges, and universities, provided that matters pertaining to the relationship between these educational and scientific organs and the general education system in the state shall be discussed afterwards. Due to a series of significant changes in the government laws and policies, less attention was given to the education autonomy of people in the Southern Philippines. Years later, the Minister of Education and Culture issued a Letter of Instructions No. 1221 (1982) directing to:

Formulate and adopt a program for the development of the Madrasah schools, at least for the improvement of their teaching staff and instructional facilities, but priority must be given, whenever possible, to their progressive integration as a sector in the national educational system, with enhanced curricula, to the end that their graduates join the mainstream of Philippine education, endowing them with the capability to contribute to the modernization of their communities within the framework of their Islamic faith.

This letter was not able to achieve the aims of the development of madrasah education; however, it serves as a milestone in officially acknowledging and supporting the development of madrasah education in the country, a solid evidence that government promotes

inclusive education among Filipino-Muslim learners, most especially in the Southern Philippines.

Two decades after, the Madrasah Education Program was recalled in 2004 when the Department of Education issued Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris (DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004) hoping to address the needs and concerns of madaris. The proposed curriculum for both schools (i.e., public and private madaris) was guided with the following objectives:

- Establish a smooth transfer of students from public to private madrasah or vice versa;
- Unify the long history of dichotomy among Muslims; and
- Promote the Filipino national identity and at the same time preserve the Muslims' cultural heritage.

One of the crucial issues identified was the unification of curriculum among madaris. As stated in this memorandum, the curricular offerings of the madaris and of the national government failed to reach uniformity of target competencies among the subjects in all levels. To address this issue, the Department of Education proposed the formulation of a standard and viable curriculum for both public and private madaris in collaboration with associations and stakeholders such as the Project Madrasah Education (PME) of DepEd ARMM, the Accrediting Association of Muslim Schools and Colleges, Inc. (AAMSCI), and the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) in the Seminar-Workshop on Curriculum Review and Enrichment in Cotabato City last 2004.

Furthermore, the Philippines, as one of the member countries of UNESCO, is committed to supporting the global commitment to the Education for All (EFA) Program which upholds the right of every child regardless of race, color, religion, or culture to obtain quality education. Madrasah education is acknowledged as an essential element of the National Educational System and classified as part of the inclusive education program of the Department of Education. It also has a role in promoting Islamic Education with strong emphasis

on Islamic values, which is authentic and appropriate to Bangsamoro people, to produce Filipino-Muslim intellectuals with right Islamic values and spirituality to serve the people and the nation. Furthermore, DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004 upholds the national unity and the implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreement. It assumes that madrasah education provides a meaningful, relevant, and culture-sensitive learning experience that is beneficial for every Filipino-Muslim learner.

In 2005, the Department of Education issued another memorandum, Memorandum No. 72, which promulgated the Creation of Ad-Hoc Committee on Madrasah Education to support and strengthen the implementation of DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004, specifically in the Southern Philippines. In connection to this, there was no success in meeting the target objectives due to socio-economic status, human resources, unstable peace and order situation, and political reasons. In terms of the availability of human resources, the scarcity of trained and qualified madrasah teachers has been a rampant concern. In spite of these DepEd initiatives to conduct education-driven programs and policy reviews, very few and limited researches were conducted illuminating these educational issues. The total absorption and understanding of the challenges hindering the implementation of madrasah education in the Philippines remained unattended. It was not until 2007 when SEAMEO INNOTECH produced the Policy Research on Access to Quality Basic Education for Muslim Learners in which findings were driven from in-depth and enriching case studies that were helpful in addressing several issues and concerns in the implementation and monitoring of madrasah education.

In order to resolve the above-mentioned challenges and barriers, the DepEd issued DepEd Order No. 24, the Basic Education Research Fund, allowing educators, education leaders, administrators, and researchers to conduct research on areas that need immediate response from the department such as “increasing participation rate by reaching the unreached children/learners” and “improving DepEd’s internal efficiency through the development of new and or improvement of existing systems and procedures for implementing

DepEd programs and projects and other operations,” where madrasah education is included in the research agenda. In accordance with the 1987 Philippine Constitution and the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (R.A. No. 10533), the Department of Education supports madrasah education by issuing Policy Guidelines on Madrasah Education in the K to 12 Basic Education Program, also known as DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2017, which aims to provide Muslim learners with appropriate and relevant educational opportunities while recognizing their cultural context and unique purposes for participating in the program offerings, and to integrate content and competencies which are relevant and of interest to Muslim learners. Unfortunately, the expected outcomes of these initiatives were not realized, and this resulted in a problematic teacher support system in the country.

In addition, DepEd Order No. 43, s. 2015 was issued as part of the 2013 K to 12 curriculum reform to strengthen DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2010, focusing more on evidence-based policy development that improves access to education, quality education, and governance. In this thread, the Department released DepEd Order No. 39, s. 2016 a year after stating the adoption of the Basic Education Research Agenda in sustaining the Department’s progressive actions to address issues and concerns in education through sound policy review and relevant research outputs.

Examining madrasah education teacher’s support system policies

For several decades, little attention and support have been given to Asatidz. Asatidz pertain to those teachers teaching in the madrasah institution. Many of them are working on a volunteerism basis. In 2010, DepEd Order No. 22, Mainstreaming and Institutionalizing Madrasah Education Program By Transferring Its Developed Components to the Bureau of Elementary Education and Regional and Division Offices, was called to direct the Department of Education to invest on human resource development, most especially on teachers (i.e., Asatidz), in order to reinforce the implementation of the Madrasah Education

Program. In regard to the teacher's support system, giving enough attention to the following components is imperative:

- (a) Payment of Asatidz Monthly Allowance
- (b) Pre-service Training on Language Enhancement and Pedagogy (LEaP)
- (c) Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP)
- (d) Refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum (SMC) in Public Elementary Schools and Private Madaris

In addition, item no. 4 stated that:

Considering that Madrasah Education is heading towards the final mainstreaming of the program, the incumbent Education Supervisors assigned as Regional ALIVE Coordinators (RACs) and Division ALIVE Coordinators (DAC) shall continue to perform on acting capacity but on full-time basis. All existing DACs from the Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) Unit shall be replaced by the Education Supervisors either from the Elementary or Secondary Education Unit since the ALIVE classes are categorized in the formal education system

Based on the open forum and dialogue during the International Conference on Madrasah Education hosted by the UP Institute of Islamic Studies last July 4–5, 2018 at the Balay Kalinaw, University of the Philippines, Diliman, school teachers and school owners from selected ALIVE and private madaris across the country highlighted their personal experiences regarding the Mainstreaming and Institutionalizing of the Madrasah Education Program in their respective institutions. Many of them revealed that they were still in the struggling stage due to several factors. The Asatidz' monthly allowance is not enough to compensate for their travel expenses and the teaching materials they need in order to teach better. In many instances, the said allowance is months-delayed. Although there are DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2008 or the Implementing Guidelines for DepEd Order No. 82, s. 2007, re: Financial Assistance to Private Madrasah and DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2012 or the Guidelines on the

Allocation, Delivery and Distribution of Instructional Materials (IMs) to Support the K to 12 Curriculum, many school teachers, school heads, and school owners explained that they are still experiencing financial challenges.

Furthermore, regarding the Pre-service Training on Language Enhancement and Pedagogy (LEaP), many Asatidz have a hard time deciphering the significance of the English language enhancement training since most of them are trained in teaching Arabic language, which is the main requirement to understand Qur'an. Some of them admitted that English is not that significant in teaching Islamic values among students because their mediums of instruction in many instances are the students' mother tongue and the Arabic language. In addition, many admitted that they have very limited training on pedagogy, especially teachers in private madaris. Some of them participated in training programs on pedagogy organized by private organizations and NGOs. Although there were several trainings offered by DepEd in many instances, only ALIVE teachers were able to participate and very few were from private madaris. As a result, many teachers still focus on traditional methods of teaching since the training that they attended was not enough for them to explore and put into practice the different pedagogical approaches and strategies in teaching.

As with the Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP) offered by the DepEd, only ALIVE teachers from public schools may benefit from this program since it is clearly stipulated that:

This is a 24-month course approved by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and delivered by partner universities. The Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) teachers deployed in public school are encouraged to enroll and take the 24 months program on full subsidy from DepEd.

This component of DepEd Order No. 22, s. 2010 stresses a number of questions that need to be addressed. Such questions are:

the process on how public and private madaris teachers avail this program, the capacity of the program to hold attendees from madaris, and the sustainable support coming from partner universities and state colleges in ARMM which will provide necessary guidance to teachers in fulfilling the objective of this educational initiative. To monitor the successes and challenges of this program, DepEd released Memorandum No. 88 in 2017 which is known as Submission of 2016 In-service Training, Physical and Financial Accomplishment reports under the Madrasah Education Program. In terms of the Refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum (SMC) in Public Elementary Schools and Private Madaris, there are two orders issued by DepEd, namely: DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2011 known as Amendment to DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004, Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris and DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2012, Guidelines on the Allocation, Delivery and Distribution of Instructional Materials (IMs) to Support the K to 12 Curriculum. Teachers in both public and private madaris, as curriculum implementers inside the classroom, need an in-depth understanding on the proposed Refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum. However, in many private madaris, teachers and Asatidz have their own special training on how to understand and implement Madrasah curriculum. Some of them even had their training or studies abroad. During the 2018 International Conference on Madrasah Education, some of the Asatidz from private madaris proposed a “Unified Madrasah Curriculum” explaining that the ALIVE DepEd program is a mix of Islamic and secular education. Therefore, as part of the teacher’s support system and implementation of the proposed curriculum, strengthening the Refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum (SMC) in both public and private madaris is indispensable.

Policies on madrasah teacher’s qualification

As many madrasah teachers work on a volunteerism basis (i.e., receiving only minimal allowance), school administrators do not pay much attention to the educational qualifications and regular trainings of teachers. This means that for as long as the teachers are willing to share and transfer knowledge, this defines their teaching service

to humanity. However, since the DepEd issued several orders and memoranda to support madrasah education implementation in both public and private schools across the country as part of the UNESCO and the national program for inclusive education, the department formulated policies on how to recruit qualified teachers through DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2012, also known as Policy Guidelines on the Hiring and Deployment of Madrasah Teacher 1. One of the reasons in formulating this policy is to allocate enough compensation for madrasah school teachers. The items are stated below:

- (1) In the interest of laying the foundation for quality in the hiring and deployment of Madrasah Education Teachers (Asatidz), the Department of Education (DepEd) has adopted a program for the training and development of these teachers at the early start of the program consisting of the following:
 - (a) Qualifying Examination (QE) in Arabic Language and Islamic Studies. All Muslim applicants must take and pass this qualifying examination to ensure of their competence in Arabic Language and Islamic Studies;
 - (b) Language Enhancement and Pedagogy Training (LEaP). Passers of the Qualifying Examination shall undergo a 23-day live-in pre-service training workshop, and only those who have completed and passed the LEaP training shall be deployed in public schools. Schools Division/ City Superintendents (SDSs) shall hire the completers and passers on contract of service who shall receive a monthly allowance from DepEd; and
 - (c) Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP). This is a 24-month course approved by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and delivered by partner universities. The Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) teachers deployed in public schools are encouraged to enroll and take the 24 months program on full subsidy from DepEd. After completing and passing the ATEP, the enrollees shall

have earned the degree equivalent of a Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEEd) and are qualified to take the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET);

- (2) In recognition of the increasing number of LET passers who graduate from the ATEP, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) allotted teaching position under the special groups to include those for madrasah teachers and distributed these items to school divisions. The Teacher 1 items shall be given/granted to the Asatidz who are already deployed provided they possess the following qualifications:
 - (a) Passed the QE for Arabic Language and Islamic Studies;
 - (b) Completed and passed the 23-day LEaP Training;
 - (c) Completed and passed the ATEP; and
 - (d) Passed the LET.

- (3) After accommodating those Asatidz already deployed, and there are remaining unfilled teacher items, beginning School Year (SY) 2012-2013, school divisions with unfilled Madrasah Teacher 1 items can award the items to qualified Muslim teachers/applicants in accordance with the following priorities:
 - (a) Those ALIVE teachers (Asatidz) who have the education degree in BEEEd and Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) and have passed the LET and two (2) levels of training: LEaP and ATEP including the QE;
 - (b) Those ALIVE teachers who have the education degree in BEEEd/BSEd and have passed the LET and QE for Arabic Language and Islamic Studies (QEALIS);
 - (c) Those ALIVE Teachers (Asatidz) who passed the LET but failed to pass the qualifying examination for Arabic and Islamic Studies shall then be required to take it until he/she passes the said examination for him/her to

be entitled to a Madrasah Teacher 1 item or teaching position; and

- (d) If there is no available qualified Muslim under priority a, b, and c then the Madrasah Teacher 1 shall be given, first to a Muslim LET-passer applicant. If there is no Muslim LET-passer, then the item shall be given to a non-Muslim LET-passer who shall be assigned to teach Revised Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC) subjects.
- (e) In cases where a deployed ALIVE teacher is not a QEALIS passer and has not undergone the LEaP training but was given madrasah teacher item and appointed as Teacher 1, he/she shall be required to take the QEALIS and if he/she passed, he/she shall keep the teacher item. Thereafter, he/she shall undergo and finish the ATEP then take the LET. However, if he/she failed in the QE, the item will be forfeited and shall be separated from the service.

Given these policy guidelines, there are several challenges that madrasah school teachers and administrators are facing. Under item 1a, it is stipulated that prospective madrasah teachers must pass an examination known as the Qualifying Examination in Arabic Language and Islamic Studies (QEALIS). However, the implementation of the said examination is not on a regular basis. According to one of the interviewees, it should be an annual activity. However, in the last five years, only two qualifying examinations were conducted. After passing the QEALIS, only teachers who underwent the Language Enhancement and Pedagogy Training (LEaP) are allowed to be deployed in public schools. The concerns are on the ways to address the following questions: How about the teachers in private madaris who wish to avail of the training? How competitive is the monthly allowance provided? Is a 23-day training enough for the madrasah teachers to learn relevant and contextualized pedagogy to cater to the students' needs?

For many madrasah school teachers and school administrators, the third sub-item under item number 1 is the most challenging part

of the policy. The profiles of madrasah teachers are very diverse when it comes to Islamic education background. Some of them are aged religious people (e.g., *ulama* or spiritual leaders) in the community and some even studied abroad with a graduate diploma. A number of the teachers are fresh graduates from the university who took Islamic Studies, while others are high school graduates who got special training and passed the QEALIS, but all of them are ready to serve as volunteers. However, with the Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP) that spans 24 months, taking the Licensure Examination for Teachers afterwards can be very tedious for them due to several reasons, namely:

- (1) 24 months of training cannot be directly equated to a Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) degree because the preparation to become an Ustadz (religious scholar) is different from being an elementary classroom teacher.
- (2) Currently, the educational backgrounds of the madrasah school teachers are diverse, i.e., some finished high school, while others finished graduate studies outside the country. How can the 24-month training of getting BEEd be made relevant to the needs of the high school graduates and Ustadz?
- (3) Taking the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) seems inadequate. Does the LET cover the requirements for a teacher to be qualified as madrasah teacher considering the courses taken in the BEEd program? In respect to the nature of madrasah education and teaching capabilities, a madrasah teacher must have in-depth understanding of Islamic education and values and a high level of Arabic proficiency. However, the licensure examination for teachers is not written in the Arabic language, the language that most Asatidz spent years learning. For them to teach Islamic Education and values, it is expected that they must reach a certain level of English proficiency, which is not part of their long training and is rarely used as medium of instruction in teaching madrasah education. How could they pass the LET

given/written in English? Will the LEaP program suffice for them to pass the LET?

- (4) The LET contains content-knowledge items. How do madrasah teachers cope with the questions which are out of their educational scope?
- (5) Madrasah education heavily focuses on Arabic language and Islamic values while the required BEd LET is divided into two: the Professional Education and General Education where the examination is written in English not in Arabic Language, which is the language used in teaching Islamic education. Is there a possibility that the LET for madrasah teachers would be like taking the Shari'ah-a secular Bar Examination for future Muslim lawyers? Furthermore, considering the age, interest, and educational background (i.e., studied abroad) of current and prospective madrasah teachers, how significant is passing the LET? Does the LET prove professionalism or is it mere credentialism?
- (6) Having passed the LET and being granted a Teacher 1 permanent item position, they can be assigned to teach subjects that are not madrasah-related. The issue on scarcity of teachers is not only for madrasah education; it is a country-wide issue on basic education. Once the madrasah teachers earn the Teacher 1 permanent item, in many cases, they will be asked to teach other subjects as a transition to obtain the regular teaching assignment. As a result, time and effort will be divided. Instead of focusing on how to improve and strengthen the madrasah teaching and learning process, some of them spend more time teaching mainstream subjects.

These issues and concerns are among those raised by key informants and participants during the International Conference in Madrasah Education held at the University of the Philippines, Balay Kalinaw last July 4–5, 2018.

Based on the item 3e description:

In cases where a deployed ALIVE teacher is not a QE passer and has not undergone the LEaP training but was given Madrasah teacher item and appointed Teacher 1, he/she shall be required to take the QE for Arabic Language and Islamic Studies and if he/she passed, he/she shall keep the teacher 1 item. Thereafter he/she shall undergo and finish the ATEP then take the LET. But if he/she failed in the QE, the item will be forfeited and shall be separated from the service.

For many Asatidz (religious scholars), the existing policy on madrasah teacher's qualification seems inappropriate, which makes it more difficult for them to get a permanent teaching position compared to a regular public school teacher. A madrasah teacher with a good command of the English language is in an advantageous position in taking the LET. However, it is also important to note that the description stated above is purposely intended for public madrasah school teachers only and not applicable for private madaris teachers.

Conclusion and recommendation

A strong teacher support system is vital if the institution needs quality teachers. There are several issues and concerns that need immediate response such as: (1) inadequate qualified teachers to teach madrasah education in both public and private madaris, especially in remote areas, (2) limited training on pedagogic skills, (3) training and educational attainment mismatch, (4) low and delayed allowance or salary, and (5) the lack of clear guidelines in hiring, retention, and monitoring of qualified teachers in private madaris. Based on the analysis and review of policies on teachers' qualification and recruitment, it is recommended that more case studies be conducted on madaris teachers' support system on these aspects of education. If we are to fully address the shortage and lack of quality of madrasah education teachers in the Philippines, voices of madaris teachers need to be heard and their lived experiences and narratives need to be recounted which can strongly serve as basis for policy change. Hence,

it is indispensable to consider recommendations from key informants and participants for policy review. One important consideration is that Asatidz or ALIVE teachers considered by the government as contractual employees must qualify to receive bonuses as they are not granted any special allowance (i.e., special hardship allowance) despite the security issues for being assigned in remote and conflict areas where the peace and order situation is relatively unstable. Another point to reckon is that there has to be an order that guarantees exclusive focus for Madrasah Teacher 1 to handle only ALIVE classes.

It is also significant to explore the possibility of developing a teacher education program for undergraduates such as BSE specializing in Madrasah Education and BEEed specializing in Madrasah Education, which could be spearheaded by the colleges and universities. This could be a joint project of DepEd, ARMM, and CHED to prepare prospective teachers with ample pedagogical skills and content knowledge relevant to madrasah education with a high level of cultural sensitivity. In addition, it is timely to review House Bill No. 6644, an Act Creating the Bureau of Madrasah Education (BME) in the Department of Education (DepEd) to Strengthen the Madrasah Education Program and Appropriating Funds. If enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress, this will hopefully lead to the creation of the following divisions: Curriculum and Instruction Division, Human Resource Management and Development Division, Finance and Scholarship Division, and Infrastructure and Projects Divisions.

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As Muslim Filipino communities thrive in various parts of the country, there is a need to both celebrate their diverse cultures and traditions and confront the multifarious issues affecting them. The **Islamic Studies Program (ISP)** seeks to take the lead towards an active role for the academe in advancing the role of Islam in nation-building. It aims to encourage the wider Filipino community to know Islam deeper, and, consequently, deal with existing stereotypes against Muslims.

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