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## **Analysis of the Socio-Political Dimension of Madrasah Education Program in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao**

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*Received: 27-12-2024*

*Reviewed: 10-01-2025*

*Accepted: 27-01-2025*

### **Abstract**

Madrasah education has played a crucial role in the educational landscape of Mindanao, Philippines, particularly for Muslim communities. Traditional Madaris provide religious instruction and support for Muslim students' cultural identity. The government has been supporting the integration of Madrasah into the mainstream through different legislations, policies, peace agreements and educational reforms. Yet, challenges still exist in providing and satisfying the academic needs of Muslim learners, especially in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. This study explored the social and political factors shaping the Madrasah educational System in the communities surrounding the Ligawasan Marsh within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. It offered recommendations to transform the Madrasah educational system. Findings revealed that social dimensions in shaping the implementation of the Traditional Madrasah include the selective implementation of the Refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum, increasing need for a balanced education, gender disparity in Madrasah attendance, decreasing trend in the learning outcomes, multilingual instruction and the unpredictable vulnerability of these Madaris to extreme and violent ideologies. On the other hand, political dimensions consist of increasing efforts in reforming Madrasah Education, changing political leadership and landscape, absence of a standardised practice for Madrasah teachers and introducing new administrative procedures and regulations. This paper recommends a comprehensive curriculum to include peace concepts, continuing education for teachers, strategic & complementary partnerships among stakeholders of Madrasah education, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the learning outcomes and policy support, advocacy & communication. This is to ensure inclusive and culturally responsive policies for a sustainable future of the Muslim children in Ligawasan and areas where there are Bangsamoro learners.

**Keywords:** Traditional Madaris, Madrasah Education, BARMM, Socio-political factors, Muslim Educational Needs

## **Introduction**

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was established as a new political entity in February 2019 after the Bangsamoro Organic Law was approved by referendum. The region is home to a significant population of Muslims in the Philippines. The BARMM, which includes the Islamized ethnic groups, was created to give Muslim-majority Mindanao's regions an independent administrative framework. The region is a monument to the dedication to promoting inclusion and respecting the distinct identities of its Muslim communities and acknowledging the various cultural fabric of its inhabitants.

In order to meet the needs of the Muslim community in Muslim Mindanao's Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BARMM), madrasah education is essential. In addition to providing religious instruction, madrasahs support students' cultural and educational growth, producing a generation that is knowledgeable about Islamic values, sensitive to cultural differences, and prepared to meaningfully contribute to the advancement and unification of local and national communities. Madrasahs equip Muslim students with the perspectives and abilities needed to negotiate the intricacies of modern life by offering a comprehensive education that incorporates both religious and secular knowledge. This method not only gives children essential information about their religion but also actively works to protect and strengthen the Muslim identity.

The Madrasah has become an essential component of the national educational system in nations where Muslims predominate while in countries where Muslims are a minority, this is an ongoing concern. In the Philippines, policymakers in the education sector have reportedly been looking for ways to incorporate madrasah education into the mainstream system for years (Mercado, 2009). The constitutional and statutory frameworks that acknowledge the importance of an inclusive and culturally responsive education system serve as the legal cornerstone for these developments. The State's responsibility to creating and sustaining an integrated educational system that meets the demands of the populace and the larger society is outlined in Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution. The Philippine government attempted to integrate an Islamic education system, such as madaris, with the national education system as part of its policy on Islamic education. The First Madrasah Congress (1982) and the Islamic Education Congress (1980) marked the beginning of the effort. Since the Philippine government adopted DO 51, which mandated the teaching of Arabic and Islamic principles in public schools and the testing of the standard curriculum, commonly referred to as the Standard Madrasa Curricula (SMC) in private madrasahs, the accommodation of madrasa education in the Philippine educational system has been materialised (Rido, et.al, 2022).

In the legal landscape of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), considerable progress has been made to support the implementation of Madrasah Education. Republic Act No. 11054, the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, further strengthens this commitment. The Bangsamoro Government is required under Section 16 of the aforementioned law to create an educational framework that is both pertinent and sensitive to the unique needs, values, and goals of the Bangsamoro people. Furthermore, Section 18 of RA 11054 emphasises how important it is to include Islamic and

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Arabic Studies instruction in elementary and high school curricula, with a focus on Muslim students attending public schools.

In the BARMM, there are at least 1,534 madrasas (IAG, 2019). Of these, only 135 were granted permits to operate and only sixty were funded under the Standard Madrasah Curriculum – Balanced Education (Latiph, 2020). Currently, enrollment data based on the Ministry of Basic Education, Higher and Technical Education report reveal that there are 55,172 learners who are enrolled in Madaris or Islamic Education during the School Year 2023-2024.

To date, there is a need to review the challenges and gaps in the implementation of Madrasah programs by virtue of the existing laws, policies, and peace agreements, as well as the administration and management of private Madaris. A long-term, comprehensive model of madrasah education that is sensitive to the religious and cultural beliefs of Muslim Filipinos must be developed in order to enable Muslim communities to combat violent extremism and actively contribute to the development of their country (Cayamodin, 2019).

In this research, Madrasah education in the BARMM communities surrounding the Ligawasan is the focus as these are a home to sizable Muslim population. Madrasah education is essential in helping the community develop a sense of stewardship because of its focus on Islamic teachings and values. Islamic teachings support the wise and sustainable use of natural resources, which is consistent with the need to save ecologically delicate regions like Ligawasan. It is also essential that Madaris surrounding the Ligawasan are adaptive to meet the needs of the future as society experiences technological developments, globalisation, and evolving cultural dynamics. This strategy is hoped to guarantee that Madrasah education will always be important and relevant in creating well-rounded people who can successfully navigate the changing and diverse terrain of the future and prepare the next generation of Muslims for the intricacies of the modern world.

This research aimed to explore the futures of the Madrasah educational System in the communities surrounding the *Ligawasan* in Mindanao. Specifically, this will achieve the following objectives:

1. What are the social and political factors affecting the implementation of Madrasah Education in the communities of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) ; and
2. How can the social and political factors mutually reinforce in transforming the Madrasah Educational System?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Madrasah Education Implementation**

Ozturk (2018) offers relevant international literature that examines the integration of Islamic education within the Turkish educational framework. Ozturk helps readers understand

how legislative changes and policy frameworks allowed Turkey to successfully integrate madrasah education into the country's formal educational system. Turkey promoted inclusivity and high standards in Islamic education, promoting social cohesion and advancing national development, by assuring accreditation and coordinating madrasah curricula with national norms. This outsider's viewpoint provides insightful guidance on how to best manage the confluence of law, policy, and religious instruction to improve academic performance and communal cohesion.

Madrasah education has played a crucial role in the educational landscape of Mindanao, Philippines, particularly for Muslim communities. Almonte (2018) provided a comprehensive overview of the historical development of Madrasah education in the Philippines. The study highlighted its evolution from traditional Islamic teachings to a more formalised system integrated into the national education framework. This evolution underscores the significance of Madrasahs in preserving cultural identity and promoting religious tolerance in Mindanao's diverse society.

Hadji Abdullah (2019) conducted a study focusing on the curriculum framework and teaching methodologies employed in Madrasah schools in Mindanao which revealed a blend of religious instruction with secular subjects, aimed at providing students with holistic education while instilling Islamic values and principles. The study emphasised the importance of continuous improvement and alignment with national educational standards to enhance the quality and relevance of Madrasah education.

In addressing challenges faced by Madrasahs, Ali et al. (2020) investigated the socio-economic factors influencing access to and participation in Madrasah education among Muslim communities in Mindanao. The study identified poverty, lack of infrastructure, and cultural barriers as significant hindrances to Madrasah enrollment and retention. Policy recommendations included targeted interventions to improve infrastructure, increase financial support, and promote community engagement to enhance Madrasah accessibility and effectiveness.

Furthermore, Ibrahim (2021) explored the role of Madrasah education in promoting peace and development in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao. The study highlighted the potential of Madrasahs as platforms for fostering interfaith dialogue, building social cohesion, and countering radicalisation through inclusive and quality education. The findings underscored the importance of government support and community involvement in leveraging Madrasahs as catalysts for peace-building and sustainable development in Mindanao.

Mangudadatu (2019), a researcher on the effects of peace agreements and Philippine government policies on Muslim education in Mindanao, offers local literature that illuminates the application of madrasah education. He explored the complex interplay among governmental directives, peace accords, and the establishment of madrasah education in Mindanao. Mangudadatu provides insightful research on the complex effects of peace initiatives and legal frameworks on the day-to-day operations of madrasahs. Mangudadatu provides important insights into the potential and problems faced by madrasahs in navigating the complicated socio-political terrain of Mindanao by looking at the local implementation

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subtleties, such as resource distribution, curriculum creation, and teacher training. In addition to adding to our knowledge of the factors influencing madrasah education, his research offers stakeholders and policymakers useful suggestions for improving the caliber and accessibility of Islamic education in the area.

Meanwhile, Al-Naggar and Isa (2018) provide a perceptive analysis of the state of madrasah education in the Philippines in their paper, with an emphasis on the particular circumstances of the Bangsamoro area. Through a thorough investigation, the researchers show how the socio-political dynamics of Mindanao, where historical and cultural variables define the educational landscape, interact intricately with madrasah education. Al-Naggar and Isa offer important insights into the complexity faced by madrasahs in the Bangsamoro region by analysing the potential and obstacles involved in integrating madrasah education into a larger educational framework. Their research lays the groundwork for future investigations and focused interventions by critically examining the external circumstances impacting madrasah education.

An in-depth research was also undertaken by Acabado (2017) on the crucial function *Madrasahs* play as key players in peace-building initiatives. Acabado highlights the significant contribution madrasah education makes to promoting social cohesion and resolving disputes through the use of qualitative analysis and case studies. The study clarifies how *Madrasahs* are essential venues for promoting communication, compassion, and understanding across various populations. Madrasahs play a major role in breaking down stereotypes and prejudices by promoting interfaith collaboration and conversation. This helps create a strong basis for peaceful coexistence.

Similarly, De Guzman and Medina (2016) explore how madrasah education specifically contributes to Mindanao's larger peace process. They emphasise madrasahs' critical role in promoting peace that lasts by carefully examining historical circumstances and factual data. Their research sheds light on how madrasahs function as centers for disseminating ideals among students, including tolerance, respect, and understanding. Madrasahs play a vital role in reducing conflicts and bridging gaps across ethnic and religious differences by imparting these ideals, thereby aiding in the region's attempts to promote peace.

In conflict-affected areas like Mindanao, *Madrasah* education has the potential to be a transformative tool for fostering peace, reconciliation, and community development. These studies agree on this point, highlighting the significance of identifying and utilising this impact in the face of hardship.

BARMM still faces challenges in implementing madrasah education, despite notable advancements. While Junaid (2020) investigates opportunities for improving madrasah education through curriculum development and community participation, Umpa (2018) emphasises important problems, such as resource allocation and capacity building.

The provision of Islamic education to Muslim communities across the globe is mostly dependent on madrasah education. Madrasah education, which meets the needs of Muslim learners, is an essential part of the Philippine educational system. However, a confluence of

factors such as social, technological, economic, environmental and political variables within Filipino communities stand in the way of the effective implementation of Madrasah education. To improve Madrasah education in the Philippines and make it more inclusive and effective, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders must thoroughly understand these aspects.

### **Socio-political Factors in the Implementation of Madrasah Education**

Socio-cultural variables play a major role in the way Madrasah education is implemented in Filipino communities. The Philippines is a multicultural country with a rich cultural fabric that encompasses a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The cultural context plays a vital role in determining the acceptance and accessibility of Madrasah education in Muslim regions like Mindanao (Bacate, 2017). Religious customs, societal norms, and community views on education influence madrasah enrollment and engagement.

Community attitudes towards Madrasah education play a significant role in its success. Studies by Rahman (2017) and Yusof (2019) highlight the importance of community support and positive perceptions in promoting enrollment and participation in Madrasahs. Conversely, negative stereotypes and misconceptions can deter parents from sending their children to Madrasahs, as Abbas (2018) noted.

Meanwhile, the cultural diversity of Mindanao affects Madrasah education in various ways. Research by Salam (2020) explores the adaptation of Madrasah curriculum and practices to align with local customs and traditions, emphasising the importance of cultural sensitivity in enhancing community acceptance and relevance. Moreover, Mindanao's interfaith relations and religious diversity impact perceptions of Madrasah education. Studies by Khan (2018) and Abdul (2020) explore the role of interfaith dialogue and collaboration in fostering understanding and acceptance of Madrasahs among diverse religious communities, contributing to social cohesion and peace-building efforts in the region.

In addition, armed conflict and security concerns in certain areas of Mindanao pose significant challenges to Madrasah education. Research by Hussain (2019) and Ali (2020) discusses the impact of conflict-induced displacement, damage to infrastructure, and trauma on Madrasah students and communities, underscoring the need for humanitarian support and psychosocial interventions.

As a reflection of broader societal attitudes toward Islamic education, deeply rooted cultural beliefs and traditions frequently impact parents' decisions regarding their children's participation in madrasahs (Saeed, 2018). In addition, the difficulties in implementing madrasah education are a result of the historical marginalisation and socio-economic inequality that Muslim communities have endured (Gallardo, 2020). The integration of Madrasahs into the mainstream educational system is impeded by pervasive stereotypes and discrimination against Muslims. To overcome these socio-cultural choking points, it will take teamwork to advance inclusion, religious tolerance, and cultural sensitivity in Filipino culture.

Over time, political objectives, ideologies, and socio-cultural factors have shaped the Philippine government's stance on *Madrasah* education (Ocampo, 2018). The quality, legitimacy, and recognition of Madrasahs within the national education system are strongly

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impacted by policies pertaining to curriculum requirements, budget allocations, teacher training, and accreditation procedures (Gallardo, 2020). The implementation and longevity of Madrasah education efforts are also impacted by changes in intergovernmental relations, political priorities, and government leadership (Bacate, 2017).

Also, diplomatic ties and global political dynamics have an impact on madrasah education in the Philippines. Madrasah development agendas and priorities are shaped by foreign aid, partnerships, and cooperation with Islamic countries, international organisations, and donor agencies (Abbas, 2020). The resources, beliefs, and educational procedures found in madrasahs are impacted by geopolitical concerns, transnational networks, and ideological influences; these factors mirror broader global trends and power dynamics (Ismail, 2019).

In addition, Madrasah education is greatly impacted by political upheaval, armed conflict, and peace-building initiatives in areas with a majority of Muslims, like Mindanao. Ethno-religious conflicts, historical grudges, and territorial disputes have caused population displacement, destroyed school infrastructure, and disruptions to educational operations (Caballero-Anthony, 2019). Madrasahs face difficulties in providing a secure and supportive learning environment due to political instability and security concerns, which has an impact on student enrollment, attendance, and academic achievement (Saeed, 2018).

Government policies significantly influence the regulatory environment and resource allocation for Madrasah education. Almonte (2019) examines the role of government initiatives in promoting Madrasah development and enhancing infrastructure, curriculum, and teacher training. However, restrictive policies and bureaucratic hurdles can also hinder the growth and autonomy of Madrasahs (Ibrahim, 2020).

### **Research Method**

This research employed a comprehensive and integrated approach to delve into the landscape of traditional Madrasah education in the communities surrounding the Ligawasan. The study was designed to unravel the intricate web of factors influencing Madrasah education, evaluate existing policies, and anticipate future scenarios. The methodology incorporated a thoughtful blend of field surveys, desk reviews, focus group discussions. The overarching goal was to provide valuable insights that foster informed decision-making and contribute to policy formulation, with a keen focus on the expected outcomes and impact on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Field Visits;** Field visits and transect walks were done to accessible traditional Madrasah in the communities surrounding the Ligawasan to assess the current state of Madrasah education, including infrastructure, curriculum, and overall educational quality. Informal discussions with the faculty members, stakeholders, and students were made during these visits.

**Desk Review;** A thorough desk review was undertaken to analyse existing literature, reports, and policies related to Madrasah education in Ligawasan. This process established a theoretical foundation, identified gaps in current knowledge, and informed subsequent research phases.

**Key Informant Interviews (KII);** In-depth key informant interviews with two informants per area were conducted to gain insights into local nuances and challenges associated with Madrasah education in Ligawasan. Stakeholders, including education officials, community leaders, and Madrasah administrators were engaged in these interviews.

**Focus Group Discussion;** A focus group discussion was employed to a group of Asatidz, *Madaris* administrators and parents to discuss their experiences, perceptions, opinions and ideas on teaching, managing and running the Traditional Madaris in their areas. Questions pertaining to the social and political factors affecting the implementation of *Madrasah* were asked to the participants. It usually involves a small group of 6 to 12 people.

## Result and Discussion

### 1. Social Factors

Several interconnected social factors influence the landscape of traditional madrasah education in the communities of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. These include the selective implementation of the refined standard madrasah curriculum, the increasing demand for balanced education encompassing both religious and secular subjects, and the troubling rise in drop-out rates, highlighting significant barriers to student retention. Additionally, gender disparities in attendance, language barriers from multilingual instruction, and the vulnerability of madrasahs to extremist ideologies further complicate the educational experience for many learners.

**Table 1.** Level of Agreement of Madaris Administrators and Asatidz on Madrasah Education Social Factors

Statements	Mean	Descriptions
1. Selective implementation of the Refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum	3.65	High
2. Increasing need for balanced education among Muslim communities	4.25	High
3. Increasing drop-out rate/decreasing cohort survival rate in Madrasah	3.25	Moderate
4. Gender disparity in Madrasah attendance	3.55	High
5. Increasing utilization of multilingual as medium of instruction which can create language barriers for the learners	3.73	High
6. Unpredictable vulnerability of Madrasah to violent and extreme ideology.	2.80	Moderate
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.54</b>	<b>High</b>
<i>Legend:</i>		
1.00-1.49- Very Low	2.50-3.49- Moderate	4.50-5.00-Very High
1.50-2.49- Low	3.50-4.49- High	

### Selective implementation of the refined standard Madrasah Curriculum

The Traditional Madrasah system is given prime importance in BARMM, as it preserves Islamic education and traditions. The refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum aims to align Islamic education with national educational standards, which many stakeholders see as a positive step for strengthening the Islamic identity of students fostering both religious



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knowledge and values that are critical for personal development and sustaining the peace-building efforts.

However, in many parts of Maguindanao del Sur, Madaris (plural of Madrasah) face resource shortages, including a lack of qualified teachers, instructional materials, absence of low support from local government units and education offices. There are ongoing efforts to train *Madrasah* teachers (*asatidz*) to become ISAL (Islamic Studies and Arabic Language) teachers, but still majority of the teachers in the Traditional Madaris are not equipped to teach the integrated curriculum. This has led to the uneven implementation of the refined curriculum.

On the other hand, some community members and Traditional Madrasah administrators express frustration with the selective and slow implementation due to the stringent and financially draining accreditation requirement to fully embrace the refined Madrasah Curriculum, which is from being a Traditional Madrasah to becoming a private *Madaris* offering balanced education.

### **Increasing need for balanced education among Muslim communities**

The increasing need for balanced education among Muslim communities resonates deeply within educational stakeholders, parents, and local leaders. The push for a balanced education (integration of Islamic knowledge with the Secular education subjects) reflects the region's evolving educational aspirations to address the challenges of peace-building, development and economic empowerment.

One of Muslim communities' strongest narratives is preserving Islamic values and teachings. *Madrasah* education is highly valued for its role in shaping young Muslims' moral and ethical foundation. Many parents prioritise their children's religious education as a means of ensuring that they maintain a strong Islamic identity. In a recent study by Samid (2022), the education services delivered by the traditional madaris has a high level of satisfaction among the parents. It was reported that students in the traditional madaris grows increasingly acquainted with the centuries-old Islamic ideas and traditions. They are more conscious of performing their faith in the community, which promotes religious tolerance among individuals of all faiths and advocates for moderate Islam.

However, there is growing recognition that exclusive religious education may not fully equip students for the demands of the modern world. The emphasis of balancing Islamic studies with secular subjects such as science, mathematics, and language creates well-rounded individuals who can thrive in diverse environments. The aims of Islamic education is well-aligned with the intentions of the balanced education, that is, "to develop a balanced personality, pleasing to God and to fellow humans, who promote and encourage *ma'ruf* (good) and fight *munkar* (evil)" (Lecture notes of Abdussamii Rasheed, n.d.). The academician suggested that the Islamic schools should adapt the conventional approved subjects into their curricular offerings for the development of the Muslim community and for their schools to become relevant for the future generation.

With the history of conflict in Maguindanao del Sur and across BARMM, it is of great benefit that this balanced education is identified as a critical tool for peace-building and conflict resolution. Balanced education may be viewed as a way to counter extremism by providing young people with religious understanding and critical thinking skills, hopefully producing more informed, tolerant, and peaceful citizens.

### **Increasing drop-out rate/ decreasing cohort survival rate in the Madrasah**

While there is a strong desire for a balanced education, the challenges facing Traditional Madaris have made it difficult for students to complete their studies. The decreasing cohort survival rate in madrasah education in BARMM, especially in Maguindanao del Sur, is shaped by a variety of factors, including economic hardship, dilapidated infrastructures, cultural expectations, and unfavorable learning environments to keep students engaged and motivated.

One of the most common contributors to the decline in the survival rate of students is the poverty and economic struggles in Maguindanao del Sur. Many families rely on their children to contribute to household income, leading students to drop out of madrasah education to work (either in neighboring areas where there are job opportunities or abroad). The meager income that most families have makes it difficult for them to sustain their children's education long-term.

On the other hand, in many areas of Maguindanao del Sur, poverty remains a significant factor contributing to the increasing drop-out rate in madrasah schools. Many students, particularly in Ligawasan areas, come from low-income families prioritising immediate survival over education.

Parents, faced with the harsh realities of providing for their families, sometimes pull their children out of school to help with farming, fishing, or other income-generating activities (Gatchalian, cited by Bacelonia, 2023). For many households, sending children to school, even a madrasah, is seen as a financial strain due to transportation costs, school materials, or lost labor potential. As a result, children from economically vulnerable families are more likely to drop out and discontinue their studies. The 2020 survey (Philippine Statistics Authority's Annual Poverty Indicator) concurs these findings and identified the top reasons for non-attendance in schools as: the high cost of education (21 percent), accessibility of schools (17 percent), and lack of personal interest (16 percent).

Another identified reason for dropping-out is the security situation in parts of BARMM (Save the Children, 2024), including Maguindanao del Sur. Periodic outbreaks of violence and armed conflict between government forces and local insurgent groups, or between clans involved in rido (family feuds), have led to the displacement of communities.

The World Bank (2018) reported that the share of Out of School Youth and Adults (OSYA) among the 16-30 years-old population has been close to 45 percent in BARMM, double the national average and the highest among the regions. Close to half of the children who enrolled in elementary schools drop out before graduation, and the same pattern continues at the JHS level for various reasons. This magnitude of school drop-outs in BARMM has resulted in many youth and adults with limited education, literacy, and skills. Among young

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adults aged 25-30 years, the drop-out rate is 60 percent surpassing those who have successfully completed JHS.

In many cases, students who attend both mainstream schools and madrasah institutions experience a heavy academic workload that can be difficult to manage. This dual burden can be overwhelming, leading to burnout and fatigue. Many students, especially those from low-income families or those with additional responsibilities at home, are unable to maintain the demands of both systems and ultimately drop out of one or both schools.

### **Gender disparity in Madrasah Attendance**

Lower enrollment rates for girls is a persistent issue documented in international, Philippines, and BARMM settings. A study by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2018) found that in many countries, girls are less likely to attend Madrasah than boys due to socio-cultural factors, economic constraints, and concerns about the quality of education. In some contexts, girls may face barriers such as early marriage, household responsibilities, and limited access to safe transportation, further hindering their educational opportunities (Bano, 2019).

A 2021 study by the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) revealed a significantly lower enrollment rate for girls in madaris compared to the national average. This disparity is not attributable to a single cause, but rather a complex interplay of socio-cultural and economic factors.

However, communities in the Ligawasan are setting a different pattern for girls' enrolment rates. Majority of the enrollees to the traditional Madaris are girls, while lower enrollment of girls in the Madrasah is evident in the case of Toril ( or those Islamic schools focusing on producing Qur'an memorisers) only. On the other hand, in the case of the Mudaris or the Asatidz, there are more males than females. Persistent poverty often necessitates female Asatidz, particularly, to prioritise domestic responsibilities or income-generating activities over education. While it is true that there are more girls than boys enrolled in the traditional Madaris, most of those who entered in grade 1 and finish through grade 6, are boys. The prevalence of early marriage and deeply entrenched traditional beliefs about gender roles, which often confine girls to the domestic sphere, continue to hinder their educational settings in traditional Madaris (Mastura, 2022).

### **Increasing utilisation of multilingual as medium of instruction which can create language barriers for the learners**

The increasing utilisation of multilingual instruction, involving languages such as Arabic, Filipino, English, and local dialects like *Maguindanaon* in the BARMM presents both opportunities and challenges. The focus on integrating multilingual education as a medium of instruction is intended to address linguistic diversity and improve inclusivity, but it can also create language barriers for learners, especially in the *Madaris*.

The multilingual system in BARMM, particularly in Maguindanao del Sur, has created an educational environment where language becomes a barrier to social mobility. Many

students in the region are native *Maguindanaon* speakers who are expected to learn Arabic for religious studies, Filipino for communication with the broader Philippine society, and English for global competitiveness. The situation where students are required to switch between multiple languages, sometimes within the same school day can be overwhelming to students. The mental effort required to navigate these different linguistic environments can lead to reduced comprehension and retention of the material. This is often the case for those Traditional *Madaris* accredited as providers of the "balanced education".

BARMM and Maguindanao del Sur teachers face significant challenges in adapting to the multilingual approach to education. Many madrasah teachers are highly proficient in Arabic and Islamic Studies but may lack the necessary training to teach effectively in Filipino or English. This disparity in language proficiency among educators affects the quality of instruction across subjects, particularly in rural areas where teachers have fewer professional development opportunities.

However, balancing the different languages can be a delicate process. Educators and policymakers in BARMM need to address these tensions through a more integrated and supportive multilingual curriculum, especially in the implementation of the balanced education curriculum among the private *Madaris*.

### **Unpredictable vulnerability of Madrasah to drugs, violent conflict and extreme ideology**

One of the more concerning factors in the vulnerability of madrasah schools in BARMM is the lack of standardised teacher training and oversight. Some teachers may adhere to strict, conservative interpretations of Islam that can unintentionally align with extremist ideologies. Extremist groups often exploit this by introducing materials or interpretations of religious texts that promote violence and intolerance, presenting them as legitimate religious doctrine. This is an acknowledged and identified challenge of the traditional *Madaris* in the Ligawasan area. Some of the Madrasah in the area were proactively responding to these concerns through emphasising the value of brotherhood with people of different faith, adhering to peaceful resolutions, explicitly telling the students that killing is against Islamic principles and respecting and acknowledging diversity.

Many *Madaris* in the Maguindanao del Sur have been a witness of the region's history of armed struggle and students, often displaced by conflict or growing up in an atmosphere of violence. This situation may easily sway the young minds into the promises of religious martyrdom or political power, a susceptible environment for propagating extremist ideas and ideologies. On the other hand, *Madaris* administrators, *Asatidz* and community supporters see this as an opportunity to use the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) to sway the young people into the righteous path and inculcate in them the values that are integral to fostering a well-rounded Islamic character while helping them navigate both their spiritual and social lives. These values hopefully will help students resist extremist ideas.

The unpredictability stems from the fact that traditional madaris, originally intended to impart peaceful, moral teachings and uphold Islamic traditions, can be vulnerable to becoming centers for extremism. This risk arises when extremist groups infiltrate and spread divisive and

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violent doctrines. According to a survey, seven out of ten madrasah heads and teachers agree that two primary factors contribute to this vulnerability: proximity to conflict zones and the presence of violent extremist (VE) groups. Additional contributing factors include limited financial support and, to a lesser extent, insufficient government regulatory oversight (cited by 59% of respondents). However, when asked about the vulnerability of their own institutions, most respondents downplayed these risks, except for one critical factor: limited financial support, which 67.2% of respondents considered a significant vulnerability (Institute for Autonomy and Governance). Moreover, the persisting violent conflicts (*Rido* and land conflicts) and drug use and abuse continue to plague the communities where these traditional *Madaris* are situated. Recent reports of *Rido* and land conflicts in Sultan sa Barongis and Pagalungan, alleged drug related conflicts the BARMM areas, including Maguindanao del Sur (Fernandez, 20224, Inquirer Mindanao ; Mindanao Voices) and armed conflicts between the military forces and the factions of separatists group espousing extreme ideologies are pieces of evidence that makes communities in the BARMM areas vulnerable to these violent and extreme ideologies.

**2. Political Factors**

This section analyses the political factors that significantly influence the landscape of madrasah education in the communities surrounding the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), shaping the policies and frameworks that govern these institutions.

**Table 2.** Level of Agreement of Madaris Administrators and Asatidz on Madrasah Education Social Factors

Statements	Mean	Descriptions
1. Increasing efforts of the BARMM on reforming Madrasah Education.	3.90	High
2. Changing political leadership and landscape in the BARMM (e.g. 2025 election/BTA Extension).	3.75	High
3. Introduction of new administrative procedures and regulations that Madrasah may find it challenging to navigate.	3.88	High
4. Absence of Philippine Professional Standards for Madrasah teachers which led to the variations in the quality of teaching.	4.02	High
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.89</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Legend:</b>		
1.00-1.49- Low	2.50-3.49- Moderate	4.50-5.00-Very High
1.50-2.49- Very Low	3.50-4.49- High	

**Increasing efforts of the BARMM on reforming Madrasah Education**

The creation of the Directorate General for Madaris Education (DGME) under the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is a significant policy advancement. This development is crucial for aligning Madaris with mainstream education, focusing on curriculum enhancements, integrating peace concepts from Islamic teachings, capacity

building for teachers, and infrastructure development. Key stakeholders express optimism that these changes will lead to the region's holistic development of Madrasah education (Institute for Autonomy and Governance, 2023). However, traditional Madrasah institutions in the communities surrounding the Ligawasan as perceived by its mudirs/stakeholders remain to be sidelined and at the periphery of this policy implementation.

In July 2024, BARMM marked a milestone by launching the first-ever public Madrasah in the region and the country, located in Barangay Balabaran, Cotabato City. This institution offers a curriculum that blends Tahderiyyah for kindergarten, Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (ISAL), and the DepEd national curriculum to provide a balanced and holistic education. BARMM also continues to support both public and private Madaris with financial subsidies, including a PHP 15,355,000 grant to three Standard Madrasah Curriculum (SMC) implementers in July 2024. Additionally, the Bangsamoro Education Reform and Development Plan (BERDP) 2035, launched in 2022, serves as the guiding document for reforming and integrating Madrasah education into the mainstream education system in BARMM (Sahidala, 2022; Sahidala, 2023).

### **Changing political leadership and landscape in the BARMM (e.g. 2025 election/BTA Extension)**

Concerns remain regarding the slow progress of educational reforms in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), especially as the 2025 elections approach. There is anxiety about how potential changes in political leadership might affect the continuity and support for Madrasah education reforms. A recent survey reveals that the electorate relies heavily on personal networks for political information, suggesting that community engagement will be crucial in shaping future educational policies. The outcomes of the 2025 elections could impact funding, curriculum decisions, and the overall direction of Madrasah education in the region.

The Bangsamoro Education Reform and Development Plan (BERDP) 2035 provides a strategic framework for enhancing Madrasah education. Still, its success is contingent upon political stability and the commitment of new leadership to prioritise these reforms. Community stakeholders advocate for a balanced curriculum incorporating religious and secular subjects. The political landscape, particularly the actions of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) and its leadership, will significantly affect the implementation of these reforms. The involvement and support of the community will be vital in advocating for policies that benefit Madrasah education during this period of potential political transition (Sahidala, 2023).

### **Introduction of new administrative procedures and regulations that Madrasah may find it challenging to navigate**

The participants of the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) from madrasah institutions surrounding the Ligawasan Marsh have highlighted significant challenges in meeting the requirements for accreditation. These challenges stem from a combination of structural, resource-related, and systemic issues that hinder the growth and development of madrasah education in the region. One of the primary concern shared is that Madrasah institutions still

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see the accreditation guidelines and processes as unclear. Many of the *Asatidz* and *Mudirs* expressed their frustration over the requirements they needed to comply before they could access support in the BARMM. They even mentioned that they are confused, resulting in misinterpretations, causing them to struggle to meet the necessary standards. To date, many institutions feel overwhelmed and uncertain about how to navigate the accreditation process effectively.

Moreover, there are considerable resource constraints that affect the ability of madrasah institutions to meet accreditation requirements. Participants pointed out that many madrasahs operate on limited budgets, which affects their capacity to invest on the requirements of accreditation. Another critical issue raised during the FGDs was the insufficient data collection and documentation practices within many madrasah institutions. Accreditation processes often require thorough documentation of educational practices, student performance, and institutional policies. However, participants indicated that many Madrasahs lack the necessary systems in place to collect and maintain this data consistently. This deficiency makes it challenging to demonstrate compliance with accreditation requirements, which can ultimately led to delays in the accreditation process or, worse, denial of accreditation altogether.

In many rural parts of Maguindanao del Sur, *Madaris* are grassroots initiatives established by local religious leaders or community members who want to ensure that children receive Islamic education. In a 2008 study, 71% of the *Madaris* in the Philippines have stated that they want to be integrated, while there are some traditional *Madaris*, which wish to remain traditional and are unwilling to accept the government's push to integrate Islamic education through the Department of Education (Cagape, 2008). FGD participants from numerous *Madaris* in the communities are embracing the government's accreditation system. However, still many are not integrated due to the financial difficulties, bureaucratic administrative procedures and the rigors of processing documentary requirements.

Efforts by the Bangsamoro Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) to improve the quality of education in BARMM have been hindered by the large number of unrecognised Traditional *Madaris* operating independently. Accredited Madrasah, which follow the government-endorsed curriculum, have access to teacher training programs, government funding, and educational resources that allow them to provide a more balanced education, incorporating both Islamic studies and secular subjects. On the other hand, non-accredited traditional Madrasah often lacks these opportunities and may struggle to maintain high educational standards. Without accreditation, these Madrasah are left out of important educational reforms, including teacher training programs and curriculum updates. Based on the interviews and the focus group discussions, the challenge for the MBHTE and other stakeholders is to create pathways and streamline procedures and processes for these traditional *Madaris* in seeking accreditation to ensure that all students in the region benefit from educational improvements.

A recent study on Philippine Madrasah education highlights Madrasah institutions' difficulties in adapting to new educational standards and regulations. Similarly, the study on BARMM's new administrative regulations emphasises that while efforts are made to

institutionalise Madrasah education, the complexity of compliance with these new regulations poses significant challenges. Many Madrasah administrators struggle due to insufficient support, resources, and infrastructure, leading to delays in implementation and unclear compliance requirements (Rahman, 2018; Balayanan & Lumapenet, 2024).

### **Absence of Philippine Professional Standards for Madrasah teachers which led to the variations in the quality of teaching**

The absence of Philippine Professional Standards for Madrasah Teachers in BARMM, particularly in Maguindanao del Sur, has led to lack of standardisation and teaching quality gaps, variations in curriculum delivery, teacher preparedness, and the overall educational experience of students and consistency of educational outcomes. Many stakeholders believe that the introduction of professional standards is essential in improving the quality of madrasah education. It is also a quality assurance mechanism to ensure that students receive a balanced, high-quality education that prepares them for the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous and Disruptive (VUCAD) world.

Efforts have been undertaken to professionalise the teachers in the Madaris through the Qualifying Exam in Arabic Language and Islamic Studies (QEALIS) and aspiring Asatidz enroll in Language Enhancement and Pedagogy (LEaP), a training designed to help madrasah teachers improve their English skills and gain a better understanding of assessment, teaching and lesson planning (Sali & Marasigan 2020:204-205). As a result, several *Mudarris* are now teaching in public schools run by the Philippine government as ISAL (Islamic Studies and Arabic Language) teachers while teaching in the traditional Madaris.

The Bangsamoro Organic Law mandates the construction of Mudarris (Muslim teacher) qualification criteria, and the MBHTE is in charge of establishing the standard, which must be accepted by the Civil Service Commission (CSC)(Samid, 2022). However, as of this time of writing, there is no prescribed licensure examination for *Mudaris* under the regulation of the Professional Regulations Commission (PRC).

In Maguindanao del Sur, the lack of standardisation of teaching practice for Traditional Madrasah teachers has hampered efforts to improve the quality of education. While mainstream public school teachers follow the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), madrasah teachers are left without a comparable set of guidelines to improve their craft. ISAL (Islamic Studies and Arabic Language) teachers in the Ligawasan areas are amenable that without professional development activities for their counterparts in the Traditional *Madaris*, adapting to contemporary teaching methods or enhancing their classroom management skills will remain a challenge in any reformed educational system. Community leaders and Madaris administrators acknowledge that standardised teacher training and continuous professional development is a much needed intervention in delivering quality education in the Traditional *Madaris*.

Using the lens of prophetic pragmatism in analysing the socio-political dimensions of the Madrasah Education Program in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the situation of Madrasah Education in the BARMM requires the analysis of contextual factors that can contribute to the Madrasah Education System in the



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BARMM. The analysis addresses systemic inequities to respond effectively and efficiently to Muslim Educational Needs.

In the BARMM, the Madrasah Education system focuses on teaching Islam as a way of life that encompasses both spiritual and social and political dimensions. The Madrasah Education system generally equips the students with both religious knowledge and practical skills in consonance with the Muslim way of life. The approach in the Madrasah reflects the pragmatic need to ready the learners for the demands of contemporary life while remaining grounded in their Islamic principles and philosophical heritage.

The results complement the theory that explains the significance of collaborative engagements and communal obligation (*Fardul Kifaya*) as part of the Muslim *Ummah* in addressing the socio-political challenges in the Madrasah Educational System. In the BARMM, the Madrasah Education Program is also an institution that mobilises and participates in community building. In addition, the leadership at the regional and local government as well as the school leadership of the *Mudirs* is crucial in fostering inclusivity, peace, and development. The analysis acknowledges the need for educational reform that responds to the social disparities faced by Madrasahs; Madrasah leaders and educators act as catalysts for change, embodying the passion and commitment central to prophetic pragmatism.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the implementation of Madrasah education in the communities surrounding Ligawasan is significantly influenced by a complex interplay of social and political factors. Socially, the selective implementation of the Refined Standard Madrasah Curriculum (RSMC), the increasing need for a balanced education, rising drop-out rates, gender disparities, the use of multilingual instruction and the vulnerability to drugs, violent conflicts and extreme ideas pose challenges. Politically, the efforts of the BARMM in reforming Madrasah education, changing political landscapes, introducing new administrative procedures, and the absence of standardised teacher qualifications further complicate the situation. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and community members, to ensure the quality, accessibility, and relevance of Madrasah education in the region.

The interplay between social and political factors significantly influences the transformation of Madrasah education. Community demand for quality education can pressure policymakers to allocate more resources and implement reforms. Effective policy implementation can improve the quality and accessibility of Madrasah education, empower students, and lead to social and economic development. Increased social awareness and advocacy can influence policymakers to prioritise Madrasah education, while a stable political environment can facilitate long-term educational planning and implementation. By mutually reinforcing each other, these factors can drive positive change and address Madrasah institutions' challenges.

## **Recommendation**

Based on the analysis of the social and political factors influencing Madrasah education, the following recommendations can be considered to drive positive change:

1. An inter-agency coordinating body may be created to facilitate conversations on policy gaps and harmonise policy implementation efforts on Madrasah Education in the Philippines.
2. A standardised curriculum should be developed for madaris at all levels (elementary, *Thanawi*, and *Kulliyah*) to ensure consistency and improve the quality of learning outcomes.
3. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Ministry on Basic, Higher and Technical Education (MBHTE), Professional Regulations Commission (PRC), and Civil Service Commission (CSC) should create a standardised framework for the professionalisation of Mudarris (teachers), which should include clear qualifications, certification processes, and career development pathways.
4. The Parents-Teachers Association in every Madrasah should be strengthened to facilitate socialised *Baitul-Mal* (a community fund for supporting the poor, orphans, and widows) and Community-Managed Savings Associations aligned with Islamic finance principles.
5. The Mindanao State University System can consider establishing a Center for Madrasah Education Programs and Policies and advocate for a stronger recognition of Madrasah education within the broader educational policies in the Philippines.

## **Author contributions**

All authors were involved in concept, design, and collection of data, interpretation, writing, and critically revising the article. All authors approve final version of the article.

## **Funding**

The authors received no financial support from the Development Academy of the Philippines.

## **Declaration of interest**

Authors declare no competing interest.

## **Data availability**

Data generated or analysed during this study are available from the authors on request.

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