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Sustainability Concerns of the Madrasah Education Program: Basis for Philippine Islamic and Madrasah Education Policy Review

ARLYNE C. MARASIGAN*

ABSTRACT

Recent reforms in education have placed greater emphasis not merely on promoting Education for All (EFA) but more importantly on achieving inclusive and quality education. Global education programs spearheaded by worldwide organizations like the United Nations; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and World Bank, to name a few, aid many countries in fostering quality education under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. In the Philippines, intergovernmental agencies and non-governmental organizations work together to achieve quality education for all Muslim learners by mainstreaming and institutionalizing madrasah education. One of the challenges, however, is concerning how education can be made more inclusive to cater to the needs of minority groups (i.e., in terms of quantity) based on the given context to promote education for sustainable development. This discussion paper focuses on the sustainability concerns of the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) in the Philippines. Since the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, there have been numerous programs and policies from the national to local government and inter-agencies including NGOs advocating for the mainstreaming and institutionalizing of madrasah education implementation across the country. However, implementation and sustainability of MEP policies remain ambiguous for many madrasah education stakeholders,

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most especially students and school teachers, who are directly deployed in diverse difficult contexts.

KEYWORDS

Madrasah education, madrasah curriculum, Madrasah Education Program (MEP), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Islamic education

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Introduction

For decades, scholars have realized that Arabic as a language and Islam as a religion have contributed substantially to the world civilization and culture. Islam, in its early history, was leading the entire world in terms of spiritual, intellectual, and economic arenas. Globalization and technological advancement change the landscape of education. Education is one of the dynamic factors that maintain social order and stability. Furthermore, it is also considered to be an essential tool that helps a person understand sets of values and beliefs in achieving the common good. The increasing complexity and interdependence of disciplines in the field of education from basic to higher education lead to a very challenging condition when it comes to crafting policy that promotes inclusivity. It has been a long discussion which boils down to historical issues when it comes to the formation and implementation of madrasah education in the Philippines.

Based on the current education system, some educators and policymakers proposed that the integration of Islamic knowledge and values into “secular” education is one of the alternatives to resolve some religious and cultural issues in education. However, many teachers and young Muslim learners are faced with a very perplexing situation regarding the teaching and learning of Islamic knowledge and values integrated into “secular” academic subjects. Arsad (2011, 1) notes that “duality underscores the fact that state education is not relevant to the specific educational needs of Muslims, a factor that could explain their underproductive participation in the Philippine society.” Clearly, several issues in implementing the crafted policies on madrasah education remain unresolved.

Significance of the study

As part of the Philippine education reform (i.e., K to 12 curriculum), it is essential to promote inclusive education and quality education and to not just focus on mainstream programs in the K to 12 curriculum such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS); Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM); and General Academics (GA) for the country's economic development. Identifying and examining the status (i.e., barriers, challenges, and good practices) of madaris and school teachers across the country could be a great help to Muslim learners to contribute to economic progress and national development in all aspects. This study aims to examine the status and sustainability concerns of madrasah education to strengthen policies and to make them relevant to the current and future needs of Muslim teachers and learners. The proper training and support system among school teachers are vital elements in achieving quality education while inculcating and strengthening correct Islamic values among Muslim Filipino learners to promote respect, peace, and justice. Moreover, this study looks into the possibility of the institutionalization of a context-based curriculum policy for madaris and teacher support system. The institutionalization of a context-based curriculum and teacher support system is essential in achieving inclusive and quality education. In this manner, madaris across the country could play their role in promoting quality education, peace, justice, and strong institutions under Education 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 (UNESCO 2016).

This discussion paper examines the status of madrasah education and comprehends the sustainability concerns of the MEP to promote inclusive and quality education for all. This paper purposes to address the following questions:

- (1) What existing policies and memoranda pertain to the implementation of public and private madaris and to the teacher support system for madrasah school teachers?
- (2) What are the challenges in the mainstreaming and institutionalization of the Madrasah Education Program?

- (3) What concerns and issues in madrasah education need immediate policy review to ascertain the sustainability of the program?

Madrasah and its religious purposes

Many Muslim philosophers and contemporary scholars adamantly believe that the truest mission of Islamic education is to mold a God-fearing and respectable Muslim while implementing Allah's decree in the present and future generations. Inculcation of Islamic values through education is one of the best ways to strengthen the Islamic faith and practice of future generations. *Madrasah* (or *madrassa*, pl. *madaris*), derived from the Arabic word which means "school," teaches a set of curricula from the process of memorizing the Qur'an through reading, reciting, and writing to higher studies in Islamic theology. Every Islamic country or state has its own unique system on how to implement Islamic education. Some countries consider it as mainstream education of the country's national curriculum while others integrate it to the national curriculum. In addition, teaching Islamic education could be delivered in a formal or informal manner. The madrasah is an Islamic educational institution with various types. It served as Muslim learners' school where they are educated on Islamic knowledge and values. In some cases, it is an open access institution where students who come from different walks of life may get in. In terms of physical form and structure, the madrasah does not have a distinct description of its physical attributes because it is built and inspired personally by religious Muslim volunteers who are dedicated to sharing the word of Allah. Some of the madaris are located in discreet places away from the chaotic city to preserve the sacredness of the place, to create a space conducive for learning the Qur'an and deepening Islamic faith, while other Islamic scholars have developed their own madrasah in a residential space out of convenience.

On average, "private" (i.e., with sufficient financial resources) madaris offering Islamic education (i.e., Qur'an, *aqidah* and *fiqh* or belief and jurisprudence, *seera* and *Hadith* or stories about and

sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, and Arabic language) using their preferred or customized curriculum are superior in terms of quality of education because education is more focused and delivered with ample time allotment as compared to Islamic education integrated to the national curriculum with limited time allocation. In remote rural communities, sometimes the conditions are even more challenging, creating more barriers for Muslim learners to have access to quality education.

Madrasah education in the Philippines

In the Philippine context, many religious groups have set up and built their own institutions in accordance with legal regulations. However, up until these days, madrasah education is still striving to be acknowledged as one of the sectarian schools in the Philippines. Historically, the problems in Mindanao as a whole were rooted long ago when Islam started to circulate in the Philippines as a religion. The fight for national liberation led by the armed groups in the south has been the result of limited attention to Moros with their right to be included in the nation's agenda in decision making and planning especially with respect to Islamic education. The parallel informal Islamic education in Muslim Mindanao has continued to grow in the 20th century. However, the large and modern type of madaris that are inspired by Islamic countries in the Middle East began to rise in the cities of Muslim Mindanao which eventually gained momentum and thrived (Boransing, Magdalena, and Lacar 1987, as cited in Guleng, Kawangit, and Aini 2016). Some of these madaris have received international financial support from Middle East countries. While there is inadequate support from Philippine public schools where Islamic education is integrated to mainstream education and with minor regard to Muslim's culture and traditions, parents send their children to madaris during weekends for the purpose of sustaining their Muslim identity.

The Tripoli Agreement in 1976, Letter of Instructions No. 1221 in 1982, and DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004 are the major milestones which advanced the development and implementation of madrasah education in the country. These movements somehow filled in the

gap of the issues on unification when they attempted to incorporate madrasah education into the national education system. This integration, although still faced with challenges, has empowered many madrasah teachers and Muslim learners to create their identity as Muslims in public arena.

Arsad (2011, 38) reports case studies of integrated madrasah in Muslim communities in Mindanao, the Southwestern Mindanao Islamic Institute (SMII) and the Sarang Bangun Learning Center (SBLC). Both schools experienced some constraints. In the case of SMII, some practitioners agreed that integrations are more intellectually and socially meaningful, however, these were not put into practice due to the intrinsic limitations of the school curriculum design. Meanwhile, in SBLC, there were eight identified issues, namely: sufficient number of Muslim teachers, time allotment, integration process, competition from large schools, parents preference, better library and books on Islam, more school facilities, and cross-cultural tensions.

One of the best MEP was the Madrasah Comprehensive Development and Promotion Program (MCDPP) implemented on December 12, 2005 to all Muslim people in Mindanao who were committed to learning a holistically-driven religious and social well-being and living a life in accordance to the policies of national government. The main objective of the MCDPP as a government support project was to look closely on the construction of accredited madrasah centers in Mindanao, re-operating classroom facilities, and conducting relevant trainings, seminars, tours, and sport festivals to create a more conducive learning experience for teachers and students (Bagolong 2011). It was in the time of President Rodrigo R. Duterte (former mayor of Davao City) when madrasah education was institutionalized and mainstreamed with the Help Our Preschoolers Everywhere (HOPE) Project (City Library Files).

The MCDPP in Davao City was seen by Bagolong (2011) as considerably effective in terms of its physical resources like instructional materials. However, the madrasah education system, as recommended, needs massive coordination among teachers, parents,

school leaders, and even curriculum developers to formally run its truest function. The author further stated that curriculum reformation and curriculum development program should be at par with the current trends at the national level and that seeking international education assistance is of paramount significance. Though the level of efficiency of the human resources was excellent, the level of adequacy of financial support is only moderately sufficient to shoulder the expenses of the project, which may include the renovation of school buildings and improvement of school facilities. The government's initiatives and reform programs in elevating Islamic basic education in the country were credited the highest possible recognition as Islamic education integration into the mainstream educational system had been one of the primary goals of the Philippine education. Nonetheless, the efforts of mainstreaming madrasah education in the national curriculum were undoubtedly more practical in documents than in reality (SEAMEO INNOTECH 2007).

In 2010, the mainstreaming and institutionalizing of the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) was promulgated. This curriculum mainstreaming and institutionalizing hoped to achieve quality education for all. However, due to some socio-political, socio-cultural, and socio-economic challenges, the Madrasah Education Program remains unsustainable.

Recently in the year 2013, the Philippines has embarked on an educational shift from the Basic Education Curriculum to the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 or Republic Act (R.A.) No. 10533 which is widely known as the K to 12 Curriculum. The implementation of this new educational system affects the inclusion of madrasah education. This now adds up to the tensions of madrasah education basic education graduates in which their placement is based on their performance rating. Leaning towards the advancement of modernism in education, many have seen the advantages of the new education system. Madrasah education has a unique curriculum of its own in that Muslim students need extra time to learn too many subjects. There is still so much blood to be spilt to see whether these "too good to be true" curriculum mirrors the expected result that everybody is aiming for, most especially the Muslim learners.

Methodology

The qualitative research method aims to advance understanding by “bringing to life what goes on in [the setting] and how [this is] connected to a broader panoply of real-life” (Yin 2005, xiv). This paper utilized a case study approach to explore and understand the sustainability concerns of the MEP based on the implementation of numerous educational policies formulated. This investigated top-down madrasah education policies within the “bounded system” meaning the natural context is clearly acknowledged (Creswell 2007). It has a well-defined coverage, which is explored “over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell 2007, 73). Stake (2005, 499) explained that the contexts of the case are significant to understand factors affecting the case, whether political, economic, social, physical environment, ethical, or aesthetic, and they “go a long way toward making relationships understandable.” Investigating the formulation of top-down education policy from the grassroots or ground level will help the stakeholders comprehend how and why the local community think and act in the ways they understand the MEP policies. For this study, madrasah education policies were analyzed based on the perspectives and experiences of the MEP stakeholders (i.e., madrasah school teachers and administration, volunteers from NGOs, and university faculty members). Document analysis, focus group discussions, and interviews were the sources of qualitative data. According to Yin (2003), the utilization of multiple data sources supported the study to cover a wide spectrum of issues and develop a rich combination of data through the process of triangulation to clearly analyze the case.

According to Merriam (2009) and Stake (2005), one of the most important parts of the case study research design is the proper selection of cases. There are two levels of sampling that need special consideration, the selection of a case and the proper sampling of respondents. For this study, the madrasah stakeholders (i.e., madrasah school teachers and administrators, volunteers from NGOs, and university faculty members) who attended and actively participated in the open forum and focus group discussions during the International Conference on Madrasah Education last July 4–5, 2018 were considered

as subjects of the study. Likewise, the madrasah stakeholders who joined in the interviews during the fieldwork last September 16-19, 2018 in Cotabato City, where DepEd ARMM is located and in the round table discussion (RTD) last December 5, 2018 also became the subjects of this research (*see* Table 1 below for complete details of the study participants).

TABLE 1 Participants from madrasah stakeholders

Stakeholders	Madrasah Education International Conference at UP Diliman	Fieldwork at Cotabato City	Round Table Discussion (TRD) at UP IIS Diliman
Madrasah administrators (public and private)	15	2	5
Madrasah school teachers (public and Private)	28	2	8
Volunteers from NGO	7	3	0
University faculty members and students	16	2	12

Data were collected through three events (international conference, fieldwork, and RTD) from July to December 2018. Before the organization of the three events, written documents such as DepEd orders and memos were compiled and analyzed. This compilation of DepEd orders and memos could serve as a reference for further engagement of the researcher in group discussions and interviews. Many of the participants from the international conference actively joined during the focus group discussion and open forum. They were given ample time to express their ideas and experiences. Many school teachers with different experiences inside the classroom shared their narratives during the focus group discussion. Also, some school administrators were given a chance to express their various perspectives on the existing and implemented MEP policies. During the focus groups, participants were given the choice to use the language they prefer (i.e., English or Filipino) to express their thoughts. While a semi-structured interview was constructed and

conducted in order to understand personal viewpoints of education stakeholders. Individual interview is also a form of validation process to confirm findings during the focus groups. The focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded. Analysis of data was initially begun during the data collection (i.e., focus groups and interviews). The data were carefully transcribed, reviewed, and synthesized. Slowly, themes were developed based on the participants' responses during the focus groups and interviews. As one form of document and data analysis, the themes developed were matched with the existing and implemented MEP policies compiled. Merriam's (1998) three levels of analysis, namely: construction of categories or themes, naming the categories and sub-categories, and developing systems for placing the data into categories, were employed. However, this study is limited to focus groups and interviews with madrasah school teachers and administration, volunteers from NGO, and university faculty members as MEP stakeholders. Parents, school staff, students, and other stakeholders were not included.

Results and discussion

Support systems for madrasah school teachers and students formulated and implemented in different types of madaris

The results and discussion were organized based on the order of research questions framed to understand fully how the main objective of the study linked to themes that emerged during data analysis and synthesis. Table 2 shows the support systems for both madrasah school teachers and students as observed from the formulated and implemented DepEd released orders and memoranda. Although there is no clear demarcation for each policy to be classified as students' support systems or teachers' support systems, the researcher classified them according to which party the policies and memoranda favored more. It is also acknowledged that some policies and memoranda such as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (R.A. No. 10533) favored both parties (i.e., teachers and students).

TABLE 2 Madrasah Education Program issued orders and memoranda as support systems for madrasah school teachers and students before and during the implementation of K to 12 Curriculum

Students' Support Systems	
Before Implementation of K to 12 Curriculum	During Implementation of K to 12 Curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tripoli Agreement in 1976 stipulated the rights of authorities in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) to act their rights to set up schools, colleges, and universities. • The Minister of Education and Culture issued a Letter of Instructions No. 1221 in 1982 to formulate and adopt a program for the development of the madrasah schools. • DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004 (Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris) • DepEd Memorandum No. 72, s. 2005 (Creation of Ad-Hoc Committee on Madrasah Education) • DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2008 (Implementing Guidelines for DepEd Order No. 81, s. 2007 re Financial Assistance to Private Madrasah) • DepEd Order No. 22, s. 2010 (Mainstreaming and Institutionalizing Madrasah Education Program by Transferring Its Developed Components to the Bureau of Elementary Education and Regional and Division Offices) • DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2010 (Basic Education Research Fund) • DepEd Order No. 57, s. 2010 (Implementation of the Basic Education Madrasah Program for Muslim Out-of-School Youth and Adults) • DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2011 (Amendment to DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (R.A. No. 10533) • DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2017 (Policy Guidelines on Madrasah Education in the K to 12 Basic Education Program)

TABLE 2 Madrasah Education Program issued orders and memoranda as support systems for madrasah school teachers and students before and during the implementation of K to 12 Curriculum (*continued*)

Teachers' Support Systems	
Before Implementation of K to 12 Curriculum	During Implementation of K to 12 Curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DepEd Order No. 22, s. 2010 (Mainstreaming and Institutionalizing Madrasah Education Program by Transferring Its Developed Components to the Bureau of Elementary Education and Regional and Division Offices) • DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2010 (Basic Education Research Fund) • DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2012 (Policy Guidelines on the Hiring and Deployment of Madrasah Teacher 1) • DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2012 (Guidelines on the Allocation, Delivery, and Distribution of Instructional Materials (IMs) to Support the K to 12 Curriculum) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (R.A. No. 10533) • DepEd Order No. 43, s. 2015 (Revised Guidelines for the Basic Education Research Fund (BERF)) • DepEd Order No. 4, s. 2016 (Amendment to DepEd Order No. 43, Series of 2015) • DepEd Order No. 39, s. 2016 (Adoption of the Basic Education Research Agenda) • DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2017 (Policy Guidelines on Madrasah Education in the K to 12 Basic Education Program) • DepEd Memorandum No. 88, s. 2017 (Submission of 2016 In-service Training, Physical and Financial Accomplishment Reports under the Madrasah Education Program)

The Tripoli Agreement of 1976 is very comprehensive, and it is difficult to highlight or mainstream the madrasah education among Muslim Filipinos as seen in the Letter of Instructions No. 1221 in 1982 though this letter clearly stipulates the development of madrasah schools. It seems that it is only in 2004 that the program on madrasah education makes clear teaching and learning spaces for both teachers and students through DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004, also known as the Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris. In this DepEd order, clear direction to promote education for all and quality education can somehow be mirrored. This highlights not just the right to education but also the interest for national unity and peace. This calls for inclusivity of Muslim indigenous people from the southern part of the country as

stated in item 4: “It is a mechanism of teaching the unreached and providing education that is meaningful, relevant and culture-sensitive for Muslim children.” Moreover, this order indicates the aims of the madrasah curriculum for both public and private madaris. A year later, DepEd Memorandum No. 26, s. 2005 or the Conduct of School Mapping for Madrasah Education was recommended for wide dissemination to address the issues and concerns on identification of schools with significant number of Muslim enrollees. This is another remarkable support for Muslim students as the government could properly determine the number of enrollees needing assistance in all kinds and forms and scoped within the aim of achieving education for all.

Needless to say, there are many provinces in the southern part of the country living in difficult circumstances. One of the main reasons is poverty. These poverty-stricken areas of the country need special attention and support when it comes to the implementation of government projects such as education and health. Again, DepEd issued Order No. 18, s. 2008, the Implementing Guidelines for DepEd Order No. 82, s. 2007 (Financial Assistance to Private Madrasah), a kind of financial support for students to go to school with minimal expenses. This is to augment the cost of operation of private madaris. The department allocated Php 5,000 per student each school year. The objectives of the financial assistance are clearly specified such as to totally mainstream madrasah education and to raise the quality of instruction.

Six years from 2004, another major milestone happened in the implementation of the MEP. In order to support Muslim Filipino learners, DepEd issued Order No. 22, s. 2010, which promulgates the Mainstreaming and Institutionalization of Madrasah Education Program by Transferring Its Developed Components to the Bureau of Elementary Education and Regional and Division Offices. This order does not only support the learners but the whole system of the Madrasah Education Program. It is one of the strongest moves by the department to strengthen the program. One of the highlights is the creation of the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE), which was aligned to the prescribed Standard Madrasah

Curriculum (SMC) and spiraled to secondary level. ALIVE classes from elementary to secondary level were classified in the formal education system as mandated, which means that ALIVE has the same weight or importance as other academic subjects.

In order to assess and evaluate the impact of the DepEd program and policies with substantial and empirical data as evidence, the department issued Order No. 24, s. 2010, also known as the Basic Education Research Fund (BERF) where some areas/topics for research focus on reaching the unreached children/learners, increasing survival rates in lower elementary level, and raising children proficiency level in school activities which are all strong foci of mainstreaming and institutionalizing the MEP in some remote areas in Mindanao. Moreover, to make the MEP more inclusive in response to the global commitment on Education for All (EFA) and quality education, the roadmap for upgrading Muslim Basic Education through DepEd Order No. 57, s. 2010, also known as the Implementation of the Basic Education Madrasah Program for Muslim Out-of-School Youth and Adults, was implemented together with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

In order to address the needs of the Muslim Filipino learners, DepEd amended the existing DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004, known as Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris, to DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2011, known as the Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum (REMC). The DepEd ARMM adopted the said order. The review and refinement of the curriculum, including the textbooks, teachers' manual, and other learning materials were based on the recommendation of SEAMEO INNOTECH together with some Muslim experts in Arabic Language Education in 2010. Two models of REMC were created as the outcome of the review—(1) the REMC for public schools coined as ALIVE and (2) the Refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum (RSMC) for private Madaris—though a different model was created for public and private madaris as a result of the review and refinement that both presented clear learning expectations for Grade 1 to 6 learners. In addition, the REMC clearly presented the objectives.

In 2013, the entire basic education curriculum of the country changed. As part of the major curriculum reform of the Philippines Education System, the implementation of the MEP has significantly changed. The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, also known as R.A. No. 10533, mandates to strengthen the basic education curriculum of the country and to promote inclusiveness of enhanced basic education of which the MEP is part of. In section 8.3 of the said law, it is clearly stated:

Madrasah Program. This shall refer to the comprehensive program using the Madrasah curriculum prescribed by the DepEd, in coordination with the Commission on Muslim Filipinos, for Muslim learners in public and private schools.

The formulation, design, standards and principles, production and development of materials, medium of teaching and learning, and stakeholder participation are changed or need to be changed to fit the new basic education curriculum. There must be proper harmonization among DepEd (basic education), TESDA (technical-vocational), and CHED (higher education) curricula. The MEP must adhere to the set curriculum standards and principles, as follows:

- (a) The curriculum shall be learner-centered, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate;
- (b) The curriculum shall be relevant, responsive, and research-based;
- (c) The curriculum shall be contextualized and global;
- (d) The curriculum shall use pedagogical approaches that are constructivist, inquiry-based, reflective, collaborative, and integrative;
- (e) The curriculum shall adhere to the principles and framework of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) which starts from where the learners are and from what they already know proceeding from the known to the unknown; instructional materials and capable teachers to implement the MTB-MLE curriculum shall be available.

For this, purpose, MTB–MLE refers to formal or non-formal education in which the learner’s mother tongue and additional languages are used in the classroom;

- (f) The curriculum shall use the spiral progression approach to ensure mastery of knowledge and skills after each level; and
- (g) The curriculum shall be flexible enough to enable and allow schools to localize, indigenize, and enhance the same based on their respective educational and social contexts. (R.A. 10533 2013, 3)

Following the prescribed basic education curriculum, it shows that the MEP could ensure holistic learning experiences among Muslim Filipino learners provided that implementation is clear and aligned to what is being prescribed. On top of the designed curriculum, the curriculum implementers inside the classroom must be trained properly.

After the major basic education curriculum reform in 2013, another policy guideline on madrasah education was issued by DepEd, DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2017, which aims to “harmonize existing DepEd issuances on Madrasah Education, with new provisions for more effective and efficient program development, implementation and evaluation.” The aims of this DepEd order are reflected on the standards and principles of basic education curriculum (i.e., R.A. 10533). This order is to give strong emphasis on the development up to the evaluation of the MEP across the country to promote quality education among Muslim-Filipino learners.

The sustainability of the MEP is not complete without the appropriate teacher support systems. Teachers are keys to achieve sustainable and quality education especially during the curriculum implementation. Teacher pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and attitude towards teaching play significant influence among learners. Ample preparation, training, and skills to facilitate learning are crucial in the implementation of the curriculum. There must be balanced attention and support systems between learners and teachers. Educational institutions, agencies, and organizations need to

critically examine teacher support systems. In the case of madrasah education in the Philippines, there are several DepEd orders and memoranda that evidently promote support systems among teachers. Before the K to 12 Curriculum, there were three major orders that the Department of Education issued. First is DepEd Order No. 22, s. 2010, which focuses on the Mainstreaming and Institutionalizing Madrasah Education Program, where item 2 highlights the following:

- (1) Payment of Asatidz Monthly Allowance
- (2) Pre-service Training on Language Enhancement and Pedagogy (LEaP)
- (3) Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP)

To expedite the processing and release of the Asatidz' monthly allowance, the regional/division offices were given authority and were empowered to properly manage financial concerns. Regarding the training programs for teachers, there were two training programs approved by DepEd to capacitate madrasah school teachers. First is the Pre-service Training on Language Enhancement and Pedagogy (LEaP) where the newly hired Asatidz who passed the Arabic Qualifying Exam need to complete the 23-day language (i.e., Arabic) enhancement and pedagogy with appropriate budget allocation. Second is the Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP). This is the professionalization of Asatidz. It is a two-year modular course offered by CHED represented by partner universities to help Asatidz to pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers and get a license to teach like mainstream teachers in public schools. Asatidz who passed the LET will be given a Madrasah Teacher 1 item to avail the benefits and salary of regular school teachers and not just allowances.

To assess the effectiveness of the MEP teacher support system with empirical evidences, DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2010, also known as the Basic Education Research Fund, was promulgated. This is to give financial support to DepEd teachers to conduct education-related researches, where areas/topics for research were enumerated. For the Madrasah Education Program, this is one of the best opportunities to evaluate the curriculum implementation in both public and private madaris based on the enumerated topics for research, namely:

- (a) increasing participation rate by reaching the unreached children/learners;
- (b) impact of pre-schooling on increasing survival rates in lower elementary grades;
- (c) raising the proficiency level of children already in school;
- (d) increasing local government spending in basic education;
- (e) cost effectiveness of Education Service Purchasing; and
- (f) modernization of DepEd operations of Madrasah education (DepEd 2010b).

Aside from providing the research funds to help the teachers assess their implementation of the curriculum and the school status as a whole, another professional support system for madrasah school teachers to ensure the quality of teachers entering public madrasah was issued, the Policy Guidelines on the Hiring and Deployment of Madrasah Teacher 1, recognized as DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2012. This is in support to DepEd Order No. 22, s. 2010. The detailed policy guidelines for hiring and deployment of Madrasah teachers were thoroughly discussed in this DepEd order. To address the shortage of madrasah teachers, there are provisions under items 3c to 3e, to wit:

- 3c. Those ALIVE Teachers (Asatidz) who are LET passers but failed to pass the QE for Arabic and Islamic Studies shall then be required to take and pass the QE for him/her to be entitled to a Madrasah Teacher 1 item.
- 3d. 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.
- 3e. 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 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 (DepEd 2010a).

Seminars, trainings, and workshops regularly conducted to capacitate madrasah school teachers in both public and private madaris are also made to help them comply with the basic requirements for the item of Madrasah Teacher 1. The said policy guidelines aim to ensure the quality of teachers who will enter the ALIVE program of public schools. In addition, one of the perennial problems of public schools in remote and overpopulated schools is the insufficient supply of instructional materials. The madrasah schools are not exempted from this kind of issue. To address the lack of instructional materials of numerous schools across the country, DepEd set guidelines for the allocation, delivery, and distribution of instructional materials (IMs) known as DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2012. Item 5c highlights the teacher support materials such as modules and reading materials from DepEd and foreign-assisted projects (FAPs).

When the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (R.A. No. 10533) was implemented, several reasons and salient features were highlighted: (a) strengthening early childhood education; (b) building proficiency through language (Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education); (c) making curriculum relevant to learners (Contextualization and Enhancement); (d) gearing up for the future (Senior High School); (e) ensuring integrated and seamless learning (Spiral Progression); and (f) nurturing the holistically developed Filipino (College and Livelihood Readiness, 21st century skills) (Official Gazette 2013). There were series of mass seminars, training, and workshops not only for mainstream courses and grade levels but also for madrasah education specifically under inclusive education. All the salient features are strongly connected to support the enhancement and improvement of the madrasah education implementation. One of the measures to monitor and evaluate the program through evidence and research-based processes, the Revised Guidelines for

the Basic Education Research Fund (BERF) or DepEd Order No. 43, s. 2015, was issued which aims to improve access to education, quality education, and governance which are highly crucial for MEP monitoring and evaluation. After a year, an amendment to DepEd Order No. 43, s. 2015 (Revised Guidelines for the Basic Education Research Fund [BERF]) was enacted based on DepEd Order No. 4, s. 2016. In the same year, DepEd adopted the Basic Education Research Agenda through DepEd Order No. 39, s. 2016. Given these series of developments on basic education research, it seems that the Department earnestly promotes and strengthens the culture of evidence-based monitoring and evaluating basic education including MEP through research. In 2017, DepEd Memorandum No. 88, s. 2017, the Submission of 2016 In-service Training, Physical and Financial Accomplishment Reports Under the Madrasah Education Program, was disseminated. This is to support and reinforce DepEd Order No. 58, s. 2016, the Implementing Guidelines on the Utilization of Funds for Madrasah Education Program.

Given all the DepEd memoranda and orders, it is very apparent that DepEd is committed to working on Education for All (EFA) before and during the implementation of the K to 12 Curriculum which is one of the major education reforms in the history of Philippine education systems. The support systems for Muslim Filipino learners and madrasah school teachers are vividly manifested. This is one of the milestones of the MEP program in the Philippines. Despite the creation of all these orders and memoranda, however, challenges remain and there is much to be fixed.

Challenges in the mainstreaming and institutionalization of the Madrasah Education Program (MEP)

Abu Bakar (2011) in her critical review about the status quo of madrasah education reveals that many Muslim students who graduated from secondary madrasah schools were displaced due to misalignment of the offered curriculum in the secular universities and colleges. As a result, some students were forced to travel abroad to pursue further education where they can relate their previous learnings. This challenges the fact that since madrasah education

merely lies on volunteerism, the financial stability of the school is one of the most underscored problems. Hence, madrasah education struggles to compete with public and private secular schools because it is incapable of providing the proper facilities to give and support employment skills to their graduates. There have been several policies passed by the government which attempted to address these identified challenges. In addition, madrasah education is also challenged with tremendous stereotyping against the alleged links of extremism and terrorism in the country without substantial evidence and this somehow hampers the progress of madrasah education.

Over decades of planning and crafting policies and guidelines to effectively and efficiently implement madrasah education across the country (Boransing 2006; SEAMEO INNOTECH 2007), challenges remain unsettled. Looking further at literature (Solaiman 2017; Muhamat et al. 2015; Cagape n.d.; Abu Bakar 2011; Arsad 2011; Bagolong 2011; Bano 2011; De Sosa 2008; Milligan 2008; Moulton 2008; Caballero-Anthony 2007; Milligan 2006; Daguino 2004; Duncan 2004; Milligan 2004), several challenges, and even problems on the implementation of the MEP, remain in place. Table 3 shows the numerous challenges encountered and experienced by many MEP stakeholders (i.e., students, classroom teachers, school administration, and NGOs) trying to improve and strengthen the program in both public and private madaris. While there are common challenges indicated before and during the implementation of the K to 12 Curriculum, the degree of these challenges varies from one context to another.

Based on the discussion and interviews with some public and private madrasah teachers, university faculty and graduate students, private and public school administrators, and NGOs, during the International Conference on Madrasah Education last July 4-5, 2018, during the fieldwork at ARMM Cotabato City last September 16–18, 2018, and during the roundtable discussion with Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, Ph.D. on madrasah education last December 5, 2018, the following challenges emerged: (1) technical and financial assistance, (2) curriculum, (3) management competency, (4) teacher qualifications, and (5) policy formulation and review.

TABLE 3 Identified challenges before and during the implementation of K to 12 Curriculum

Before Implementation of K to 12 Curriculum	During Implementation of K to 12 Curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum • Inadequate resources • Lack of competent teachers • Lack of competent administrators • Lack of adequate teaching materials (no relevant textbooks and references) • Lack of school facilities such as buildings, etc. • Peace and order as an extraneous factor affecting the normal operation of madrasah 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum • Shortage of qualified Madrasah teachers • Lack of competent administrators • Lack of adequate teaching materials (contextualized and relevant modules, textbooks and references) • Lack of school facilities such as chairs, blackboard, etc. • Issues on peace and order situations
<p>(SEAMEO INNOTECH 2007)</p> <p>What are access barriers to basic education for Muslims learners in Mindanao as perceived by the Muslim parents, children, teachers, and educational administrators?</p> <p>(1) Lack of educational infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of classrooms • lack of prescribed textbooks • lack of teachers • low budget for educational infrastructure <p>(2) Poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not enough scholarship and student financial assistance for the poor and disadvantaged Muslim learners • lack of school feeding programs • lack of parent’s capacity to finance school-related expenses <p>(3) Unstable peace and order situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • land disputes • political rivalry • petty crimes • disagreement/misunderstanding • others 	<p>(Solaiman 2017, 38)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A need for the appointment of competent ALIVE supervisors, consultants, or trainers in every district to oversee the program. • The ALIVE program was not properly evaluated and monitored. <p>(Kulidtod 2017, 92)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite these legal issuances and programs, still the Islamic education of the Muslims in the Philippines has been hampered by financial, administrative, and structural problems.

Before Implementation of K to 12 Curriculum	During Implementation of K to 12 Curriculum
(4) Lack of support from parents (5) Cultural issues and biases (6) Other issues and challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • difficulty in the language of instruction • lack of ALS Programs, especially in the ARMM • Technical-vocational education 	

Sources: Abu Bakar 2011; ADB 2004; Arsad 2011; Bagolong 2011; Bano 2011; Boransing 2006; Caballero-Anthony 2007; Cagape 2012; Daguino 2004; De Sosa 2008; DepEd 2008; Guleng, Kawangit, and Aini 2016; Kulidtod 2017; Milligan 2004; Milligan 2006; Milligan 2008; Moulton 2008; Muhamat, Kawangit, Guleng, and Aini 2015; SEAMEO INNOTECH 2007; Solaiman 2017

Teacher’s qualification concerns

For several decades of minimal attention and government support given to madrasah teachers (i.e., Asatidz), many of them tend to work on a volunteerism basis. While many madrasah teachers are paid through volunteerism, paying attention to the set and standardized qualifications to handle classes needs critical attention and thus makes it one of the priorities of the MEP. In 2010, DepEd Order No. 22, s. 2010 was called upon to order the department to invest on human resource development, most especially on teachers (i.e., Asatidz), to strengthen the implementation of this program. Many madrasah school teachers are not LET passers. Some of them only finished secondary education and are not eligible to take the LET. Their pedagogical skills and English language proficiency to pass the LET are crucial. Their economic and academic status may be a hindrance for them to immediately take the training program and to get a license, not to mention that some are heads or breadwinners in their respective families. On the lighter side, there are bachelor’s degree holders from Islamic Studies programs who are also capable to teach madrasah education. However, the same reasons as stated above should be considered since they could barely afford to get a license

with ample training due to family obligation, financial matter, and location of the training programs. Although they may have obtained a diploma which is enough for them to handle classes, they are still required to have ample training on pedagogy and on English language proficiency to be able to take the LET.

Another challenge is concerning the need for Asatidz who got their master's or doctorate degree in Islamic Studies abroad to take the LET. Since the Asatidz are required to undergo an English proficiency program and pass the LET which is given in English, the Arabic language which serves as a medium of instruction in Islamic education and learning of Qur'an is somehow devalued. According to some seasoned volunteer Asatidz, some of them spent years and even decades to learn and utilize the Arabic language to teach Islamic education and yet they are being required to learn English in a short period of time—a language that they do not even use in teaching ALIVE and Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (ISAL) subjects.

In addition, many teachers appeal to have regular teacher trainings related to madrasah education for their professional growth and development. However, few trainings, if any, are provided to enhance their pedagogical practices in teaching Islamic-related subjects.

Curriculum concerns

As to the madrasah curriculum, the Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum (REMC) from DepEd shows that some classroom teachers appreciate the REMC. However, there are some madaris who use a different curriculum from what the DepEd prescribed. Some of these curricula are based on other Islamic countries where some of the Ulama or Asatidz obtained their degree in Islamic Studies or Islamic Education. A call for curriculum uniformity in both private and public madaris seems to be another big challenge given the conditions. Many madrasah schools, aside for the ALIVE classes, do not have sufficient curriculum guides, teacher guides, manuals, instructional materials (i.e., textbooks and modules that are relevant, contextualized, and updated) and relevant and contextualized pedagogical practices in

teaching (e.g., reading the Qur'an). These challenges are more evident in rural and remote areas.

Furthermore, many Asatidz observed that time allotment among academic subjects, ALIVE, and even ISAL is not well-balanced. Based on the existing curriculum, many Asatidz, especially those who want to introduce ISAL aside from the ALIVE subject, find it challenging to maximize their teaching. According to some Asatidz, the RBEC is much easier to use when it comes to teaching ISAL. However, regarding other types of madrasah like *toril*, traditional, and integrated, they follow a different delivery and time allocation to teach the Arabic Language and Islamic Values and Education. The teaching schedule is based on the number of days which means that they modify the curriculum. To deal with these challenges, many Asatidz endeavor to cooperate with the National Commission for Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) in which they came up with the idea of a “Unified Curriculum” since one of the challenges is the effective implementation of REMC (i.e., standardized curriculum).

MEP Management competency concern

During the discussion and interview with the participants, it was noted that one of the challenges they are facing is the lack of a seasoned management staff with deep understanding about madrasah education based on the Philippine context and with ample knowledge on educational management. Some of the highlighted and key concepts mentioned were “enhancing management,” “implementation and monitoring of the MEP,” “strengthening capability training program for MEP management team,” and “policy review on the implementation of various orders and memoranda” (consultation from grassroots level). It was suggested that, to address management issues in madrasah education, there should be a Muslim educator who has enough expertise in educational management and madrasah education (i.e., Arabic language and Islamic Education) assigned in the DepEd Central Office. Although a great number of Muslim educators are situated within some regional and provincial offices, their seats in the DepEd Central Office remain unoccupied.

Technical and financial assistance concerns

Under technical and financial assistance, there are three major challenges reported: (1) capacitating people in the community such as parents, LGU, and groups of volunteers (i.e., Ulama); (2) financial assistance and financial counterpart for students (i.e., Php 5,000 and Php 500 per student each year); and (3) sufficient and on-time technical assistance on the accreditation processes for private madrasah.

One of the responses evidently shows that, if the proponents of the program, whether NGO or private individual, leaves or stops the program/advocacy, the project goes into limbo while some disappear naturally. A scenario that exemplifies this which was mentioned by the participants is the project from UNICEF which the participants experienced and observed. The good thing is that, there are some NGOs that are still working with DepEd and a group of educators to strengthen the MEP. Furthermore, financial constraint is a serious concern which adversely affects madrasah education in remote areas and in contexts where poverty is prevalent. It was stated that Php 500.00 as student's counterpart to government subsidy amounting to Php 5,000.00 per student per year is difficult for a parent earning a hundred or a few hundred pesos daily. In many cases, this financial assistance only works best in urban and sub-urban areas. For parents and students living in rural and remote areas, this can be very problematic. Understanding the conditions of Muslim Filipino learners in various geographical areas requires extensive review of the policies surrounding distribution of financial assistance.

Policy formulation and review concern

Apart from the aforementioned challenges (i.e., technical and financial assistances, teachers' qualification, curriculum, and management competency), it was suggested that there must be a well-defined policy review on the implementation of various orders and memoranda with active participation and consultation from grassroots level. Crafting policies must deeply be grounded and based on the needs of the stakeholders. Some of the highlights of discussions and interviews are: (a) strong monitoring of national or regional formal assessment and

evaluation of the MEP, and (b) accreditation processes and relevant policy for private madrasah. Notably, these challenges on policy formulation and review concerns are of paramount importance and should be examined in detail since they are of a wide scope. Under policy review are the challenges pertaining to teacher's qualification, curriculum, and management competency. Suggested possible actions to achieve inclusive and quality education towards sustainability of the MEP are emphasized in the following discussions.

On teachers' qualification

Based on DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2012, the Teacher 1 items shall be given to the Asatidz who are already deployed provided they possess the following qualifications:

- (a) Passed the Qualifying Examination (QE) in Arabic Language and Islamic Studies;
- (b) Completed and passed the 23-day Language Enhancement and Pedagogy (LEaP) Training;
- (c) Completed and passed the 24-month Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP); and
- (d) Passed the LET.

Without proper training on Arabic language and relevant pedagogy, can the LET for the BEE program alone suffice as requirement for a teacher to become a madrasah teacher? Since many madrasah teachers—especially in far-flung areas—do not have ample preparation and conventional pedagogical training, how would they manage to take and pass the LET? Another important consideration is whether there is a portion in the LET on the Arabic language, similar to the Shari'ah Bar Examinations for future Muslim lawyers. In practice, the LET is not administered in Arabic or in mother tongues, putting madrasah teachers who are trained in Arabic at a disadvantage and compelling them to reach a certain level of English proficiency (Marasigan forthcoming). How do education leaders address these questions to achieve sustainability in the quality of

teachers deployed to teach in madrasah? These are some of the major concerns and questions raised during the discussions and interview with the participants. Addressing these could somehow shed light into resolving the issues and concerns regarding sustainability of madrasah teacher qualification.

In addition, developing a sustainable practice on teacher qualification policy like forming a team that is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the QE, LEaP, ATEP, and LET, and making an empirical research out of the data gathered from these programs could help the DepEd and stakeholders understand the weaknesses and strengths which could serve as strong bases for the improvement of policy on teacher qualification and quality implementation.

On curriculum

While setting standards for curriculum is highly anticipated within an educational system, standardizing it to its practical sense is a very laborious task. There are several types of curriculum from development to evaluation, which need numerous ways of understanding as to how they should effectively be implemented based on contexts. Given that there are various types of madrasah across the country, implementing a standardized curriculum is very challenging for madrasah administrators and teachers in both public and private, especially when experts are coming from different Islamic countries to gain knowledge on Islamic Education/Studies. As a means of addressing these issues and concerns, a group of Asatidz and the National Commission for Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) proposed to acknowledge the implementation of a “Unified Curriculum.” However, the processes underlying its design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation are yet to be explored. To achieve the sustainability of the proposed curriculum, a group of madrasah education experts must develop a clear accreditation process with constant monitoring and evaluation of accredited curriculum.

On management competency

With the condition of madrasah education in the country, it is very

challenging to make the programs and trainings for both teacher and students sustainable. The complexity of issues and concerns of implementation from the national to the local level needs rigid and deep understanding about how to manage them. The soft and hard skills of the education management team are crucial in keeping the program running efficiently. The professional knowledge, skills, and experience in the discipline play a significant role in shaping MEP to be sustainable.

On technical and financial assistance

The sustainability aspect of education is very difficult to achieve without focusing on the economic issues behind it. As mentioned earlier, there are three major challenges identified in relation to technical and financial assistance. Limited budget allocation has always been seen as a barrier to keeping the program running, and without proper technical support coming from stakeholders, it exacerbates the condition. Dealing with inadequate financial assistance with a high level of consciousness is far better than having overflowing assistance but with not enough capacity to augment it. Empowering and capacitating community and stakeholders on how to maximize the limited financial assistance is a good start towards creating a sustainable program.

On policy formulation and review

Even with a long list of crafted and implemented orders and memoranda (see Table 2) to improve and sustain the implementation of the MEP across the country, many find it insufficient to cater to the needs of madrasah education stakeholders, most especially teachers and students who are the end consumers of the program. The top-down and the bottom-up approaches have their own advantages and disadvantages in regard to policy making. Policy formulation must be strongly backed up with researches from grassroots level with proper consultation with the community. This then gives deeper information and diverse perspectives about how to address the needs of teachers and learners in difficult contexts (i.e., remote and rural area, issues on peace and order situations, overpopulated but limited resources

schools). Moreover, the monitoring and the evaluation of implemented orders and memoranda are very much beneficial because “there is no one size fits all policy.”

Conclusion and recommendations

After an in-depth exploration of the sustainability concerns of the Madrasah Education Program (MEP), it appears that support systems for Madrasah school teachers and students formulated and implemented in different types of madaris need immediate attention. Clearly, the government has initiated several diplomacies in an attempt to improve and mainstream the Madrasah Education Program before and during the implementation of the K to 12 curriculum in the country. As can be seen from the documents gathered, it shows that the formulation and approval of policies and memoranda focusing on the improvement of the MEP program in both public and private madaris have intensified over decades of formalization of madrasah education across the country. However, it seems that many of the challenges encountered before the implementation of the K to 12 curriculum remain unresolved and are strongly evident up to present (during implementation of the K to 12 curriculum), namely: (1) technical and financial assistances, (2) curriculum, (3) management competency, (4) teachers’ qualifications, and (5) policy formulation and review. The long existence of these problems is due to several socio-political, socio-economic, socio-cultural, religious, and socio-environmental issues and concerns. Nevertheless, this does not suggest that the people behind this program are doing nothing to fix these perennial problems. Finding a common ground or the best-fit solution (i.e., greatly relevant to the community’s contexts) to address issues and concerns can certainly lead to sustainable educational practices. Sustainability cannot be achieved overnight especially if the concerns and issues are deeply rooted in a long history of educational challenges. Sustainability of the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) is on a one-step-at-a-time basis. Engaging in dialogues between and among stakeholders and hearing narratives from those people below are one of the best opportunities towards achieving sustainability.

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THE PROGRAM

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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