



Sociological Understanding of Muslim Education in Multicultural Philippines

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Abstract

The DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2017 catapulted the implementation of the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) Program. However, since its inception, there is a dearth of professional literature on a coherent sociological understanding of Muslim education in the Philippines. This paper aims to provide an understanding of the implementation challenges of the ALIVE program employing sociological perspectives. The study utilized a qualitative research method anchored on Case Study Research Model. Five ALIVE implementers in Metro Manila were part of the research participants. A thematic analysis was initiated and triangulation of data was employed from relevant data sources. The analysis results showed several challenges faced by the select ALIVE schools: The intended curriculum lacks appreciation of the approaches and evaluation of student learning. The scarcity of learning spaces was evident. In teaching, most of the *Asatidz* or Madrasah teachers require enhancement of their pedagogical competence. The cultural variance among Muslims is still evident, especially in non-Muslim communities. The findings indicate that there is a need to create deliberate plans to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the ALIVE Program. Given the various gaps and challenges identified in this study, there is a necessity to evaluate the program at the grassroots. In conclusion, maximizing and strengthening the participation of the various stakeholders and different sectors in society is imperative in the development and sustainability of Muslim education programs in the Philippines.

Keywords: ALIVE program, *Asatidz*, Muslim education, sociology, Philippines

1. Introduction

Muslim education (Boransing 2006; Majul, 1978; Marasigan, 2019a; Marasigan, 2019b; Milligan, 2006; Nunag, 1970; Rodriguez, 1986) is probably one of the least explored topics in the Philippine Education System. However, as a response to inclusivity in education, the

institutionalization of the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) Program (Solaiman, 2017; Sali & Marasigan, 2020, Sattar & Arriola, 2020; Sali & Ancho, 2021; Sali, 2022) paved a way for Muslim learners in public schools to appropriate and relevant educational opportunities. The establishment of *madrasah* (pl. *madaris*) became instrumental in the propagation of Islam in Asia's largest Catholic nation. Consequently, the madrasah was considered the oldest educational institution in Mindanao. In the context of the Philippines, madrasah generally refers to Muslim religious schools that teach Islam as the core emphasis in their curricular offerings. Moreover, the ALIVE Program of the Department of Education (DepEd) will be the focus of the study as part of Muslim education in a multicultural Philippine setting.

Islam arrived in the Philippines as early as the 14th century. The prehispanic Philippines witnessed the growth of Islam in the southern part of the country. However, in terms of Philippine demographics, Muslims comprise only six (6) percent of the national population (Philippine Statistical Authority, 2015). With the proliferation of Islam in the southernmost part of the country, madrasah education and learning Islamic teachings were inevitable. Remarkably, accounts by American colonial officials described a *panditas* school – a small group of boys studying Islam under the tutelage of a local learned Muslim that existed even after the Spanish colonization (Milligan, 2006). The competencies being taught were mostly Islamic studies, learning how to read and understand the salient teachings of the Holy *Qur-an* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad.

However, the development of madrasah education as an educational institution from the pre-Spanish era to the present day was not linear. According to Sali and Marasigan (2020), the “colonial and post-colonial experience sought to create cohesive national identity without careful consideration of religious, political, and cultural biases” (p. 202). For instance, educational policies enacted during the reign of 1935 Philippine Commonwealth attempted to unify Filipinos by carving a national identity. However, instead of homogenizing cultural and class differences, Milligan (2005) pointed out that it instituted the “ethno-religious conflict” among Muslims in the Philippines being ruled by non-Muslim political leaders. Despite the socio-political milieu, the early Muslims were able to preserve their own educational system - madrasah education.

In the past, Lacar (1994), Muslims in the Philippines had difficulty identifying with the Philippine government. For instance, in the study of Abbahil (1984) being a Filipino was consistently the fourth preference given by Muslims as their nationality. The relevant studies revealed that at some point, Muslims in the Philippines do not perceive and even identify as part of the country. According to Majul (1895) in his scholarly article on ‘The Contemporary Muslim Movement in the Philippines’, the term *Moro* was a pejorative term used by the Spanish conquerors. The word *Moro* was associated with or referred to as the “uncivilized” peoples in the South. As such, the challenges of inclusivity in education and addressing marginalization and exclusion have always been pressing issues in the multicultural Philippines. Despite the conflicts in the past, Muslims in the Philippines still have an intact faith, and through madrasah as an educational institution, the propagation of Islam is apparent even at present.

In the contemporary period, madaris are educational institutions that are being operated and managed by administrators and have formal curricular offerings and funding sources (Kadi, 2006 as cited by Sabki and Hardaker, 2013). Inevitably, the advent of drastic changes in the education landscape prompted Madrasah education institutions to reinvent themselves. However, with these changes, the Madrasah education system is still committed to its goal of teaching Islam as a way of

life. In the Philippines, the different educational reform strategies and approaches in terms of inclusivity prompted the government to address the issues of marginalization and inequity among Muslim learners.

The Department of Education (DepEd) leads the development and improvement of the education sector as a policy-making agency of the government. The various policies instituted were instruments for achieving relevant education among Filipino learners regardless of status, disabilities, gender, beliefs, and even religion to name a few. Furthermore, the “education for all” thrust has a pivotal role in the development and growth of society, especially in developing countries. The inclusivity of education can address various issues of marginalization and exclusion (Sali, 2020c). These societal issues have been prevalent in various countries in different parts of the world (Peters, 2003). Sattar and Arriola (2020) argued that madrasah education provides a good venue both for the learners and parents to learn Islam as a religion that promotes values for co-existence with other ethnic and religious groups.

The DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2017, the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) specifically the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) Program provides appropriate and relevant educational opportunities for Muslim Filipinos within the context of accepted cultures, customs, traditions, and interests. This policy catapulted the ALIVE program in the public school system in the country. However, some local scholars do not consider the ALIVE Program as a Madrasah in terms of some technicalities in its definition and operation. Uniquely, the ALIVE program adds two additional subjects on top of the regular basic education curriculum’s mandated subjects. This means that there are select public schools in the Philippines that are implementing the program despite its nature of secularism.

The institutionalization of the ALIVE program in the public school system as a microcosm was initiated through a “series of consultations and efforts of the government and Muslim intellectuals” (Sali & Marasigan, 2020, p. 204). However, since its inception, there is a dearth of professional literature on a coherent sociological understanding of the Basic Madrasah Education Program in the implementation of public schools in the Philippines. Trinidad and Leviste (2020) exemplified that without a cohesive theorization, “studies will only be looking at particular parts of the puzzle that do not take into account the whole picture” (p. 2). This paper aims to provide an understanding and analysis of relevant data on implementing the ALIVE program (Solaiman, 2017; Sali, 2020a; Sali, 2020b; Sali & Marasigan, 2020, Sattar & Arriola, 2020; Sali & Ancho, 2021; Sali, 2021; Sali, 2022) in public schools anchored to sociological perspectives. Also, the paper attempts to discuss the Basic Madrasah Education Program in relation to equity and inclusivity in Philippine society. More specifically, it attempts to answer the following question:

RQ: What are the key issues concerning the implementation of the ALIVE Program in public schools?

2. Research Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative research method (see Figure 1.0) with its framework anchored on Case Study Research Model (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2014). A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the researcher focused on the responses of five (5) ALIVE implementers as research participants in Metro Manila. The researcher also secured the participant’s consent. Miles et al., (2014) exemplified the inclusion of multiple cases to increase the validity of the research findings. Furthermore, a desk review (Silewey, 2019)

was instigated to provide more structured data from various sources including the researcher’s observations.

There are mainly two data courses used in this study: responses from the participants through key informant interviews (KIIs); literature review from relevant research articles that were peer-reviewed by reputable journals, other written artifacts from the respondents, and observation notes. The data analysis was conducted in a deductive manner (Miles et al., 2014). In the thematic analysis, the codes were identified as extracted from the transcription, and relevant themes were generated to form part of the conceptual foundation of the paper. Non-probability purposive sampling technique was utilized to identify the participants of the study. The participants were selected based on the inclusion criteria. The interview tool composed of semi-structured questions was validated by experts and went through pilot testing prior to actual data gathering. The study is limited to only three (3) ALIVE implementing schools and a sample size of five (5) participants.

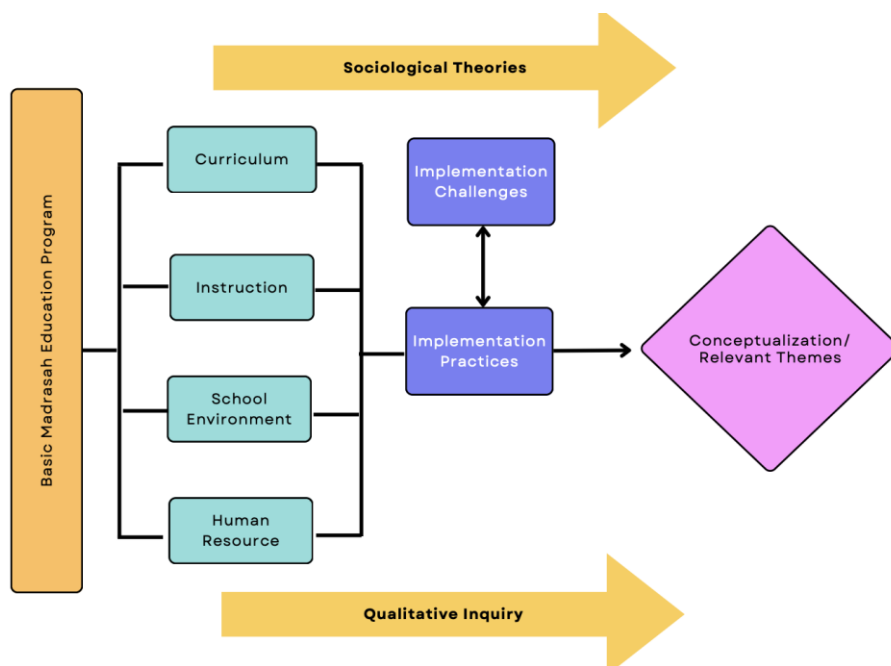


Figure 1. Research Process

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 On Madrasah Curriculum

The implementation of the ALIVE program (Solaiman, 2017; Sali, 2020a; Sali, 2020b; Sali & Marasigan; 2020, Sattar & Arriola, 2020; Sali & Ancho, 2021; Sali, 2021; Sali, 2022) in basic education paved way for institutionalization and inclusion in public schools across the country. Therefore, there is a need to explore and understand the various contexts that affect the implementation for the improvement of the program. However, one of the ALIVE program’s challenges especially affects teaching and learning is the curriculum itself. The Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum (REMC) serves as a guide for ALIVE implementers in translating the competencies embedded in the curriculum. Ornstein & Hunkins (2018) exemplify the importance of constructive alignment among parts and elements of the intended curriculum. Consequently, in

the REMC as the intended curriculum, some elements were missing, or at least the appreciation of the curriculum content in relation to approaches and evaluation was obscure. (Sali, 2021).

Furthermore, the intended curriculum needs more elaboration on the approaches and evaluation. Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) described the importance and interrelatedness of each element to form the wholeness of the curriculum. The need for a review of the content particularly on the age-appropriateness and developmental appropriateness of the competencies is sought. These challenges in curricular competencies will be discussed more in the succeeding parts of this paper. In the curriculum implementation, how to translate the competencies into sound instructional plans must be upheld to achieve the intended outcomes. However, if the intended curriculum is not reflective of the interrelatedness of the elements, the gaps must be addressed, at least for constructive alignment of the curriculum. Some of the participants shared that:

The REMC serves as our basis for teaching. The higher-ups [DepEd Central Office] created the curriculum and also books in Arabic. - P1

In ALIVE [Program], there are only two subjects [Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education], however, the competencies are a lot. It depends on the budget of work that they [DepEd Central Office] created. - P2

Moreover, the REMC serves as a blueprint, a curriculum that is being utilized by the *Asatidz* or Madrasah teachers in the implementation. The ALIVE program adds two subjects on top of the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum: Arabic Language; and Islamic Values Education. On curricular policies, the *Asatidz* described the importance of extending the time allotted for classroom instruction. The availability of the class varies from one school to another. In addition, learning spaces such as the classroom plays an important role in classroom teaching and learning. However, two implementing schools don't have learning spaces solely for the implementation of the ALIVE Program. The other factors that greatly affect the curriculum implementation are as follows: the number of *Asatidz*; the discretion of the school heads; and even the learner's availability.

Sali and Marasigan (2020) highlighted the role of *Asatidz* in the actual curriculum implementation, despite the familiarity of the *Asatidz* with the REMC, it was observed that in using instructional resources, the *Asatidz* had a high dependency on textbooks. They also tend to follow didactics in teaching Islamic values during the actual class (2014 Final Report of Muslim Education Initiatives). Furthermore, in a master's thesis conducted by Sali (2020b), as reflected in their instructional plans, most of the *Asatidz* showed misalignment between the lesson objectives and the chosen formative assessment. As curriculum implementers, *Asatidz* are expected to have mastery in content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Considerably, some of the Madrasah teachers were high school graduates, and most did not have an undergraduate degree in education.

Rodriguez (1986) pointed out that there is a need to adopt the MECS-Madrasah Reconciliatory Curriculum to harmonize the national basic education with the madrasah schools in the Philippines. The said curriculum as she proposed will not waste the country's resources, especially in relation to employment. In addition, Cayamodin (2019), argued that curriculum and learning content must be integrated under what he proposed as the Integrated and Holistic Madrasah Education System (IHMES). On top of the Islamic subjects, there is a need to integrate essential secular subjects into the curriculum. However, he opted not to include the ALIVE Program

in his proposed framework as it was governed by the DepEd Order which is the opposite of what Rodriguez (1986) was proposing in her study.

However, the researcher argues, that there is a need to revisit how the curriculum was developed and the series of activities that were initiated. The researcher argues that democratization of the curriculum development process by identifying and allowing essential stakeholders to be part of the curriculum development is sought (Sali, 2022). According to Majul (1978), Madrasah as an educational institution has a core curriculum which I agree with. However, understanding how the curriculum was made and its intent is essential to bridge the gaps in implementing the program. Moreso, the researcher argues that curriculum evaluation for the REMC is encouraged after a decade and so of implementation. The curriculum serves as the heart of any educational institution and therefore, a sound intended curriculum is tantamount to the overall success of the program.

In Print's Curriculum Development Model (1993), '*Curriculum Presage*' was highlighted and must be the first step in the development process, which I agree with. It is imperative to identify the people including stakeholders and end users involved. With this, the researcher argues that Madrasah teachers as grassroots implementers must be included being curriculum implementers themselves will eventually give a valuable platform for the development of the curriculum. Hilda Taba (1962) argued that curriculum development should start from the bottom as a grassroots approach. The feedback from the grassroots must not be excluded as it is imperative for the feasibility and acceptability of the various institutions once implemented (Sali, 2022).

The conflict between a reinforced habitus or a predisposition of education experts way back in the 1930s, especially during the Commonwealth era when education policies were meant to create a Filipino identity; where the unsubjected people of Mindanao, especially the Muslims were not consulted in policy formulation. The public educational system at that time was heavily constructed and implemented by Manila-centric bureaucrats and educators neglecting the habitus of the minorities. The very concept of Bordieus' Cultural Reproduction Model suggests that such precedence was a form of symbolic violence. Indeed, educational institutions are pivotal in cultural reproduction and a functionalist perspective of meritocracy must be revisited. I agree that cultural knowledge can be learned, however, such knowledge must be preserved too. At the same time, the researcher argues the importance of defining and creating conscious efforts in nation-building despite the difference in the habitus. After all, the capital be it social or cultural serves as the foundation of social life.

Furthermore, some practitioners might argue that curriculum review or evaluation is taxing and time-consuming. The arguments are stemmed from the basis of the merits of who must be involved in curriculum development. Since education experts and policymakers are mostly in the DepEd Central Office, in practice, they are presumed to lead and provide directions in terms of curriculum development. However, the researcher argues that the success of the implementation lies in the collective efforts of the different sectors of education in making sure that the curriculum is aligned with the outcomes intended. Therefore, the process of curriculum development must be collaborative, evidence-based, and participatory.

3.2 On Instructional Materials and Learning Spaces

The Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum should complement the instructional materials or learning resources, especially textbooks that will reinforce the teaching and learning

process. On top of it, the ALIVE Program has reached more learners in different parts of the country. Therefore, with more students enrolled, there is a dire need to make sure relevant instructional materials are readily available. Aside from its availability, for instance, the textbooks must be aligned with the competencies embedded in the curriculum. This is to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the program. The curriculum equips program implementers to recognize explicitly the various competencies that are within Muslim learners' grasp and context. The identified competencies guide the Madrasah teachers in crafting their instructional plans and translating them into actual practice using instructional materials is imperative. This makes alignment between curriculum and instructional materials outright necessary. Some of the challenges raised by one of the participants:

The REMC is beautiful. Before we have the budget for work, however, the other [parts of the documents] might not be distributed to others. Sometimes the problem is the availability of the books. At times, we lacked books. At times, [the competencies to be taught] are in the budget of work but not available in the book. Sometimes [the competencies to be taught] are available in the book but not in the budget of work. - P2

In terms of crafting the instructional plans, the *Asatidz* are allowed to utilize other instructional materials aside from the learning resources being prescribed. I think this approach is a good practice on the part of the program implementers as they can sort out the essential materials to be utilized in their instruction. It allows the Madrasah teachers to include relevant resources or learning materials in the educative process. Relating it to the gaps in the development of the curriculum, the instructional materials developed were perceived as not developmentally appropriate (Sali & Ancho, 2021). For instance, according to the REMC, in level 4, the learners are perceived to have at least applied the simple grammar rules in Arabic. To consider, the Arabic language would require specialized teaching skills of the teachers and course the learner's preparedness in terms of the depth and breadth of the competencies. It has been researched that the Arabic language is one of the hardest languages to learn. In translating the competencies of the REMC, some of the participants discussed their experiences:

The book that was given before had a higher level of competencies and I think the level of the book [in terms of competencies] was not appropriate for the other children. Some of the students here don't have experience in Madrasah. So they might not be able to reach the level of the book that was released by DepEd. Because level 6 here is like level 2-3 in the province [referring to the types of learners]. - P2

I have experienced teaching level 1, 2, 3, and 4 children in the classroom [referring to multigrade learners]. One technique that I taught for level 3 is that they have to identify the noun or isim. For level 2 I taught them words on how to read and how to pronounce well. From there, I had to also teach level 1 how to read. - P5

At present, our biggest problem is the availability of the classroom [laughing]. Unlike before we had one classroom, however, now we don't have one. We borrow classrooms [from the regular teachers] every Saturday. I hope Central Office [DepEd] can help us with this. - P3

For most Madrasah teachers, the competencies in the learning resources such as the textbooks, in particular, are too difficult for the learners, especially in the lower grades. On top of

the gaps in the curriculum and learning resources, however, the REMC is written in the English language. The Madrasah teachers especially those who graduated from high school, find the curriculum hard to comprehend. In terms of the availability of the ALIVE Program's instructional materials, according to Solaiman (2017), it was evident that textbooks were lacking and insufficient. In his findings, he discussed the scarcity of textbooks as he perceived that "the quality of such materials might be good but their availability and accessibility are not particularly ensured" (Solaiman, 2017, p. 44). He recommended that textbooks must be a 1:1 ratio for learners. However, scarcity and quality of the instructional materials are two different concepts. There are various studies conducted that support the premise that the contents in the textbooks are not aligned with the REMC and are not developmentally appropriate (Muslim Education Initiative Review Final Report, 2014; Review Report on the Three Years Implementation of ALIVE Program, 2008; Sali and Marasigan, 2020; Sali, 2021).

According to Mc Devitt et. al (2014), "child development textbooks are worthwhile to examine because they contain an overview of the field" (p. 25). There is no doubt that instructional materials if developed and utilized effectively help learners achieve various learning outcomes. However, if the textbook does not support the competencies during classroom instruction, it might be the reason for the setbacks in terms of learning. In the professional literature, "high-quality instructional materials that are aligned to state standards can reduce variability in the quality of instruction across classrooms and help boost student achievement" (Southern Regional Education Board, 2017, p. 2). In terms of the reproduction of such instructional materials, it took a lot of resources and time. That is why I think before the reproduction of the textbook, the materials must be properly vetted and the contents are aligned with the competencies prescribed by the curriculum. The problem arises from the misalignment of some content in the instructional materials. In addition, the misalignment must be addressed through a series of consultations with education experts, especially in the field of language (Arabic), curriculum, and instruction, and to include developmental psychology among others. This addresses the gaps in the age-appropriateness and developmentally appropriate competencies in the prescribed curriculum.

However, despite the plan for instruction and utilization of the instructional materials, one pivotal factor in the teaching and learning process is - learning spaces. Physical factors play a significant role in the educative process, especially in the implementation of the ALIVE Program. However, in a study conducted by Sali and Marasigan (2020), only one of the three select ALIVE schools visited in Quezon City has a separate building and projector used in the program. The rest of the schools have to borrow regular classrooms and their classes were held during the weekend. In a study conducted by Altunova and Kalman (2020), the author emphasized the need for the availability of physical materials to boost teachers' job performance in school. However, with the present status of learning spaces in selected ALIVE schools, there is indeed a scarcity of physical infrastructures intended for the program. The scarcity of learning spaces also affects teacher performance. Some of the participants shared:

Yes Sir. The classrooms that we used were only borrowed from the regular teachers. - P4

Second, [learning] devices. We can't hang our [learning devices] just like this [referring to the classroom] this is a regular classroom. So we have to carry [the learning devices] every Saturday because we don't have rooms [smiling] - P2

According to Akomolafe and Adesua (2016), "Experience shows that if physical facilities are available, students tend to have an interest in learning" (p. 38). This can be attributed and lead to the high performance of the learners. The authors recommended closing the gap between the scarcity of physical infrastructure and the achievement of learning outcomes. There is a need to allocate enough funds to public schools to create a conducive learning environment to improve academic standards. I agree with the importance of providing physical facilities, however, more than the allocation of resources, there should be a dedicated office (Bureau of Madaris Education) or top leadership position in the DepEd Central Office to oversee and situate the needs of the Philippine Madrasah Education (Cayamodin, 2019; Sali, 2021). Allocation of funds is not enough, there should be a long-term roadmap for the sustainability of the program. The researcher argues that the scarcity of learning spaces is a dehumanizing approach to every learner. The concept of equity in education (Freire, 1978) may be a humongous concept to discern, however, to propel the ways forward in improving the access and availability of education to Muslim learners, this lack of learning spaces must be addressed. Although, budget appropriation for classroom construction is mostly political and administrative, however, empowerment of institutions and society to prioritize education is essential.

There might be an argument that the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of the Madrasah teachers must be enhanced first before the review of the instructional materials (i.e. textbooks). However, since teachers are considered curriculum implementers, their competence in creating a plan for instruction must be adequate. Therefore, initiating a review of the textbook used in the program may not be the best solution, to begin with. However, the researcher argues that it should be done in parallel with the enhancement of Madrasah teachers' competence in their PCK and even the enrichment of their pedagogical practices. Furthermore, parallel to such initiatives, the need to address the scarcity of learning spaces must be initiated.

The challenges mentioned above are in one way or another related to the overall success of the program implementation. Various empirical proofs show how instructional materials and learning spaces are vital in the teaching and learning process. These things are essential for me and must not be just supplementary to one's learning. The dire need to achieve a relevant public school system for every learner is equivalent to achieving academic success and developing a productive member of our society. In application, the school is a social institution, equipped to educate learners with relevant and meaningful learning. It is expected, however, that the lack of congruence will cause resistance and change, these certain factors given the right approach can address and mitigate the realities of our public school system implementing Madrasah education (Bago, 2008, p. 180).

3.4 On Professional Development and Training

The teachers' pedagogical practice is pivotal in the teaching and learning process. As instructional leaders in the classroom, the huge task to plan and create relevant learning experiences for each learner is necessary. According to the professional literature, teacher qualities are a determinant of student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2006). John Dewey's *Curriculum and Children* (1902) exudates the prominence of classroom teachers as better at creating relevant experiences in the classroom. As such, the teacher gives proper emphasis on experiential learning rather than being the consumer of knowledge. Furthermore, as emphasized by Selvi (2010), teachers are seen to improve and develop further their teaching practices and their pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) to enhance their pedagogical competence (Olsson & Roxă,

2013). With this, the ALIVE program requires competent Madrasah teachers to be instructional leaders. However, most of the *Asatidz* are not regular teachers. There is a gap that needs to be addressed especially in the professional development including the professionalization of the *Asatidz*.

To reiterate, a case study conducted by Sali and Marasigan (2020) revealed that *Asatidz* needed the following training to enhance their teaching skills and improve their instructional practices: (1) how to choose and perform various strategies and methods of teaching during classroom instruction; (2) how to create a sound lesson plan with emphasis on the correctness and alignment of the objectives to the outcomes in the curriculum; and (3) how to fill out correctly promotional reports and forms needed to submit among others. The seminars and enrichment activities developed by DepEd that were held in the past years showed a variety of teaching strategies performed during a classroom observation. However, it was noted that most of the *Asatidz* practiced didactic and lecture methods in their respective classes (Ahmadzhai, 2015; Rusthman et al., 2012).

Interestingly, in the Philippines, the pedagogical practices of the *Asatidz* are influenced by secular and non-secular orientations. Remarkably, the Madrasah teachers adopt some of the teaching practices of their previous mentors which are mostly direct and traditional (Sali, 2020b). Based on the actual classroom observation conducted by Sali (2020b), a significant number of the *Asatidz* showed a disconnect between the lesson objectives and assessment. The assessment tasks must be executed to measure if learning objectives are met based on the teacher's instructional plan. In addition, the REMC lacked explicit assessment tasks in the curriculum. The *Asatidz* expressed that it is "challenging to create a coherent lesson plan with proper alignment where the English language is being used for the written output" (Sali, 2020b, p. 128).

Furthermore, some of the participants expressed the need for relevant professional development for madrasah teachers to enhance their pedagogical practices and pass the licensure exam for teachers:

We should possess certain qualifications. We must be a graduate of Arabic [education] and we also need to have a good background in English education. - P2

Second, we attended a training called LEAP or Language Enhancement and Pedagogy Training for Asatidz teachers for 23 days. - P4

According to Ishomuddin and Bin Mokhtar (2017) select Islamic teachers in Singapore preferred the traditional methods of teaching compared to other instructional methods. In addition, Madrasah teachers were reluctant to use other teaching methods because their schooling and undergraduate experiences likewise maximized the said teaching practice. The authors argued that the traditional method of teaching Islam is more precise than other methods. However, the researcher argues that the pedagogical practices of the ALIVE teachers must employ a variety of instructional strategies in teaching and learning. This should be one of the priorities in the professional development of the *Asatidz*. This enhancement training will be beneficial in terms of building their self-efficacy. According to the study conducted by Vieluf et al. (2012) on the 'Teaching Practices and Pedagogical Innovation' of different teachers across the world, claimed that — "there is no single best way of teaching and teachers continually must adapt their practices to serve the needs of the specific context, class, and students" (p. 25). However, without a teacher's

pedagogical competence, *Asatidz* will find it difficult to practice effective teaching and address the needs of their learners.

Sahin (2013) argued the need for hermeneutics of Islamic education for the contemporary world. Accordingly, the perception of Islamic education displayed within the traditional forms of Islamic schooling across the Muslim world as being instruction-centered and rigid inculcation of learning neglects critical reflection (Sali, 2020b). Again, the researcher argues that the pedagogical competence of the Madrasah teachers must be enhanced constantly. As such, different learning theories will be adopted to maximize classroom instruction anchored to cognitive development and social interaction. Indeed, there is a need to maximize social engagements, as Lev Vygotsky (1978), the main proponent of Zone of Proximal Development argued that development comes as a result of interaction between the learner and other people – thus social interaction helps in cognitive development. Analyzing the two utterances, the ‘value’ and ‘experiences’ show how meaningful learning happens through the process of interaction. Certainly, learners must be allowed to explore relevant experiences during teaching and learning. This, in turn, promotes a positive learning environment for everyone. However, given the gaps and challenges mentioned in teaching and learning, these have to be addressed in the implementation practices.

Fang (1994) on the missing paradigm (p. 50) discussed the lack of studies on the teacher’s perspective in teaching and learning. The professional literature commonly focuses on the learner’s perspective towards learning rather than the latter. I think teachers are the most important factor in achieving learning and even program outcomes. Their intellectual capabilities coupled with their pedagogical practices spell a difference in the execution of the instruction plan in classroom teaching (Sali, 2021b). Therefore, there is a demand to improve the pedagogical competence of the Madrasah teachers. However, there might be arguments in terms of the feasibility and sustainability of the planned professional development for *Asatidz*. For context, *Asatidz* has different backgrounds, praxes, and eligibility in comparison to the regular teachers in the public schools yet they perform the same roles and tasks in terms of teaching. Most of the *Asatidz* do not have an education degree and their pedagogical praxes are adopted from their previous mentors. The premise would be professional development initiatives such as training and seminars are enough to equip and enhance the pedagogical competence of the Madrasah teachers. However, the need to professionalize our *Asatidz* to pass the licensure exam for teachers eventually is sought, albeit, the current processes and systems in place are not profoundly deliberated.

The partnerships among higher education institutions must be strengthened. Teacher Education Institutions have pivotal roles in supporting the professional development and professionalization of Madrasah teachers. In the past, the *Asatidz* are required to attend the Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP) which is a customized course approved by the Commission on Higher Education and Professional Regulation Commission to be delivered by higher education partners. Through this program, ALIVE teachers may earn a teacher’s degree and take the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). However, recent data shows only 9% of the *Asatidz* passed the LET (DepEd Teachers’ Support Program, Madrasah Education Program Slide, 2018).

Therefore, there is a need to review the program to support *Asatidz*’ professionalization. Lastly, DepEd must be able to design relevant programs and also assess the implementation of the ALIVE program at the grassroots. Given that *Asatidz* has unique learning needs in terms of pedagogy, I sturdy support creating an office or an academy that focuses on Madrasah teachers’

professionalization in the Philippines. However, first, there should be a needs-based analysis, and the results must be part of the improvements on the MEP policies and also the basis for plans for their professional development.

3.5 On Cultural Variances

The very essence of reality as socially constructed is enshrined in how society developed as part of the larger societal structure, despite the rapid changes in terms of growth and development. However, intercultural relations according to Carr and Thésée (2012), arguably, are the base of humanity. In a pluralistic society, we have diverse cultures, religions, races, languages, customs, norms, and unique identities. With this, there is a dire need to understand, explore, and seek meaningfully how realities are socially constructed and at the same time, arbitrary.

According to recent data from the Philippine Statistical Authority (2015), the Philippines houses a significant number of Muslims of almost 6% of the total national population. Said (1978) argued that the orientalist have their own unique identities and thriving cultures predating the colonization of the West. However, the cultural bias, for instance, Spain subjected the unsubjected Muslims as uneducated and uncivilized was an outright display of hegemonic dominance. Said (1978) said, "since the oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjected" (p. 207). Remarkably, Muslim Filipinos have a deliberate cultural identity and a common history that predated Spanish colonization (Institute for Autonomy and Governance, 2019). As early as the 14th century, according to Milligan (2006), the Islamic influence in education already existed. The educational system of the early Muslims was established even before the Spanish colonization and the rise of the Philippines as a sovereign country.

In 1935, the commonwealth government propagated the call for a unified Filipino identity through educational policies being executed. However, despite the efforts to achieve the goal to unify the country, inevitably, the various issuances were instruments to propagate ethnoreligious conflict among Muslim-Filipinos (Milligan, 2005). Remarkably, the early Muslims in the Philippines were keen to preserve their educational system even up to the present day.

The 1976 Tripoli Agreement between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the government of the Philippines was instrumental in the institutionalization of Madrasah education in the Philippines. At present, the salient reform strategies by DepEd are to ensure culturally appropriate education to the learners. In Madrasah education, the issuance of the DepEd Order no. 51 s. 2004 responded to the "rightful and legitimate aspiration for authentic and appropriate Islamic education" (2014 Muslim Education Initiatives Review, p. 138). The enactment of the Republic Act (RA) 10533 or the "Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013" ensured relevant education within the context of Filipino learners regardless of status, identity, and religion. For the inclusion of the ALIVE program in the public school system, the major aim is to produce Muslim learners aside from being proficient in the Arabic language and Islamic values, they are expected to be part of productive members of our society.

However, in implementing the ALIVE Program outside the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, cultural variance among Muslims in the Philippines as identified in the study by Sali and Marasigan (2020) is still evident today, especially in public schools. Narratives from the *Asatidz* explained the importance of mainstreaming cultural identity and Islamic religion to promote awareness in schools and the community. The most evident factor in cultural variance was the inadequacy of in-depth knowledge and awareness of Islam by most non-Muslim mentors. In terms

of coaching and mentoring, the 2008 Review Report on the Three Years Implementations of the ALIVE Program revealed that school administrators who were non-Muslims expressed hardship in terms of checking the instructional plans of the Madrasah teachers in a way in the Arabic language. This is one of the many reasons why cultural variances are somehow inevitable, especially in non-Muslim-dominated communities. Interestingly, the “ethnoreligious conflict” (Milligan, 2005, 2006; Caballeros-Anthony, 2007) has been in existence, especially during the colonization period even up to this day. Some of the participants shared their experiences, especially on cultural variances:

That is why we are looking forward to when our supervisor arrived to share our plans [...] the school, the madrasah [referring to parents] is managed by non-Muslims [referring to the different cultures at times a challenge where normally madrasah is handled by learned Muslims]. - P₁

Anyone can be a coordinator of Madrasah [referring to non-Muslim mentor/coordinator] as long as you are assigned or appointed by the principal [referring to the Madrasah Coordinator at school] - P₃

The cultural variance is one of the major factors that must be addressed in grassroots implementation. Particularly, this factor influences the success of the Madrasah Education Program especially the acceptance of the school community to such initiatives. To address these nuances, Banks (1998) reiterated the importance of ‘educational equality in the school setting. Accordingly, there is a need to examine the interaction and dynamics of the students and staff across ethnic and racial characteristics. Through this, it will create a school culture that strengthens student diversity. However, I think there is a missing element in this premise, particularly in creating structural changes and reforms in addressing the ethnoreligious conflict (i.e. subcultures) in the community. Remarkably, more collaborative works and appreciation of social structure must be elucidated to positively turn one’s cultural differences into advantages. Thus, appreciating human rights, citizenship, and social responsibility in the community is encouraged. The challenge is how to incorporate more relevant MEP policies at the grassroots. On a top-down approach, I think restoring the Undersecretary position for Muslim Affairs in DepEd Central Office is unprecedented. In addition, a separate Bureau for Madaris Education will strengthen program monitoring and sustainability efforts of Madrasah education in the Philippines (Sali, 2021).

In terms of a bottom-up approach, the researcher argues the community should provide leeway for educational opportunities by ensuring an accepting environment for learning. In learning spaces, the non-school areas and hidden curriculum are essential factors that should be explored and understood. In the context of the Madrasah Education in the public school system, more than the analysis of ethnic and racial attributes in schools, the need to establish and create deliberate plans to preserve the cultural identity of the Muslims in the Philippines is sought. This can be done effectively and efficiently if there are clear guidelines or frameworks to follow especially in developing training programs for non-Muslim Madrasah coordinators and mentors. For this reason, clear appreciation and awareness of Islam will help them understand various contexts as they directly supervise the Madrasah teachers. Abdullah (2018) argued an Islamic pedagogical framework in the education literature is essential. I agree that the Islamic pedagogical framework must be responsive to the needs of contemporary education anchored in a prophetic pedagogy. The true emancipation of education happens if the educational system will not be imposing but transformative to the learners (Freire, 1978).

Stark (2003) expressed that the colonial education system weakened the implementation of Madrasah Education and bring about conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims. Absari and Morados (2019), argued that in the case of Muslims in the Philippines, negative stereotyping was a form of “colonial blunder depicting the negative imagery of the Moros” as part of the “divide and rule” policy instigated by the colonizers (p. 10). With this, I think there is a need to address the issue of ethnoreligious conflict by mainstreaming subcultures in the Philippines. According to Marasigan (2019a), at present, “madrasah education is still striving to be acknowledged as one of the sectarian schools in the Philippines” (p. 6). In the past, various international covenants were made to ensure the accessibility and availability of relevant education regardless of learners’ ethnoreligious differences. The World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework in Thailand solidified the commitment to prioritize education as a fundamental human right. The United Nations’ 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) reaffirmed the commitment of the participating countries to provide accessible universal primary education. In recent years, more comprehensive agreements - Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were enriched to include more specific targets to achieve relevant educational targets by 2030. I think these covenants are pivotal in making sure sustainable development and efforts are instituted in various countries around the world.

There might be an argument that there is no need to create a Bureau for Madaris Education or restore the Undersecretary position for Muslim Affairs in DepEd Central Office (Sali, 2021). However, based on the various research articles, there is a need to reconsider these alternatives. To begin with, the issues on colonial education have threatened to preserve local identities and ensure education is inclusive in terms of its scope and breaths. The ALIVE Program is one way of preserving the cultural identity of Muslims in the Philippines. The acceptance of the non-Muslim communities in the Madrasah Education Program is tantamount to the overall success of its implementation. On the other hand, the issues and conflicts brought about by differences and unawareness of the program goals will deter the salient objectives and outcomes of the MEP. Therefore, there is a necessity to strengthen the multicultural curriculum design (Demir L. & Yurkadul B. 2015; Guo & Jamal 2007) in raising individuals who are aware and accepting of other cultures. In this way, Filipino students will have more opportunities to learn and appreciate the various ethnoreligious groups in the country, albeit, contributing to nation-building and honing our country’s identity - it is where inclusivity starts.

4. Conclusion

The implementation of the ALIVE Program as part of Muslim education in the multicultural Philippines improves the access and inclusivity to relevant education for Muslim learners. In general, the enactment of the ALIVE program especially in non-Muslim communities has increased awareness of Islam. Furthermore, Muslim learners are expected to participate in the implementation as it gears toward the attainment of the program outcomes. However, despite the issuance of salient policies on the Madrasah Education Program, implementation challenges of select ALIVE schools in Metro Manila were inevitable which are as follows: (1) curriculum; (2) instructional materials and learning spaces; (3) professional development of Madrasah teachers; and (4) cultural variances.

Given the various gaps and challenges identified in this study, there is a necessity to evaluate the program at the grassroots. It is imperative to plan for solutions based on the empirical data

gathered. In evaluating, the Education Department should identify the appropriate evaluation model in making sure all the essential factors are captured. On a political and administrative level, I think restoring the Undersecretary position for Muslim Affairs in DepEd Central Office is unprecedented and timely. In addition, a separate Bureau for Madaris Education will strengthen program monitoring and sustainability efforts of Madrasah education in the Philippines.

At present, multistakeholder collaboration is encouraged especially in strengthening the partnerships among Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) to provide customized professional development programs for the *Asatidz* and even degree programs (bachelor, master's, and even doctorate) with teachers specializing in teaching Arabic language and Islamic Studies. However, a holistic approach is encouraged in providing viable solutions to the gaps and challenges identified as the researcher argues that the responsibility and ownership do not solely depend on the Department of Education. Lastly, the participation of the stakeholders and even the end users must be upheld for the improvement of the program to further strengthen the democratization of education in the Philippines.

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