

Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education for Muslim Learners Policy and Reform Recommendations for Madrasah Education

Background

Mindanao island is endowed with vast natural resources with an estimated half of the country's mineral wealth. Ironically, poverty incidence in Mindanao is the highest among islands at 33.8% and eight of the top ten poorest provinces are in its regions. (*Philippine Statistics Authority 2015 Report on Poverty Incidence, March 2016*) Major contributing factors to the people's impoverishment are 1) situations of conflict due to insurgency and cultural factors; 2) geographical disadvantages and socio-cultural isolation of highland and small island populations; and 3) limited opportunities for productive activities and limited access to social services due to prolonged government neglect.

The poverty in Mindanao and factors that exacerbate this situation are the main causes of persistent obstacles to education of the people of Mindanao, especially to Muslim children and youth. Mindanao is home to the majority of Filipino Muslims in the country where 93% of the entire Islamic population resides.

The poorest basic education service in Mindanao is concentrated in the top three regions which are largely Muslim areas—The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), SOCCSKSARGEN and Zamboanga Peninsula.

The Irony of Mindanao:

A land endowed with vast natural resources;

***An impoverished people with
limited opportunities;***

An education out of reach for many.

Region	Muslims	Percentage from Mindanao's Population
Region 9 Zamboanga Peninsula	603,289	2.50%
Region 10 Northern Mindanao	378,019	1.57%
Region 11 Davao Region	167,879	0.70%
Region 12 SOCCSKSARGEN	1,032,824	4.28%
Region 13 Caraga	12,355	0.05%
Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)	3,451,644	14.30%
MINDANAO	5,646,010	23.39%

2017 data from PSA Region XI shows that with the Philippines attaining a 97.5% literacy rate (10 y/o and above), the largely Muslim regions still registered the lowest rates in simple literacy with ARMM having the lowest among regions at 82.5% and Sulu with the lowest literacy rate among provinces with 76.6%. ARMM had the lowest gross enrollment rate (GER) for primary education at 84.4% and lowest GER in secondary education at 45.27% with Zamboanga Peninsula posting 2nd (70.88%), and SOCCSKSARGEN, 3rd (72.24%).

In the 2013 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), the highest rates in elementary drop-outs among regions are also posted in these areas with ARMM (24.9%), Zamboanga Peninsula (11.8%) and SOCCSKSARGEN (8.3%) ranking 1st, 2nd and 5th. Of the regions with the highest number of out-of-school children and youth (6-24 y/o), ARMM ranked 1st with 14.4%, SOCCSKSARGEN 2nd with 12.3% and Zamboanga Peninsula 5th with 11.3%.

The Madrasah System of Education for Muslim Children and Youth



Photo Credit: DepEd, Madrasah Education Program

The Moro people have their own system of education. They have their own system of schooling - the *madrasah*- which is usually situated close to, if not inside, a Mosque. In *madrasah* schools (madaris), students learn to speak the Arabic language at a young age and soon they are able to read the Holy Qur'an. Usually run by religious teachers, *madrasah* schools develop their own curriculum that offers religious and cultural teaching aimed to preserve the identity and cultural heritage of Muslim learners.

With its establishment coinciding with the arrival of Islam in Sulu in the 13th century, the madaris can be considered as the oldest educational institution in Mindanao and recognized to be the single most important factor in the preservation of the Islamic faith and culture.

Madaris are scattered nationwide, with the majority found in Central and Western Mindanao. The Department of Education (DepEd) estimates that there are between 600 and 1,000 madaris in Mindanao with a total student population of between 60,000 and 100,000.

Aside from the madaris, DepEd has more than 400 public schools nationwide implementing madrasah. This number does not include the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) with its own regional DepEd which is technically independent of the national DepEd.

Types of Madrasah Education in the Philippines:

Traditional Madrasah is considered as non-formal education. With no formal curriculum and non-grade, classes are usually held on weekends. It focuses exclusively on the study of the Qur'an, related Islamic subjects, and the Arabic language. Profit is not the essential motive for opening the school and payment of fees is on a voluntary basis.

Formal or Developmental Madrasah is structured and uses sequential learning generally the same with the formal education system. Islamic religious and cultural subjects as well as some mathematics and science courses are taught. Arabic is the medium of instruction. This type is not recognized and accredited by the DepEd because it still does not implement DepEd's standard curriculum.

Standard Private Madrasah has been harmonized, upgraded and modified to become a component of the Philippine education system through the issuance of DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004, prescribing the Standard Madrasah Curriculum for private *madaris* and the Enriched Curriculum for public elementary schools, known as the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) Program.

The inclusion of Madrasah Education Program in the Philippine national educational system has strong legal and policy support under Philippine Laws. The Constitution clearly upholds the "*right of all Filipinos to quality basic education, relevant to the needs of the people and the society.*" Republic Act No. 10533, known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 highlighted Madrasah Education Program under Section 8-Inclusiveness of Enhanced Basic Education (*DepEd Region XII, 2015*).

The Philippine government through the DepEd has developed the **Road Map for Upgrading Muslim Basic Education**, a comprehensive program for the educational development of Filipino Muslims which also stresses the strengthening of the present Madrasah educational system as a vital component of the national education system.

Challenges of Madrasah Education in the Philippines

Some problems related to Muslim Education in the Philippines are described below.

Lack of Access of Moro Children and Youth to Education Due to Poverty.

Inherent problem of poverty in Muslim areas have highly impacted the education of Moro children and youth. Drop-outs and number of out-of-school are especially high in the poorest regions of the country. Among the country's 17 regions, the ARMM, with one of the highest rate of poverty incidence, also has the highest drop-out rate which increased by 76% comparing SY 2002-2003 and 2012-2013, a study made by DepEd in 2013.

Lack of Educational Infrastructure, Facilities and Human Resources.

There is a need for opening new schools and establishing schools in the rural areas to ensure that all Moro children can go to school. Madrasah schools operating with low budget and without support from government are often lacking in facilities, instructional materials and human resources such as teachers or other necessary staffs.

Cultural Issues and Biases.

The Moro people are very aware of their culture and codes of conduct. So many parents prefer the madrasah traditional and formal education for their children to any other education. However, madrasah schools which do not adopt and implement the DepEd prescribed curriculum are not recognized and accredited and thus do not get support from government.

On the other hand, according to a research study by SEAMEO, it was observed that teachers in many public schools in Mindanao had very little knowledge and understanding of the culture and beliefs of Muslims. Many teachers were often insensitive and in some way, contributed to promoting among the non-Muslim learners a similar bias against their Muslim classmates.

Absence of Standard Curriculum.

Different types of Madrasah schools are running under various curriculums. Although DepEd has harmonized the madrasah religious education and cultural teachings with the secular education in public schools, the madrasah method of teaching, course content, teaching environment and code of conduct require in-depth understanding especially by our education agencies and institutions. The knowledge and methods of the Moro people themselves, the *ustadz* and *ulamas* and the Moro learners, are key in the task of harmonization.

Unstable Peace and Order Situation.

The ultimate goal of peace in Mindanao has been an elusive one. Mindanao is known as an area of war and conflict. These continuing conflicts, between government forces and armed groups or other lawless elements or fights among clans (*rido*) resulted in many disruptions and displacements, including in education.

In the latest Marawi war alone, that lasted over four months, clashes between government troops and members of a local terrorist group destroyed school structures and facilities affecting more than 62,000 students who were enrolled in the city's public and private schools. (DepEd)

Families are pushed to extreme poverty in conflict areas and services like education are compromised.



Photo Credit: UNICEF Philippines.

Policy Recommendations for Madrasah Education

The education situation of the Moro people point to the urgency of enforcing the national laws that protect their rights. The barriers that continue to stand between the Moro people and their fundamental right to education must be addressed, poverty being the primary. Below are some recommendations to address other barriers.

Strengthening the Madrasah Education System and Improving Governance

Implement various policies that build the institutional capability of the Madrasah system and bring the Madrasah system standard of instruction to a level comparable with the public schools. To ensure such mandate and improve governance and monitoring system, restoration of the Office for Madrasah Education Program with a dedicated Undersecretary is recommended.

Continuing Support for Expansion and Development of Madrasah Education

The per capita spending on services such as education in the largely Muslim areas is among the lowest in the Philippines. Per student expenditure on education in ARMM, for example, is less than \$100 or roughly P4,700 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomous_Region_in_Muslim_Mindanao) compared to the average Philippine spending per student (in DepEd schools) at P 17,000.

There is a need to strengthen government support and increase budget for Madrasah Education for establishment of schools, teachers training, professionalization and additional compensation, sufficient and appropriate instructional and learning materials, development of curriculum and manual;

A fund assistance for Muslim education and increased access of Muslim learners to programs such as scholarships and tuition fee subsidies should be ensured;

Strengthen regulation and monitoring of standard private Madrasah.

Alternative Learning System (ALS) for Muslim Out-of-School Youth

Institutionalize a diverse, culture-based and learner-centered ALS to cater to Moro Out-of-school youth.

Promoting Inclusiveness and Cultural Sensitivity

There is a perception by the Bangsamoro people that the framework and content of basic formal education are not sufficiently relevant and applicable to their socio-economic and cultural way of life, traditions and customary laws. On the other hand, there are perceptions as well that the Madrasah are inferior schools serving only the Muslim students to learn how to read the Qur'an and write Arabic Language.

There must be opportunities for dialogue and interaction among students, teachers and parents on cultural diversity issues as well as cultural sensitivity and promote programs and activities that counterbalance some cultural biases and discrimination.

The integration of Muslim teachings into the public education should involve learning processes that tap the knowledge of those most knowledgeable of madrasah teachings and methods, the Madrasah teachers themselves.

Continuing Enhancement of Standard Madrasah Curriculum and Materials

There is a need for continuing enhancement of the standard Madrasah curriculum including teaching and learning materials. Specifically, there is a need to fast track the development of curriculum for secondary education that aligns with K-12 and covers the whole aspect of madrasah which teaches a wide range of Muslim beliefs, Bangsamoro social formation, economics and political system.

Continuing Support for Professionalization and Training of Teachers

To address the issue of qualifications of Madrasah teachers, a program to professionalize Madrasah teachers should be implemented. The program should include pre-service education and continuing professional training for *ustadiz*.