

# Integrated and Holistic Madrasah Education System (IHMES): An Alternative Madrasah Education System for Muslim-Filipinos

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## Key points

- The madrasah education system in the Philippines was recently impugned as a training ground for the radicalization of trivial groups of Muslim youths. This assertion was based on the presumption that most radicalized youths who happened to be members of either the revolutionary groups such as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) or ISIS-inspired groups such as the Abu Sayyaf, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and Maute (Dawlah Islamiyah) went through the diverse madrasah institutions in the country.
- This indictment, however, may be impartial to the substantial majority of Muslim youths who served the nation in the past and those active players in the reformation of contemporary Muslim communities as also a product of various madrasah institutions here and abroad. More vividly, many of the highly educated Muslim youths are actively engaged in various government and non-government programs on preventing and countering violent extremism. These two opposing views made the examination of the dynamics of the country's madrasah education system imperative to vindicate the issue.
- The abrupt spread of extremism and radical ideology and the emergence of radical groups in the country that led to the tragic Marawi siege in May to October 2017 suggest that there is a seemingly mounting threat to national security from violent extremism. This made the unprejudiced evaluation of the plight of existing madrasah institutions in the Philippines essential to both public and private stakeholders.
- Challenges and gaps in the implementation of the madrasah programs by virtue of existing laws, policies, and peace agreements must be thoroughly reviewed; objective assessment of the administration of private madaris is deemed essential; and a sustainable holistic model of madrasah education system that is religio-cultural sensitive to Muslim-Filipinos must be devised to empower Muslim communities to fight against violent extremism and meaningfully participate in nation-building.

## Introduction

The madrasah (pl., madaris) education institutions in the country had been existing as early as the 15th century, prior to the coming of foreign colonizers (Abubakar 1983). Until the early 21st

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century, the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission of Higher Education (CHED) were seen to have flaws in the full and effective integration of the country's madrasah institutions in the national education system even though these had existed in past centuries as integral part of Muslim-Filipino society.

Although the development of madrasah education has been a consistent integral component of notable national legislations (i.e., Republic Act (RA) No. 6734 as amended by RA No. 9054 and RA No. 11054, RA No. 9997, and RA No. 10908) and is embodied in past peace agreements (i.e., the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, the 1996 Final Peace Agreement, and the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro) which were signed between the Philippine government and Muslim revolutionary groups (i.e., MNLF and MILF), madrasah education has never been fully developed as it was envisioned in these legislations and peace agreements due to very confined efforts and the absence of a central authority for all types of madrasah institutions in the DepEd after the departure of Manaros B. Boransing as DepEd Undersecretary for Muslim Affairs in 2010.

Consequently, since the arrival of Muslim Filipino students who studied from foreign universities, particularly in the Middle East and in North African countries, this scenario made many Muslim groups and individuals independently establish their own madrasah institutions. More often, these madaris are largely influenced by the founders' religio-cultural preference inherited from foreign Islamic countries without being sanctioned by authorities. This mushrooming establishment of independent madaris is further fortified by the absence of inclusive legal and regulatory frameworks. Hence, the four types of madrasah institutions, as explained in the succeeding sections, had emerged in the passage of time.

### Types of madrasah institutions in the Philippines

Currently, there are four types of madrasah institutions that are simultaneously operating in the Philippines. Except for madaris in public schools, all of these madrasah institutions are managed by private organizations and/or individuals.

- *Traditional Arabic madrasah:* This refers to the mainstream type of madrasah that had existed as early as 15th century (Abubakar 1983). It is considered the oldest type of madrasah that adopted the Arabic language as medium of instruction. Its operation is held during weekends and weekdays, depending on students' preferences vis-à-vis their conventional education (as most students going to this type of madrasah have concurrent schooling). A large number of madrasah institutions in the country is believed to be categorized under this type. These institutions do not receive support from the government.
- *Madrasah toril:* This type of madrasah is not included among the categories of madaris as defined by the DepEd because its methods and approaches are relatively different from the rest of the Philippine education system. This is also called *pondok*, *pesantren*, or boarding school in Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand (Lukens-Bull 2010). Learning of students in this madrasah type focuses on memorizing and understanding the Qur'an, the *sunnah* (tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), as well as other religious courses such as Islamic law (*Shari'a*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*).
- *Integrated madrasah:* This is part of the recent development of madrasah institutions in the Philippines, which is believed to be a result of Islamicization of Human Knowledge (IOHK) movement that began after the 1977 First World Conference on Muslim Education in the Holy City of Makkah (Saqeb 2000) and advanced by contemporary Muslim scholars (such as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, Abdul Hamid AbuSulayman, and Muhammad Kamal Hassan) (Ali 2017). This type of madrasah is considered the closest to the Integrated and Holistic Education System (IHES), which will be discussed in the next section. Curo (2015) found that this type of madrasah is the most progressive and has a strong potential to help transform Muslim communities in the Philippines. These madaris are referred to by the DepEd

as ‘private madaris’ in DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004 (as amended by DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2011) and implement the Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum (REMC).

- *Madrasah in public schools:* These institutions implement DepEd’s Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) program. This madrasah program is fully funded and implemented by the government by virtue of DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004 (as amended by DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2011). However, since 2010, there was a seemingly constant top-bottom transfer of authority in managing ALIVE programs in public schools, which suggests the lack of a clear legal and regulatory framework for its implementation. Currently, ALIVE programs are administered by multiple bureaus within the DepEd.

### The Integrated and Holistic Education System (IHES)

The Integrated and Holistic Education System (IHES)<sup>2</sup> was first introduced in the early 1990s by Engineer Hasni Mohammed, education content expert in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Chief Executive Officer of the Adni Islamic School (AIS) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The AIS is a private school registered with Malaysia’s Ministry of Education that was set up in 1994 and is considered as an experimental venue for the IHES. The AIS is designed to promote a holistic, quality and balanced education integrated with moral values suitable to all peoples irrespective of religious, cultural, or racial backgrounds. Thus, the school program is directed towards inspiring the students to realize their spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical potentials, given their various inherent and acquired abilities (Sekolah Islam Adni n.d.a).

The school’s philosophy states that “education is aimed at a balanced growth of personality through tarbiyyah of the spirit, the intellect, the emotions and the physical willingly and joyfully

for the sake of Allah (SWT)<sup>3</sup>” (Sekolah Islam Adni n.d.b). Its primary mission is to “develop excellent, holistic individuals towards building an excellent generation based on total submission to Allah (SWT)” and its objectives are “(1) to provide an integrated educational program suitable for the early development of the child from pre-school to secondary level that produces a wholly practicing Muslim; (2) to provide a broad spectrum of avenues and opportunities for maximum potential growth to help individuals achieve excellence in all aspects; and (3) to develop the human potential and impart the necessary knowledge in order to build an excellent *ummah* (community)” (Ibid.).

The school’s learning content encompasses (1) *hafazan* (memorization) and *qiraati* (reading) of the Qur’an and *sunnah*; (2) language development (in Arabic, Malay, English, and Mandarin); (3) mathematics and science; (4) basic arithmetic; (5) information and communications technology (ICT); (6) arts and crafts; (7) daily *do’as* (supplication); and (8) Islamic Studies (e.g., *akhlaq* (ethics), *seerah* (biography of the Prophet Muhammad), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and *tauhid* (doctrine of the unity of God)) and its multilevel curriculum includes (1) core curriculum; (2) co-curriculum; (3) extra-curriculum; (4) national curriculum; and (5) international curriculum (Ibid.).

In sum, the IHES—as seen in AIS—focuses on outcome-based learning which aims on the immersion of knowledge, character building (*akhlaq*), academic achievement, and application in life (Muhammed 2012). It indicates that the system encompasses all aspects of human life with its various potentials to develop in different levels. It therefore suggests that all types of madrasah institutions existing in the Philippines may be integrated under IHES. The main question at this juncture is how can IHES be contextualized in the Philippines given the diversity of madrasah institutions in the country. The following section discusses the possible configuration of IHES in the Philippine education system which requires an inclusive legal and regulatory framework.

<sup>2</sup> This presentation of the IHES is largely based from the website of the Adni Islamic School ([www.adni.edu.my](http://www.adni.edu.my)) and is further reinforced by a literature review conducted by the author based on his experience as a volunteer teacher in the said school from 2009 to 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Abbreviation for the Arabic “Subhanahu wa ta’ala,” an honorific translated as “May He be praised and exalted”

### From IHES to IHMES: The Philippine context

There are two approaches in which the IHES can be implemented in the Philippines: through administrative and curricular aspects. For contextualization, we now call the IHES as the IHMES or the Integrated and Holistic Madrasah Education System. These approaches are proposed due to the diversity of madrasah institutions, as discussed above, and the lack of established legal and regulatory framework and policies governing these institutions.

#### First approach: Administration

Figure 1 indicates the regulation of all types of private madrasah institutions in the country in order to provide a competitive and holistic education to Muslim children according to their historical and cultural identities as mandated by RA No. 10908. For an effective administration of the IHMES, a standard regulatory framework should be crafted by various madrasah stakeholders and concerned government agencies. This framework should then be implemented proportionately across all types of madaris, except for those in public schools. This indicates that all three types of madrasah institutions will follow a single standard, making their curricula, learning contents, and pedagogies exist synchronously under the IHMES. Analogous to the findings of the study by Kimpa (1991),

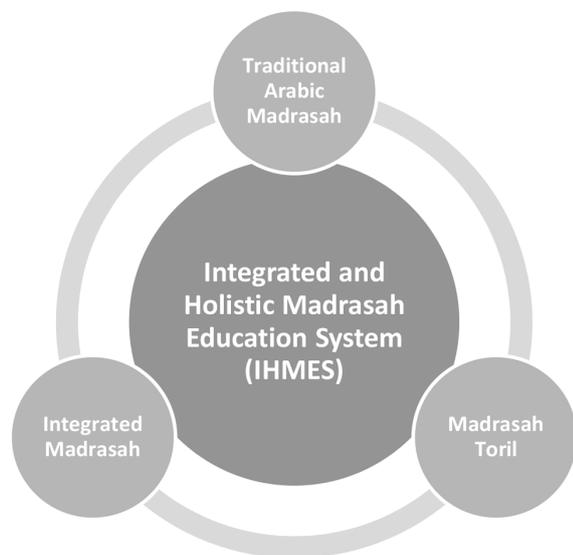


FIGURE 1 • The integration and administration of madaris in the Philippines under the Integrated and Holistic Madrasah Education System (IHMES)

this framework will allow the full and broader integration of madrasah education in the DepEd and uplift the status of madrasah teachers (*asatidz*) within the Philippine bureaucracy.

#### Second approach: Curriculum and learning content

Although madrasah schools, as espoused by Majul (1986), have a common core curriculum, there is a need to integrate curricula and learning contents from all types of madaris, which will eventually make Muslim children as what Al-Attas (1980) referred to as ‘good man’ (*insan adabi*) and reach the state of being a ‘full human’ as viewed by Fethullah Gülen (Carrol 2007) as a result of a holistic education. Figure 2 shows the proposed curricular and learning content design under the IHMES. In this case, the learning contents under the traditional Arabic madrasah and the madrasah toril are being integrated with the existing curriculum of the integrated madrasah that are accredited by the DepEd. Values and peace education are emphasized to counter violent extremism at the very early stage of madrasah education.

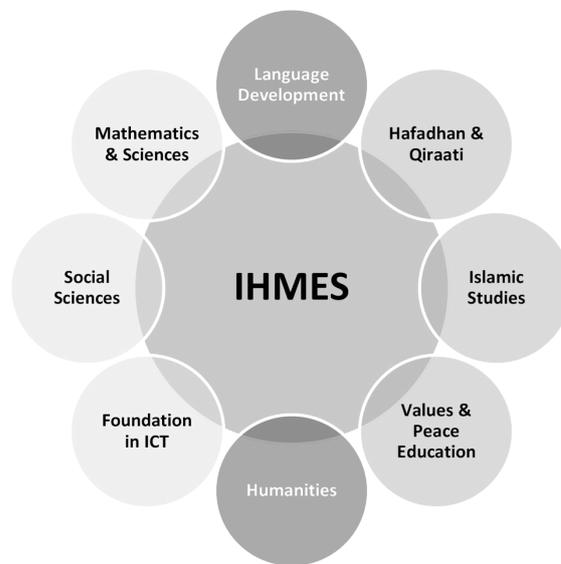


FIGURE 2 • Curricular and learning content integration under the Integrated and Holistic Madrasah Education System (IHMES)

### Recommendations

To implement the IHMES in the Philippines requires legislative and executive initiatives in order

to provide a clear inclusive legal and regulatory framework governing madrasah institutions. This should be implemented throughout the country by an interagency body as authorized by the Philippine government. The following are policy and administrative recommendations for the implementation of the IHMES:

- (1) *Reinstatement of the Office of Undersecretary for Muslim Affairs in the Department of Education's Central Office:* The reinstatement of the said office will pave the way for further development of the previous madrasah programs that have been stalled due to lack of a central authority in managing the programs. It will then signal the fulfillment of the current administration's promise to correct the historical injustice done to Muslim Filipinos.
- (2) *Creation of the Bureau of Madrasah Education (BME) under the DepEd Central Office:* The creation of a dedicated bureau within the DepEd has enormous significance for the development of Madrasah education in the country. In fact, this is a major component of House Bill No. 6644 (or the Madrasah Integration Act of 2017). The bureau—as provided in Section 3 of the bill—will have divisions on (a) curriculum and instruction, (b) human resource management and development, (c) finance and scholarship, and (d) infrastructures and projects.
- (3) *Creation of the Philippine Madrasah Education Board:* The Board will be composed of four agencies of the government, namely the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG). The Board will then collaborate with the other madrasah stakeholders including the *ulama*, *asatidz*, community leaders, and professionals in the administration and development of madrasah education in the country.

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