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CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
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ABSTRACT

Muslims accord a high premium on education, primarily that which obtains spiritual knowledge, and secondarily, generally beneficial knowledge. Historical accounts prove that education in Islam thrived in the Philippines well before the colonial period but became increasingly marginalized as succeeding education systems were institutionalized. In the new millennium, the Philippine government initiated a program of educational accommodation for Muslim and indigenous peoples. This paper elucidates the Department of Education's Muslim Education Program and the Commission on Higher Education's policy standards and guidelines for its baccalaureate program in Islamic Studies.

KEYWORDS

Muslim education, curriculum, basic education, higher education, reforms

Background

Education among Muslims in the Philippines has had a long-standing history. Where there were Muslims, there was always someone seeking knowledge and someone imparting it. The premium on seeking knowledge in Islam has been often asserted by its scholars

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and adherents. The Qur'an, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, and the resultant works of Muslim scholars serve as the foundation for this communal assertion. The former two serve as the primary sources of knowledge while the teachings of Muslim scholars recognized as leaders in the knowledge of Islam, consultation with the learned and people of remembrance, and finally, the signs of God in creation constitute the auxiliary sources of knowledge. The tradition of acquiring knowledge in Islam is expected to be imbued with the following characteristics: correct intentions, constancy in its seeking, primacy to sacred knowledge then beneficial knowledge, constant remembrance and reflection, and esteem for those who possess knowledge. Imam Al-Haddad, a scholar from Hadramaut, Yemen, was attributed to have said: "Knowledge has three rights upon you—that you seek it, that you practice it, and that you benefit others with it." Such is the great meaning attached to knowledge that where a Muslim community established itself, more often than not, a mosque was subsequently established for worship with a *madrasah* or school immediately appended to it. This fact runs true until today despite the institutionalization of the *madrasah* by the government in Philippine education since 2004. This paper interweaves the philosophies, principles, and practices of education among Muslims in the Philippines as it discusses institutionalization initiatives in Philippine state education. The springboards for discussion are inputs derived from the webinar, Muslim Institutional Development-Education organized by the UP Center for Integrative Development Studies-Islamic Studies Program (UP CIDS-ISP) on the 21st of November 2021. The webinar's and thus this paper's scope is delimited to initiatives by the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for basic and higher education respectively.

Department of Education

The Department of Education's program for Muslims is coined the Muslim Education Program (MEP), defined as a wide-ranging

program for Muslim learners both in the public schools as well those in the private sector or *madaris*. The Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE), one of the MEP's components, is aimed at recognizing Muslim learners' culture, customs, traditions, and interests in the process of providing for their educational needs. The ALIVE component is as well envisioned to respond to Muslim learners' "cognitive and cultural capacity, circumstances and diversity across learners, schools and communities."² DepEd believes that the MEP is a form of affirmative action contributing to the national peace and development agenda. The Arabic language is taught three times weekly, and Islamic Values Education classes are held twice weekly both at 40 minutes per session.

Islamic Values Education was initially envisioned to closely correspond with Philippine education's values inculcation framework with core values centered around the 4 Ms: *Makatao* (humaneness), *Maka-Diyos* (God-orientedness), *Makabayan* (civic-mindedness, nationalism), and *Makakalikasan* (pro-environment behavior). Continued consultations with Muslim stakeholders, i.e., ALIVE teachers and external resource persons determined the imperativeness of anchoring Islamic values, primarily on God-centeredness and monotheism, the core principle of Islam.³ This is expressed in Islam's belief of *Tawheed* or Unity, from which all other values emanate from and interconnect. For Muslims, humanity was established on earth for the singular purpose of worshipping one God. Auxiliary to and never independent from this purpose is humanity's mandate as God's trustees or stewards on earth. This mandate lends itself to the fulfillment of duties to other creations that encompass the aforementioned core values. These duties entail working towards the benefit, preservation, and protection of fellow

2 Adapted from the webinar presentation of Ms. Mildred Zamar, Muslim Education Program focal person, Bureau of Curriculum Development, Department of Education.

3 Obtained from observations as external resource person in DepEd IVE workshops in 2018, DepEd RELC, Marikina City.

humans, the community and society, and the entirety of the natural environment. While there was no argument with the 4M values, being *Maka-Diyos* had to precede all the others in the curricular progression.

Earlier state initiatives for Muslim education

Government directives on the integration of Islamic education into the national education system had existed much earlier. However, DepEd Order No. 51 s. 2004, or the Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris (issued on August 15, 2004), was the first active program to establish a Muslim education roadmap at the national level. Then dubbed the Madrasah Mainstreaming Program, it prescribed an additive approach in accommodating Arabic language and Islamic Studies into the State curriculum. In public schools, this took on the form of optional, nongraded subjects to be taken in addition to the former Revised Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC) and the current K-12 curriculum. Private madaris had to follow a prescribed learning continuum which essentially added the State core subjects into their Islamic curricula. In the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, the coverage of Islamic Studies was more extensive. The Standard Madrasah Curriculum for the latter areas combined components of the RBEC (English, Filipino, Mathematics, Science and Health, and Makabayan, a social science course in a broad fields design, i.e., a combination of interrelated subjects covering history, civics and citizenship, and social studies) and components of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language or ISAL (Arabic Language, Qur'an, Biography and Sayings of Prophet Muhammad, and Islamic Creed and Jurisprudence). The above features are operationalized under DepEd Order No. 46 s. 2005.

After a review of the Standard Madrasah Curriculum documents and resources, with multilevel assistance from the Basic Education Assistance Program–Australian Agency for International

Development (BEAM–AusAid), it was deemed that the curriculum and its attachments needed to be refined. As a result, DepEd Order No. 51 was amended by DepEd Order No. 40 s. 2011, and the Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum (REMC) for Grades 1 to 6 was crafted with two models:

- (1) REMC for public schools, composed of Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE)
- (2) Refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum (RSMC) for private madaris

The REMC model for public schools had the following aims, which merely reiterated the previous DepEd Order: (copied verbatim from DepEd Order no. 40)

- (1) establish a smooth transfer of Muslim pupils from recipient private Madrasah to public schools with ALIVE Program or vice versa;
- (2) unify the long history of the dichotomy of education among Muslims; and
- (3) promote the Filipino national identity at the same time preserve the Filipino Muslims' cultural heritage.

Educational shifts and the Muslim Education Program

Two major events in Philippine education would yet again cause considerable adjustments to the refined Madrasah curriculum: the promulgation of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 and the COVID-19 education scenario which necessitated the adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) of 2019. Owing to its “currentness” and the monumental shift in curriculum and education delivery platforms, this paper shall give more space to the COVID-19 education situation.

The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, enacted through Republic Act 10533, provided for the K–12 educational reform. The added two years of schooling to basic education and other substantive features necessitated extensive planning for education at all levels. DepEd Order No. 41 s. 2017, entitled “Policy Guidelines on Madrasah Education in the K to12 Basic Education Program,” was a policy direction that framed the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) within the K–12 education continuum, harmonizing all DepEd issuances accordingly and providing for the development of a manual of operations for its administration. The MEP was further secured by the quite recent Inclusive Education Policy Framework provided for by Department Order (DO) 21, s. 2019. The DO mandated the promotion and protection of all Filipino children’s right to quality education, optimizing their potential and further enabling significant civic participation. In the first year that the K–12 reform was implemented, the number of Muslim learner-enrollees decreased. Figures consistently increased in the next two years (918,000 in 2015; 939,000 in 2016). The number decreased by 9,000 in the next year owing to the absence of an ALIVE program in place for Senior High School.

Similar to the previous modifications to the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC), it was incumbent upon planners and implementers of the Madrasah curriculum to recalibrate how learning competencies and content would be articulated within and across educational levels to conform to K–12 directives. As of this writing, ALIVE curriculum guides from kindergarten to grade 10 have been developed.

The actions had to synchronize with two additional years of schooling, learning streams at Senior High, the Mother Tongue-Based Multi-Lingual Education (MTB-MLE), among other features of K–12 education. They likewise needed to align with the *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao* (EsP) value framework that aspires to train all Filipino learners in two disciplines: ethics and career guidance.

The ethics component is evidently for moral development, while the career guidance is geared towards competency development—whether in academics, arts, or sports—“that is attuned to learners’ talents, abilities, and aptitudes, not to mention corresponding to industry needs.”⁴ The ethics and career guidance components of the EsP framework are reasoned to be necessarily intersecting pathways to train Filipino learners to be positive participants in civic actions towards the common good. While not indicated in DepEd curriculum documents, this definition of goodness evokes Ciulla’s (1995, 13; 2014, xvii) etymology of good (particularly in relation to ethical leadership), where “good” should be both ethical (morally good) and effective (technically good, capacitated, and capable).

Arabic Language (AL) on the other hand, needed to correspond with language development principles similarly expected of other languages taught in Philippine schools, i.e., English, Filipino, and the mother tongues: interactive learning, challenging learning, content knowledge building, emphasis on different text types, scaffolding and assessment. Equally, the following language development components had to be evident in the AL curriculum: phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, listening comprehension, oral language, vocabulary and concept development, reading comprehension, grammar awareness, fluency, literature, and composing. All these are expected to interact to develop the five language macro skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing in AL learners.

Upon reflection, one is moved to ask whether the premise of this language development framework is universally true for first, second, foreign, or purposive language teaching. English and Filipino are very familiar for a significant cohort of Philippine learners and may

4 Translated from Department of Education, K–12 Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao Curriculum Guide, May 2016, <https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ESP-CG.pdf>

be classified as either first or second languages. Arabic Language on the other hand, is still a foreign language despite that Muslims read an Arabic Qur'an, regularly recite Arabic chapters and verses during their five daily prayers and supererogatory prayers, not to mention constantly doing supplications in Arabic.

Learning Arabic is the goal of most Muslims, given that their holy book, the Qur'an, was revealed in Arabic. It is a Muslim's conviction that facility in classical Arabic will enable him to fully understand the Qur'an and its teachings. It is commonly believed that translations do not capture the essence of these teachings and, more dangerously, may transmit an inferior or worse, an erroneous understanding of the Muslims' scripture. Classical Arabic, called *fus-ha*, is differentiated from *ammiyya* or colloquial versions of the language that are widely spoken in the Middle East. Modern Standard Arabic follows the classical Arabic model. Philippine Muslim communities in earlier times developed localized versions of Arabic which conformed to their native tongues. Among the peoples of the Sulu archipelago, this Arabic version is known as *Jawi* or *Surat Sug*. Among the Maranaos of Central Mindanao, it is called *kerim*. During those times, numeracy and written communication were encoded in this form. Official and personal letters, even computations for commerce purposes used Arabic.

From community accounts, this language skill eventually deteriorated after the advent of Philippine public education, initiated by the American Thomasites. Currently, only students who sought to advance their learning in the Islamic curriculum until the high school (*thanawi*) and college (*kulliya*) levels, or those who went to specialized schools with language immersion components are able to acquire a good proficiency of the Arabic language in terms of the abovementioned macro skills. Most other Muslim Filipinos in the current times will use Arabic solely for worship purposes. Their level of language understanding is more often confined to the meanings of their recited Qur'an chapters and verses, prayer recitations and

supplications. For all other intents and purposes, Arabic is a foreign language; thus, approaches to its teaching should be framed with foreign-language teaching principles.

Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan

The Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP)⁵ was a measure responding to exigencies brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Adopted on June 19, 2020, the BE-LCP sought to reengage learners massively displaced from schooling because of widespread lockdowns and near-absolute restrictions on physical mobility. The reengagement definitely needed to operate under new paradigms. Educational delivery had to be planned around several salient factors: a shortened school calendar; the severely interrupted teaching–learning momentum; the necessity of new learning platforms in lieu of physical school attendance; the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of school constituents; and finally, school curricula and instructional designs that were attuned to these considerations. Three prominent features of the BE-LCP were flexible learning platforms, academic ease, and the delivery of the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCS).

Decision-making on MELCS selection was based on an evaluation of learning competencies (LCs) according to relevance, responsiveness and endurance, with endurance being the primary determinant. DepEd defines *enduring competencies* as “those that remain with or become useful to the learners long after a test or unit of study was completed.”⁶ Such would include competencies in research, map reading, reading comprehension and writing, and

5 See Department of Education, Department Order No.12 s. 2020, “Adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year 2020–2021 in light of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.”

6 Adapted from the webinar presentation of Ms. Mildred Zamar, Muslim Education Program focal person, Bureau of Curriculum Development, Department of Education.

others determined by student needs. Essential learning competencies are expectedly aligned with the national education agenda and curriculum frameworks. These should also be integrative with concepts across content areas and contributing to higher concepts at the more advanced levels.

In culling the MELCS, the following methodology was employed:

- (1) Identify desirable learning competencies.
- (2) Extract the essential learning competencies from the shortlisted competencies in Step 1.
- (3) Identify the most essential learning competencies (MELCs) from the essential learning competencies.
- (4) Decide on four actions with reference to the essential learning competencies.
- (5) Evaluate learning competencies, subsequently leading to four actions: retention, rephrasing, merging and dropping.

A LC was retained if it was highly contributory to lifelong learning (endurance criterion) and if it served as a prerequisite skill for the next grade level. An LC was rephrased for conciseness, as well as for appropriateness (responsiveness and relevance criterion) to the new normal learning realities. Finally, an LC was merged with another if both had similar objectives or outcomes; meanwhile others were dropped if they did not meet the three abovementioned criteria; simply put, if they were unnecessary, not viable nor developmentally appropriate. After the MELCs were determined, it underwent another round of critiquing and vetoing before finalization.

For the ALIVE program, the process involved ALIVE teachers/writers who collaboratively worked on the process of LC shortlisting and MELC selection. The LC shortlist was then presented to both

internal (DepEd personnel working with the ALIVE program) and external validators (resource persons from academe or communities of practice) for substantiation. Teacher/writer inputs usually considered curriculum and actual scope of teaching covered at the classroom level (micro level) while DepEd and external validators considered education agenda alignment, systemic curriculum articulation and conceptual breadth and depth (macro level).

Despite the pandemic, DepEd data⁷ in school year 2020–21 indicated that Muslim learners were present in public schools in all the country’s regions. The number of Muslim children at the elementary level was 3,892, while those at junior high were pegged at 1,229. Muslim learners in ALIVE programs at the elementary level were highest in BARMM (560) followed by Region 12 (355) and Region 9 (311). At junior high, Muslim learners were highest in number in Region 6 (109), followed by Region 5 (100) then Region 12 (93) and Region 10 (91). Subsequent workshops on the identification of the MELCS for the ALIVE program reflected the distribution of Muslims learners across the country with participating DepEd personnel and ALIVE teachers representing most, if not all, regions.

Commission on Higher Education

The Commission’s system-wide initiative towards Muslim education followed that of DepEd’s after several years. Within its policy standards development program, space was given for the crafting of a Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Studies program (ABIS) and a Technical Committee (TC) on Islamic Studies was organized for this purpose. The TC was additionally tasked to evaluate the program of study of graduates from Islamic institutions abroad who apply for

7 Adapted from the Table: Muslim Learners Elementary (Public School) SY 2020-2021 presented by Mildred Zamar, Education Program Specialist, Bureau of Curriculum and Instruction on November 24, 2021, UP CIDS-ISP Webinar on Muslim Institutional Development-Education.

equivalency in the Philippine education system for employment or further studies.

CHED policy standards and guidelines on the AB Islamic Studies program

CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) 30, series of 2008, entitled “Policies and Guidelines for Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Studies (ABIS) Program” was issued after the conduct of requisite preliminaries such as consultations and public hearings, and subsequently disseminated to higher education institutions (HEIs) for implementation. The Order came more than a year after a TC on Islamic Studies was organized by the Commission on Higher Education. The ABIS program had the following aims:

- (1) To study Islam as a way of life in the context of economic, social, cultural, political, and legal aspects; and,
- (2) To create a pool of experts and scholars who would contribute to the education of Muslims and non-Muslims as well as in the integration of Muslim Filipinos into the mainstream of Philippine society

Program framing

The TC was subsumed under the Humanities Technical Panel (TP Hum) and was therefore subject to the disciplinal scope and guidelines of the Humanities field as were most TCs on religious studies. This may be attributed to the field’s underpinnings in philosophical, metaphysical, and perhaps theological thought, and the subsequent assumption that all religions were of similar cast. The humanities shaped the framing of the Islamic Studies program; thus, the courses formulated under it, particularly in the areas of specialization, had to conform to the Humanities discipline. The Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Studies program, a four-year degree course, had two specializations: Political Economy and Islamic

Arts and Multimedia Technology. Members of the TC on Islamic Studies (TCIS) consistently argued for the recognition that Islamic Studies as a discipline was multidimensional, given that Islam is a life system and not just a religion, theological framework, or faith orientation. The TCIS members felt that the ABIS curriculum would be better suited to the Technical Panel on the Social Sciences and Communication (TP SSC), anticipating that the Social Sciences cluster would have more room for the multidimensional curriculum directions that the TCIS intended to pursue. In compliance with CHED protocols in relation to the Technical Committee and Technical Panel organization under the Office of Policy Standards Development (OPSD), the TCIS requested transfer to the TPSSC in 2018, after appropriate consultations with TP Hum and TP SSC members respectively. Soon thereafter, however, CHED embarked on a wide-ranging reorganization and along the way, the OPSD's TC-TP oversight hierarchy was replaced by a new system. As of this writing (March 2022), the TCIS is a working group autonomous of TP oversight and supervision.⁸

Curriculum review and development

In addition to the abovementioned program framing concerns, the TCIS undertook curriculum review and revision for two main reasons: developments in Philippine education and the viability of the 2008 curriculum.⁹ These shall be elaborated to afford readers a clear understanding of the evolutions that the ABIS curriculum underwent and the corresponding actions it involved. The same or similar evolutions were likely applied to other curricula under the other TCs.

8 Inputs derived from participant observation as TCIS member since 2015.

9 Excerpt from the presentation as TCIS member during the March 1, 2022 CHED Focus Group Discussion/Consultation on the ABIS curriculum with representatives of the Department of Tourism, Department of Foreign Affairs and National Commission on Muslim Filipinos.

Developments in Philippine education

The developments in Philippine education involved the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2015 and the adoption of the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) framework by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) as part of its quality assurance initiatives.

Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2015

Owing to the additional levels of Senior High School as detailed in the previous sections, the general education (GE) framework at the tertiary level had to be redrawn. The K-12 program caused the movement of then foundational competencies in the first two years of college to Senior High, leaving a gap in tertiary institutions' general education lineup. The ensuing GE curriculum became multi-disciplinary, where students were primed to appreciate the sciences and humanities, even professional programs not as specific, stand-alone disciplines, but rather in relation to other disciplines in an integrated manner. This policy would perhaps contextualize the disciplines within real-world settings and thus prepare students for sensible, multi-nuanced interactions in general society and in the world of work.

The multidisciplinary casting of the new GE made it imperative for TCs to review the policy standards and curriculum of their respective academic programs. The objective was to ensure that the new GE and program specifications (core disciplinary courses and major learning tracks) were correctly aligned and that there would be no issues with content scope and sequence, likewise in competency articulation. In addition, the TCs needed to decrease the number of program units in order to give HEIs more elbow room to add other courses they deem necessary to their educational mission, milieu, and contexts.

Quality assurance and the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) framework

CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) 46, s. of 2012 articulated a new policy standard that was focused on institutionalizing a uniform quality assurance system in Philippine education. Section 4 of the CMO asserts that this new standard is geared towards eliminating widespread poverty and developing highly-capacitated human resources to provide buttress to the national economy. To further explicate the premise of this policy standard, the following section is quoted verbatim below:

Section 5. The focus on quality and quality assurance is further underscored by the following:

- Research findings suggesting that the lack of a critical pool of graduates with the necessary thinking, technical and behavioral competencies are among the factors constraining the re-launching of the Philippine manufacturing sector and the achievement of the full potentials of the service sector;
- The reality of an ASEAN community by 2015 which will facilitate the free flow of qualified labor in the region and either open up opportunities for graduates of Philippine HEIs or threaten their employment even in their own country;
- The commitment of the government to the evolving efforts to recognize a system of comparable qualifications, degrees and diplomas across the Asia-Pacific region under the auspices of the UNESCO and other multilateral bodies (e.g. ASEAN, APEC); and,
- The acceptance of internationally agreed-upon frameworks and mechanisms for the global practice of professions;

Quality assurance in Philippine education was calculated to respond to the opening up of regional and global markets and the eminent standards that participation in these new frontiers required. At the same time, it was a systematic move to address shortcomings—both in quantity and value, in the Philippine human

resource capital and in turn, the quality of education and training that produced such capital.

CHED assumed three definitions of quality: as fitness for purpose, as being exceptional, and as developing a culture of quality. Fitness for purpose, a key concern in international accreditation and assessment, entails the close correspondence between institutional aims and system, program, and learning outcomes. Simply put, what is envisioned at the institutional level should be effectively achieved at the classroom level. Exceptionality from the CHED perspective is conformity to quality standards through the use of competitive criteria and rating instruments. Developing a culture of quality, meanwhile, is particularly focused on its transformational aspect.

Quality assurance (QA) rested on the development of competency-based learning standards that are internationally compliant or benchmarked as the case may be. To ensure that QA indeed transpires, the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) framework was adopted. OBE “defines learning as what students can demonstrate that they know” (McNeir 1993, 2). Its proponent William Spady asserted that OBE entailed “clearly focusing and organizing everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences” (Spady 1994, 12). This implies that planning for the educational process at all levels of implementation had to be clear and detailed. By this, we mean that institutional, program, and curriculum documents should be explicit, measurable, and outcomes-based. As the process goes, institutional philosophies and outcomes are concretely laid out; program nature and outcomes and ultimately, course nature and outcomes are defined according to these institutional articulations. The OBE approach has been earmarked by CHED for the monitoring and evaluation of programs and institutions in the public and private educational sector. Custodio et al. contend that OBE in the Philippines was ushered by four factors: the growing international trend towards Outcome-

Based Education; the idea of “borderless and seamless education” (2019, 38) across countries of the world brought on by globalization; and industry, workplace, and stakeholder demands for locally and globally competitive professionals who would be development partners across locales, nations, and regions.

In response to CHED’s OBE framework adoption, the TCIS, as well as other TCs, needed to redraw their respective Policy Standards and Guidelines (PSGs) to conform to the new framework, even while at the process of curriculum and course review (for TCIS). This entailed some major restructuring of the PSGs to detail the program very explicitly. Added components are: (taken verbatim from PSG documents)

1. Nature of field of study
2. Program goals (transitioned from program objectives)
3. Specific professions and allied fields/careers/occupations for graduates
4. Partner institutions (with which Higher Education Institutions or HEIs are expected to collaborate with for OJT or practicum purposes)
5. Allied programs (or disciplines/fields of knowledge)
6. Program outcomes – (minimum set)
 - a. Common to all programs (citing Republic Act 7722- Higher Education Act of 1994, which scopes CHED’s creation and mandates)
 - b. Common to the discipline (where the curriculum is clustered under e.g., Social Sciences)
 - c. Specific to the sub-discipline and a specialization (in this case, Islamic Studies)
 - d. Common to the horizontal typology (specified in Article 5 of CMO no. 46 s. 2012, which recognizes that HEIs are differentiated into professional institutions, colleges and universities)

7. Sample Performance indicators (per Program outcome)
8. Curriculum Description (providing an overview of the categories of courses within a program)
9. Sample Curriculum (detailing all the courses within each category)
10. Sample Program of Study (articulated across semesters and academic years)
11. Sample Curriculum Mapping (for all if not most courses, according to the specific competency levels expected: Introductory or basic, Practice or modeling towards mastery, and Demonstrate or showing a degree of mastery)
12. Sample Means of Curriculum Delivery
13. Course Descriptions
14. Syllabi

The addition of the abovementioned components evidently required a painstaking process to comply with the new education framework. A comparison of pre- and post-OBE PSGs clearly demonstrates this major overhaul.¹⁰

Viability of the 2008 curriculum

Even prior to the two major developments in Philippine education mentioned above, the ABIS curriculum specified in CMO 30 s. 2008 had been subjected to ongoing scrutiny from the new TCIS members. Initially, the review focused on program and course content, before other considerations were arrived at during the process. These were: congruence of discipline with specializations, resources, viability in the national context, and duplication of other programs.

¹⁰ Samples of OBE-compliant programs are on the CHED website.

Content

The ABIS curriculum content was reviewed from the framing of Sunni orthodox beliefs given that the majority of Muslims in the Philippines practiced Sunni Orthodox Islam. Further, the content was scrutinized according to the scope of the classical Islamic curriculum, particularly its core sciences. The latter shall be elaborated on in the section following this. Upon examination, the curriculum was determined to carry courses that did not fall within the Sunni orthodoxy framing, a circumstance that could cause confusion to students as curriculum subscribers. Relative to this, there would be the consequent issue of who could teach such courses given that these were external to the thought and experience of the Muslim majority in the Philippines.

Congruence of discipline with specializations

The classic Islamic Studies curriculum normatively had the following major areas of study: Islamic Law (*Shari'ah*), Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), Prophetic Sayings (*Hadith*), Arabic Language (*Lughatul'Arabiyya*), Exegesis of the Qur'an (*Tafsir*), Polemics (*Kalam*), History (*Tarikh*), and Qur'an Reading (*Qiraa*). The ABIS specializations, for one, did not fall under any of the abovementioned tracks. While there was no nominal objection to programs that were hybrid and out of the norm, the specializations of Political Economy and Islamic Arts and Multimedia Technology were too divergent. Moreover, there was a sense that both specializations deserved to be developed as separate programs or at least appended to more suitable programs where the flow between the core disciplines and specializations was more congruent and feasible. Political Economy for instance is generally recognized as a subfield of Political Science, a field quite distinct from Islamic Studies, and even from the Humanities.

Resources

In relation to the concerns raised regarding program flow, resources for such hybrid programs were either very limited in number or nonexistent. A case in point is Political Economy in relation to

Islamic Studies. One of the viability indicators of a program is the extant literature and resources that would support it. Another would be the faculty complement that would implement the program, bring it to life in the classroom and conduct research to establish it, and finally, pursue new frontiers of knowledge in relation to it.

Viability in the national context

Given the CHED mandate of working towards local, national, and global development, the two specializations were judged not feasible given the previously enumerated issues of content, congruence, and resources. CHED-authorized PSGs and curricula face the demands of relevance and definite viability with regard to the quality of their contribution to the development agenda of primarily the nation, then the region, and the world. Specializations or major tracks of the Islamic Studies curriculum would be more relevant if these were cognizant of the real needs of Philippine Muslims and general Philippine society. Objectively, these specializations would be the following:

- (1) **Arabic Language.** Arabic is a tool language for Muslims, primarily to strengthen spiritual understanding and secondarily for communication. Continuing multilevel relations, OFW deployment, and the pursuit of higher education in the Middle East underscore the demand for facility of the language. Moreover, DepEd's Muslim Education Program continuously required Arabic speakers who would serve as teachers, instructional designers, resource material producers, etc.
- (2) **Islamic Law and Jurisprudence.** The long presence of the Shari'ah circuit and district courts in the Philippines as implementing institutions of the Code of Muslim Personal Laws (Presidential Decree [PD] No. 1083) and those that will be established under the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao translate to a continuing demand for licensed Shari'ah practitioners. A strong foundation in Islamic law and jurisprudence is a prerequisite for a well-grounded practice.

- (3) **Halal Studies.** Concrete government programs and directives towards halal development in the Philippines for trade, tourism, and local consumption purposes equates to a thriving need for *Halal* scholars, researchers and industry practitioners to guide and actively participate in these multiple development efforts. *Halal* integrity is especially dependent on critical elements that could only be comprehensively understood and implemented by Muslims who are well-trained in *Halal* principles and mechanisms of practice.
- (4) **Islamic Finance and Economics.** As a field or profession, Islamic finance and economics fall within the parameters of a *halal* lifestyle. Thus, it is an articulation of what is *halal* in this specific domain. The continued existence of the Al-Amanah Islamic Investment Bank, recent related legislation, and its development under the BARMM machinery call for highly trained professionals to provide its human resource requirements in all aspects of the implementation infrastructure.
- (5) **Philippine Muslim History and Culture.** Continued articulation of and research into Philippine Muslim history and culture is a necessary program of study for the people of the Philippines. It is a crucial contribution to the promotion of the country's peace and development agenda. This area of study will produce academics and researchers who will effectively execute the vision of Republic Act (RA) 10908 or Integrated History Act of 2016. RA 10908 mandates the integration of Indigenous Peoples (IP) and Muslim history, identity, and culture studies in the teaching of Philippine history.

Duplication of other programs

This consideration specifically applied to the ABIS specializations Islamic Arts and Multimedia Technology. While Islamic Arts was particularly formulated to the field of Islamic studies, Multimedia

Technology was not. In point of fact, there was an existing program for the latter in the CHED line-up, i.e., the Bachelor of Multimedia Arts (BMMA) program, established by CHED Memorandum Order No. 20 s. 2017. Offering Multimedia Technology as a component of an ABIS specialization constituted a duplication of the BMMA, as pointed out in one of TCIS's in-house consultations. While the ABIS was established much earlier, the TCIS's proposed program revisions needed to consider the later-established program. The TCIS considered two options: redefine and rename the component in question or remove it altogether.

Points of inquiry

The webinar's moderated open forum generated salient issues from the audience, particularly on curriculum delivery and bottlenecks in CHED equivalency processes.

Curriculum delivery of the DepEd ALIVE program

While the DepEd ALIVE curriculum has been appreciated by Muslim teachers according to its content organization and coverage, concerns have been raised by parents about the quality of curriculum delivery in the classroom, implicating ALIVE teachers' capacity to implement the curriculum according to standards set by the Department of Education. The DepEd Madrasah Education Program's focal person observed that ALIVE teachers are chiefly educated in the Islamic education system with content expertise in their particular field of knowledge. However, they are not trained in the education profession, therefore having minimal if not zero background in curriculum and instruction. The lack of skill set in these fields affects curriculum implementation on the ground.

The MEP's focal person, however, intimated that her division was tasked solely with curriculum review and development. They periodically organized workshops for these purposes and invited consultants from public and private academe to collaborate with

curriculum writers in the review and crafting of curriculum documents. Curriculum implementation and related concerns, on the other hand, were within the purview of the Bureau of Learning Delivery. With reference to the quality of curriculum delivery, the MEP's focal person shared that it was the Department's vision for ALIVE teachers to eventually attain professional teaching competencies. Since the ALIVE curriculum's inception, a capacity-building continuum of training and assessment programs has been embarked on by the Department of Education, as detailed in its Department Order No. 30 s. 2012, or the Policy Guidelines on the Hiring and Deployment of Madrasah Teacher Ion April 16, 2012:

- (1) **Qualifying Examination (QE) in Arabic Language and Islamic Studies.** Also coined QEALIS, the exam is an entry-level assessment for competence in Arabic Language and Islamic Studies which Muslim applicants were required to pass.
- (2) **Language Enhancement and Pedagogy Training (LEaP).** Language Enhancement and Pedagogy Training (LEaP) is a 23-day live-in pre-service training workshop for QEALIS passers with embedded evaluation components. Attendees who passed the LEaP were deployed in public schools on a service contract with monthly allowance.
- (3) **Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP).** The Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP) is a 24-month intensive course akin to a Professional Teaching Certificate course. The satisfactory accomplishment of the course was considered equivalent to a Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) degree, rendering passers eligible to apply for the Licensure Exam for Teachers (LET). The ATEP is a special program with approval from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC). The latter is the state agency tasked with setting and administering

benchmarks and standards for the regulation and licensing of professionals in the country.

- (4) **Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET).** The Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) is the PRC-administered exam for obtaining a teacher's license. ALIVE teachers who passed this exam became licensed teachers qualified for a Teacher 1 item assignment in the Department of Education *plantilla*, with fund allocation for special groups from the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

An issue was raised in reference to the Teacher 1 item awarded to ALIVE teachers. Because of their teaching qualification and due to DepEd budgetary constraints, licensed ALIVE teachers were given additional subject assignments other than Arabic Language and Islamic Studies by their School Division. This in turn, "diluted" the teachers' concentration on the ALIVE program at the latter's expense. This issue was admittedly, a matter for internal discussion within the Department.

Bottlenecks in CHED equivalency

Another concern raised was the nonresponse of CHED on an application of equivalency for an Islamic Studies degree obtained in a Middle Eastern country. Briefly, the CHED equivalency program was intended to provide for the integration of Filipino graduates from foreign academic institutions into Philippine academes or workplaces. The processing of equivalency required the submission of specific documents which would in turn be evaluated by the TCs of a respective program that corresponded to the foreign degree obtained. From old practice, the documents were transmitted from the CHED regional offices to the Central Office where the TCs officially attend. The issue could be attributed to either failure in transmittal or in the non-performance of equivalency review. As of this writing, identification of the bottleneck is still in process.

Synthesis

This paper elaborated on Philippine government initiatives to develop Muslim education in the Philippines. During the mid-decade of the new millennium, the Philippine government established the Muslim Education Program in basic education through the Department of Education; and later the Policy Standards and Guidelines for the Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Studies Program through the Commission on Higher Education. Parallel programs were instituted in the technical education sector through the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), though this was not covered in the paper.

Ensuing discussions covered the evolutions of both basic education and higher education programs for Muslims through multiple developments in Philippine education, the COVID-19 pandemic as well as technical curriculum considerations. Woven into the discussions were concepts that reflected the Muslim worldview and consequently, the Muslim conception of education and how this influenced the nuances of Muslim participation and inputs into the ongoing curriculum development in DepEd and CHED. The discussions highlight implications for policy development to further strengthen Muslim education in the Philippines.

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