

PRESERVING ISLAMIC IDENTITY THROUGH MADRASAH EDUCATION AMONG MUSLIM YOUTH IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Islamic Studies at the
Faculty of Islamic Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of**

Master's Degree (M.A.)



by:

Rodsma L. Mangindalat

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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the significance of madrasah education in preserving the Islamic identity of Muslim youth in the southern Philippines, an area facing numerous challenges, including social marginalization, inadequate government support, and the growing influence of secular influences. In this context, madrasahs are not just institutions where young Muslims learn religious knowledge; they are also vital spaces where they develop a strong sense of religious identity. The main goal of the study is to understand the role of madrasah education in shaping the religious awareness, orientation, and daily lives of young Muslims, especially as a religious minority. The study builds on the theoretical insights of Masquelier and Soares (2016) in *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*, particularly the idea of a self-aware generation of Muslim youth influenced by both global and local forces. Their concept highlights how Muslim youth actively engage in self-fashioning, constructing and expressing their religious identity as a response to social challenges. This research employs a qualitative design, collecting data through virtual interviews and focus group discussions with students, teachers (ustadz), and local stakeholders involved in madrasah education. The findings show that madrasahs play a key role in shaping Islamic identity by teaching core beliefs, moral discipline, and religious obligations. They also offer a supportive environment where young Muslims develop a sense of belonging, purpose, and confidence in living according to Islamic values. However, the study also found that madrasahs still face certain issues, including limited resources, low integration with the national education system, and negative stereotypes in the wider society. Despite these challenges, madrasahs are highly valued by the community and are still adapting to meet the needs of the younger generation. This research contributes to the broader discussion on Islamic education in Southeast Asia, especially among minority Muslims, and highlights that madrasah systems should be community-based while remaining flexible to the demands of the modern world.

Keywords: Islamic identity, madrasah education, Muslim youth, religious formation, Southern Philippines

ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة أهمية التعليم في المدارس الإسلامية (المدارس الشرعية/المدارس الدينية) في الحفاظ على الهوية الإسلامية للشباب المسلم في جنوب الفلبين، وهي منطقة تواجه العديد من التحديات، بما في ذلك التهميش الاجتماعي، وضعف الدعم الحكومي، وتأثير التيارات العلمانية المتزايدة. وفي هذا السياق، لا تُعد المدارس الشرعية مجرد مؤسسات يتعلم فيها الشباب المسلم العلوم الدينية، بل هي أيضاً فضاءات حيوية يطوّرون فيها إحساساً قوياً بالهوية الدينية. الهدف الرئيس من هذه الدراسة هو فهم دور التعليم في المدارس الشرعية في تشكيل الوعي الديني، والتوجهات، والحياة اليومية للشباب المسلم، خاصة وهم يعيشون كأقلية دينية. وتُستند الدراسة إلى الإسهامات النظرية لماسكولير وسواريس (2016) في كتابهما الشباب المسلم وجبل ما بعد 11 سبتمبر، ولا سيما فكرة الجيل الواعي من الشباب المسلم الذي يتأثر بالقوى العالمية والمحلية على حد سواء. وتشير هذه الفكرة إلى أن الشباب المسلم يشاركون بفاعلية في صياغة ذواتهم، وبناء هويتهم الدينية والتعبير عنها استجابة للتحديات الاجتماعية. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على تصميم بحثي نوعي، من خلال جمع البيانات عبر مقابلات افتراضية ومجموعات نقاش مركزة مع الطلاب، والمدرسين (الأساتذة/الأئمة)، وأصحاب المصلحة المحليين المشاركين في التعليم بالمدارس الشرعية. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن المدارس الشرعية تلعب دوراً محورياً في تشكيل الهوية الإسلامية من خلال تعليم العقائد الأساسية، والانضباط الأخلاقي، والواجبات الدينية. كما توفر بيئة داعمة يكتسب فيها الشباب المسلم شعوراً بالانتماء والغاية والثقة في العيش وفق القيم الإسلامية. ومع ذلك، وجدت الدراسة أيضاً أن المدارس الشرعية ما زالت تواجه بعض المشكلات، بما في ذلك محدودية الموارد، وضعف الاندماج مع النظام التعليمي الوطني، والصور النمطية السلبية في المجتمع الأوسع. وعلى الرغم من هذه التحديات، فإن المجتمع يقدر المدارس الشرعية تقديراً عالياً، وهي لا تزال تتكيف لتلبية احتياجات الجيل الأصغر. وتسهم هذه الدراسة في النقاش الأوسع حول التعليم الإسلامي في جنوب شرق آسيا، وخاصةً بين المسلمين الأقلية، وتؤكد أن نظام المدارس الشرعية ينبغي أن يكون قائماً على المجتمع المحلي مع الحفاظ على المرونة لمواكبة متطلبات العصر الحديث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية الإسلامية، التعليم الشرعي، الشباب المسلم، التكوين الديني، جنوب الفلبين

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ABBREVIATIONS DIRECTORY

ALIVE	: <i>Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education</i>
BARMM	: <i>Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao</i>
DepEd	: <i>Department of Education</i>
DGME	: <i>Directorate General for Madaris Education</i>
MEP	: <i>Madrasah Education Program</i>
MBHTE	: <i>Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education</i>
MNLF	: <i>Moro National Liberation Front</i>
NGO	: <i>Non-Governmental Organization</i>
PSA	: <i>Philippine Statistics Authority</i>
UNESCO	: <i>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</i>

DEFINITION OF TERMS

‘Adat	: Traditional customs and social practices observed by a community, often passed down through generations.
Akhlāq	: (pl. of Khulq) It refers to moral character or disposition. In Islamic thought, it denotes the internal traits that guide ethical behavior, shaped through habit, discipline, and spiritual refinement.
Aqīdah	: The Islamic term for faith or creed; it refers to the core beliefs that a Muslim holds.
Asatidz	: Plural of ustadz; refers to Islamic teachers or scholars who provide religious instruction and guidance.
Da’wah	: The act of inviting or calling people to understand and practice Islam.
Fiqh	: Islamic jurisprudence; the understanding and application of Shari’ah in daily life.
Guru	: Honorific designation of classical Islamic scholars in the Philippine context.
Hafidz	: A person who has memorized the entire Qur’an.
Halaqat	: Study circles or gatherings for learning and discussing Islamic knowledge, usually held in mosques or informal settings.
Ibtida	: Refers to the elementary or beginner level of Islamic education.
Kulliyah	: Collegiate level of an Islamic school.
Madrasah	: (pl. Madaris: An Islamic institution that offers Arabic and Islamic knowledge.
Maktab	: Traditional model of Islamic schooling in the Philippines, particularly for memorizing the Qur’an.
Moro	: A Muslim inhabitant of the Philippines.
Mutawassit	: A term referring to the intermediate or middle level of Islamic education in a madrasah system.
Pandita	: Traditional model of Islamic schooling in the Philippines, particularly held in the house of the guru.
Qur’ān	: The holy book of Islam, believed to be the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).
Shari’ah	: Islamic law derived from the Qur’an and Sunnah, guiding all aspects of a Muslim’s life.
Sultan	: A traditional Muslim ruler or leader, often with both political and symbolic authority in a specific region.
Tafsīr	: The interpretation and explanation of the meanings of the Qur’an
Qur’an Tarbiyyah	: Islamic upbringing and education focused on moral and spiritual development.
Thanawī	: The secondary or advanced level of Islamic education in the madrasah system.
‘Ulama	: Islamic scholars recognized for their knowledge of religious sciences.
Hadīth	: The recorded sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), used as a source of Islamic guidance alongside the Qur’an.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the Southern Philippines, Islam serves as the foundation of Moro cultural identity, shaping both communal belonging and political aspirations. Empirical studies in Mindanao indicate that Muslim Filipinos have a stronger sense of religious identity as Muslims than as a particular ethnolinguistic group. With the long history of tribal distinctions and warfare, Islamic identity becomes a strong unifying agent among various Moro groups in one of the most fragmented regions in the world. This common religious awareness is the basis of the Bangsamoro identity, which was defined by most of the respondents in the study as a combination of Mindanao, Islam, and peace/unity. In this sense, Moro is not just an ethnic label but a lived membership of a faith-based community, which is based upon shared religious beliefs, historical conflicts, and the desire for self-determination.¹

Historically, Islam has served as the moral and institutional framework for social life in Mindanao. The teachings of Islam have served as a basis for communal norms, leadership frameworks, and everyday life for Muslim Filipinos for centuries. The Philippine Muslim national identity, eventually codified in the term “Moro,” has been shaped by Islam and was further expounded through the experience of resistance against Western colonialism. The legacy of resistance based on religious differences continues to affirm Islamic identity as cultural, political, and spiritual.²

According to the 2020 Philippine Statistics Authority, the percentage of Muslims in the Philippine population was approximately 6.4% compared to 78.85% Roman Catholic. The concentration of Filipino Muslims can be found in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), which includes Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Sur and Norte, Sulu, Basilan, and Tawi-Tawi, as well as the cities of Marawi and Cotabato. The Muslim population can also be found in parts of Luzon and the Visayas, which often includes urban areas and populated coastal regions.³

¹ Ma. Elizabeth J. Macapagal et al., “The Unifying and Divisive Effects of Social Identities: Religious and Ethnopolitical Identities Among Mindanao Muslims in the Philippines,” *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology* 12 (January 2018): e28, <https://doi.org/10.1017/prp.2018.16>.

² “The History of the Muslim in the Philippines,” *National Commission for Culture and the Arts*, n.d., accessed July 7, 2025, <https://ncca.gov.ph/about-ncca-3/subcommissions/subcommission-on-cultural-communities-and-traditional-arts-sccta/central-cultural-communities/the-history-of-the-muslim-in-the-philippines/>.

³ “Philippine Statistics Authority | Republic of the Philippines,” accessed January 9, 2025,

Collectively, these Muslim communities are referred to as the Bangsamoro people, a combination of the Malay word *bangsa* (meaning "nation") and *Moro*, which was a name used by Spanish colonialists to denote Muslims both on the Iberian Peninsula and in Mindanao. Although the name had a derogatory meaning, it was reclaimed in the 1970s when the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), led by Nur Misuari, adopted it as a collective identity and a symbol of resistance. The Bangsamoro consist of several ethnolinguistic groups who, despite their cultural and linguistic are unified through their shared adherence to Sunni Islam, and this history and collective aspiration continue to inform their culture and identity through increasing significant religious institutions such as the madrasah, which is vital for the retention of Islamic values and identity in the Muslim youth of the region.⁴

This identity is sustained through daily religious practices, communal rituals, and growing state-sponsored programs. Muslim communities in Mindanao perform the five daily prayers, observe Ramadan (the month of fasting), and celebrate Islamic holidays, which are now formally recognized by the Government of the Philippines. The Government has implemented public schemes such as the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) program to meet the religious needs of Muslim learners, which enables what they describe as “equal education,” one that recognizes the cultural dignity of the Muslim identity and society. It is also widely accepted that Islamic instruction takes place in madrasahs, where children learn Qur’anic Arabic, community ethics, and Islamic values and laws. Together, these religious educational spaces, alongside traditional authority figures such as sultans and datus, ensure that maratabat (honor) and customary or traditional laws are also respected, resulting in a disruption of the traditional religion and its merging with indigenous cultural frameworks.⁵

In contemporary times, this identity remains a source of dignity and resistance for many. As Milligan stated about the Mindanao teachers, "to claim an Islamic identity is both to assert one's dignity and to resist those forces who would take away that dignity. Islamic identity is not simply a private faith for these communities, but a public worldview that is reinforced by institutions such as sultanates, madrasahs, and communal

<https://psa.gov.ph/>.

⁴ Lakan Sumulong, “A Christian Understanding of the Moro Struggle in Mindanao,” *PeaceBuilders Community, Inc.*, January 12, 2016, <https://peacebuilderscommunity.org/2016/01/understanding-the-moro-struggle-in-mindanao/>.

⁵ Marlon Pontino Guleng et al., “Issues on Islamic Education in the Philippines: Isu-Isu Pendidikan Islam Di Filipina,” *Al-Irsyad: Journal of Islamic and Contemporary Issues* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.53840/alirsyad.v2i1.22>.

adat (custom).⁶In other words, Islam is not merely a private faith for these communities but a public worldview, reinforced by institutions like sultanates, madrasahs, and communal *adat* (custom).⁷

While these traditional organizations have historically provided Muslim people with an Islamic identity, new cultural forces are starting to transform the social environment. The Islamic identity of Muslim youth is increasingly under pressure due to modern globalization, secular schooling, and consumer cultural practices, thus providing new complexities for young Muslims to pursue. These global forces not only reshape cultural norms but also disrupt traditional frameworks of religious socialization. As a result, Muslim youth often find themselves caught between the moral foundations of their Islamic upbringing and the secular, individualistic values promoted by dominant global currents. Husein et al. (2022) warn, "modern globalization with the spread of Western culture and values threatens the Islamic identity of Muslim youth, making them engage with alien culture and abandoning the Islamic tradition."⁸ This depreciation of Islamic identity is more than a hypothetical or theoretical notion. Every day, we see young Muslims changing their lifestyles, becoming less consistent in their religious practice, and gradually losing their connection to Islamic values.

Muslim youth might contend with peer pressure, secularism, and materialism that weaken traditional commitments to religion. Globalization introduces new ideas and behaviors that may contradict local Muslim norms and elicit confusion in terms of identity. As one report reveals, Muslim children face threats of assimilation and cultural disconnection, which means that Islamic values must function as essential anchors to create and sustain the faith of young Muslims.⁹

Today, Muslim youth in Mindanao live in a world shaped by social networks, global fashion trends, and changing cultural paradigms. For many Muslim youths, they have become increasingly engaged on social media outlets like Facebook, notably in light of incidents like the Marawi Siege, to raise awareness on hate and to promote peace. Unfortunately, it also means numerous serious dilemmas are posed to many Muslim youths today. More specifically, Muslim youth are situated at the intersection of the

⁶ Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, *Islamic Identity, Postcoloniality, and Educational Policy: Schooling and Ethno-Religious Conflict in the Southern Philippines*, second edition, Islam in Southeast Asia Series (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

⁷ "The History of the Muslim in the Philippines."

⁸ Saddam Husein et al., "Enhancing the Development of Students' Islamic Identity in Islamic Higher Education," *Progresiva: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam* 11, no. 02 (2022): 87–103, <https://doi.org/10.22219/progresiva.v11i02.23094>.

⁹ Shahbaz Gaya and Nadzrah Ahmad, "The Concept of Islamic Identity and Its Importance for Muslim Youth," *Al-Daulah: Jurnal Hukum Pidana Dan Ketatanegaraan* 13, no. 1 (2024): 34–49, <https://doi.org/10.24252/al-daulah.v13i1.46879>.

values of the religion they are taught at home or in the madrasah, and the secular lifestyles that are promoted in pop culture, school, or in the mainstream media. This leads to confusion and tensions for Muslim youth who, at times, see their Islamic teachings and values as conflicting with peer norms, fashion, and trends, or liberal values regarding relationships and definitions of success.¹⁰

In addressing these challenges, families and communities have placed greater emphasis on madrasah education, not only as a religious duty but as a means of maintaining their Islamic identity in the context of global change. Madrasahs, increasingly seen as safe spaces where young Muslims can deepen their faith, develop moral discipline, and stay anchored to their religious heritage, are critical in establishing resilience. In the face of growing global influences, these institutions play a vital role in shaping resilient Muslim identities in the Southern Philippines.

Many Muslim families enroll their children in madrasahs to reinforce their Islamic identity as they receive formal schooling. This institution provides instruction in Arabic, Qur'an recitation, and Islamic values and beliefs, and helps develop moral foundations and a sense of religious belonging. One study indicates that madrasahs are highly valued in the community for fostering moderate Islamic identity and civic engagement. Educators are beginning to advocate for a balanced curriculum that includes secular subjects to prepare youth for the modern world while preserving their religious faith.¹¹

Islamic schools are commonly established and funded by families and local communities in most areas of the Philippines, particularly underserved Muslim communities. Almost 60 percent of the madrasahs are founded by individuals or community-based organizations and not the government. These institutions also have a long history of trust because they are perceived to maintain religious values and cultural continuity within a society that is affected by secular change. To most parents, it is not merely education that makes them send their children to these schools, but rather the protection of their faith and identity in the changing national landscape.¹²

The educational reality of Muslim communities in the Philippines has been historically determined through a process of marginalization. Beginning in the early-20th

¹⁰ Primitivo Cabanes Ragandang, "Social Media and Youth Peacebuilding Agency: A Case from Muslim Mindanao," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 15, no. 3 (2020): 348–61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1542316620957572>.

¹¹ Esmaida Andang-Alaiden et al., "Analysis of the Socio-Political Dimension of Madrasah Education Program in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao," *Pancasila International Journal of Applied Social Science* 3, no. 01 (2025): 01, <https://doi.org/10.59653/pancasila.v3i01.1379>.

¹² Amina Samid, "Filipinler'de İslami Eğitim ve Medrese Okullarının Gelişimi," *International Journal of Political Studies*, ahead of print, August 31, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.25272/icps.1139650>.

century, the region of the Sulu Archipelago and Mindanao has been politically and culturally dominated by a Christian-majority state, often viewed as an "internal colony" rather than an equal part of the nation. Public education systems established during the American colonial period and perpetuated by the postcolonial state often functioned to impose a singular national identity. In practice, the role of these public education systems frequently neglected or obliterated the cultural and religious uniqueness of Muslim learners, who were subsequently isolated and disenfranchised. Nevertheless, many Muslim families and educators have continued to believe in the potential of education, not only as a means of upward mobility but also as a possible path toward peace, dignity, and justice. This tension between education as a tool of assimilation and a space for cultural survival continues to shape the experiences of Muslim youth in the country today.¹³

Madrasahs have also been important in maintaining cultural identity and communal independence, historically, when there was outside pressure. This tradition was threatened during the colonial era. With American rule came the introduction of a secular, Western form of the education system that encouraged an English language curriculum that generally overlooked or downplayed local cultures and indigenous systems of knowledge. Though not directly targeted at Islamic schools, educational reforms of this kind led to the degradation of the traditional madrasahs and redefined the overall learning conditions of Muslim communities.¹⁴ It has been a hard situation in the postcolonial era. The specific needs of Muslim students have often been ignored by national education policies, traditional Islamic schooling has been marginalized, and community-based education systems have been undermined.

In the postcolonial era, the situation has remained difficult. National education policies have frequently overlooked the distinct needs of Muslim learners and have sidelined traditional Islamic schooling, weakened community-led education systems, and affected how Islamic education is perceived and integrated in the Southern Philippines.¹⁵

Regardless of this marginalization, education has remained a means of upward mobility, dignity, and peace among many Muslim families and educators. However, this tension between education as an instrument of assimilation and a place of cultural survival has been a hallmark of the Muslim educational experience in our times as well¹⁶.

Throughout their complex history, Muslim communities in Mindanao have actively

¹³ Milligan, *Islamic Identity, Postcoloniality, and Educational Policy*.

¹⁴ Renato Constantino, *The Miseducation of the Filipino*, n.d.

¹⁵ Milligan, *Islamic Identity, Postcoloniality, and Educational Policy*.

¹⁶ Abdul Haiy Abdul Sali, "Sociological Understanding of Muslim Education in Multicultural Philippines," *Dinamika Ilmu* 23, no. 1 (2023): 105–22, <https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v23i1.6255>.

preserved their educational traditions through private madrasahs and community-based religious institutions. Far from being limited to religious instruction, these schools have become vital cultural spaces where Islamic identity is nurtured and sustained. This study argues that madrasahs in the Southern Philippines play a crucial role in helping Muslim youth navigate the pressures of secularization, globalization, and historical marginalization by reinforcing core Islamic values and offering a sense of belonging. While many madrasahs now incorporate secular subjects to remain relevant in a modern society, they continue to uphold their religious foundations. Despite ongoing efforts at reform and integration, these institutions often lack adequate support. Yet little is known about how they shape identity today, or how students, parents, and teachers perceive their role in a pluralist context. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining madrasahs as spaces of identity formation, resilience, and continuity for young Filipino Muslims.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Madrasah and/or Islamic Education and Identity

Islamic education in the Philippines, particularly in the Southern areas of the country, represents a vital but largely unexplored area within the broader discussions of madrasah education and Islamic identity construction. Islamic religious schools have played a fundamental role for Muslim Filipinos since their introduction by the sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao during the 14th century.¹⁷ However, the educational configuration was interrupted by colonialism, especially Spanish Catholicism and American secularism, through the alteration of the madrasah and the division of education into religious and state schools. (McKenna, 1998).¹⁸

Despite being marginalized, madrasahs have continued to play an essential role in the lives of Muslim communities in the Philippines' Mindanao. Today, there are many forms of Islamic schools, from traditional community-based madrasahs to formal private Islamic schools to integrated government-madrasah programs. The 2004 introduction of the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) and the ALIVE (Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education) curriculum by the Philippine Department of Education was a significant milestone in achieving recognition and reform (DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004). Additionally, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was established in May 2019, consisting of an institutionalization of Islamic Education in the

¹⁷ Cesar Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, 1999 ed (Univ. of the Philippines Pr, 1999).

¹⁸ Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*, Comparative Studies on Muslim Societies 26 (University of California Press, 1998).

regional public school system through care.¹⁹

Nonetheless, challenges remain. Several studies highlight that quality madrasah education is under threat from unmet expectations of facilities provided to madrasah students, a lack of training for teachers, and a lack of clarity on how to implement and/or curate a curriculum.²⁰ Madrasah students often have to navigate social stigma and misrepresentation tied to their madrasah identity, potentially limiting their access to education and the development of identity.²¹ These concerns are compounded for communities outside of the Bangsamoro region, where Muslims are a minority, and challenges are further amplified for diasporic communities. Although initiatives have been developed or implemented, there are still few empirical studies indicating how Islamic education has provided an avenue for a fluid development of identity in the everyday lives of youth and educators.²²

The Philippines case, if compared to other parts of Southeast Asia, where Islamic education has developed and integrated more consistently. In Indonesia and Malaysia, Islamic schools, which are commonly called madrasahs and pesantrens, have become fully part of the national education systems, with changes in religious schooling to accommodate modern education. Hefner notes that Islamic schools provide secular education in subjects like science and mathematics, while continuing to base the curriculum and educational practice on a religious foundation.²³ Reforms in education in these countries are driven by both government policy and by internal Muslim community reforms that aim to make religious schools more relevant to changing environments.²⁴

In minority contexts such as Singapore and southern Thailand, madrasahs serve as educational institutions and mechanisms of cultural preservation. Mokhtar (2010) states that Singaporean madrasahs begin to incorporate English-language instruction, with many schools also integrating science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) into

¹⁹ *Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)*, December 29, 2021, <https://bangsamoro.gov.ph/2021/>.

²⁰ Salma Butig Redocto and Gideon Sindad Sumayo, "The Teaching-Learning Process in Madrasah Multigrade Classes During the Pandemic: A Phenomenological Investigation," *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 16, no. 1 (2024): 14–26, <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v16i1.5110>.

²¹ Khadiguia Ontok-Balah, *Exploring Muslim College Students' Experiences: Implications for Appropriate Integration of Secular and Madrasah Education for Academic Achievement and Personal Development*, Zenodo, June 12, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.8027527>.

²² Redocto and Sumayo, "The Teaching-Learning Process in Madrasah Multigrade Classes During the Pandemic."

²³ Robert W. Hefner, ed., *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824832803.001.0001>.

²⁴ Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims*.

the curriculum, satisfying national expectations while still providing for Muslims' religious identity.²⁵

Similarly, Wekke et al. (2019) indicated that madrasah education in Thailand's Pattani region stood against their political marginalization and drew on local Malay-Muslim identity, fostering Malay culture and traditions through education. Dominant Islamic schooling in Southeast Asia shows how traditional and contemporary approaches to state-regulated schooling can be managed.²⁶

Globally, Islamic education embodies continuity and transformation. Historically, madrasahs were religious learning institutions focusing on Qur'anic memorization, Hadith studies, and classical Arabic.²⁷ Today, they are pressured to reform, in part due to criticism of rote learning and lack of critical engagement.²⁸ Nevertheless, some, like Moosa (2015), claim that these methods of learning remain meaningful, especially when combined with reflective learning and moral formation.²⁹

Education in many Muslim-majority countries has sought to bring together secular and religious learning. In Bangladesh, for example, Aliya madrasahs seek to weave more science and mathematics into Islamic education to equip students for both spiritual living and the labor market.³⁰ Curriculum reforms in India and Pakistan tend to focus on teacher training and recognition for quality and public trust. In general, Islamic schools are intimately connected to their respective communities and represent their collective religious identity (Basheer, 2016).³¹

Islamic schools within the West provide an interesting comparative viewpoint to understand the functioning of education in establishing identity among minority Muslim groups, specifically. In cases like the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany, Islamic schools have emerged predominantly to safeguard religious values in

²⁵ Intan Azura Mokhtar, "Madrasahs in Singapore: Bridging between Their Roles, Relevance and Resources," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2010): 111–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602001003650663>.

²⁶ Ismail Suardi Wekke, *Madrasah in Muslim Minority: A Study on Islamic Education West Papua*, Unpublished, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.30839.78242>.

²⁷ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton University Press, 2002).

²⁸ UNESCO, *Key Elements of Madrasa Education in Selected Countries*, September 2, 2024, https://articles.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/09/02.Madrasa_Education_in_selected_countries.PDF.

²⁹ Ebrahim Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474401753>.

³⁰ M Mahmudhassan and Muhammad Abuzar, "Developing Religious Identity: Assessing the Effects of Aliya Madrasahs on Muslim Students in Bangladesh," *Solo Universal Journal of Islamic Education and Multiculturalism* 2, no. 01 (2024): 49–60, <https://doi.org/10.61455/sujjem.v2i01.135>.

³¹ K. Mohammed Basheer, *Quality Enhancement in Madrasa Education: An Exploratory Study* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

secular societies. Shakeel (2018), in a systematic review of 81 studies, concluded that Islamic schools often exceeded public schools in nurturing moral discipline, academic achievement, and student welfare.³²

Spiegler et al. (2019) noted that Muslim students in German Islamic schools who had achieved a "dual identity" - strong in their faith and national citizenship - experienced improved psychological well-being.³³ Thijs et al. (2018) also showed that very positive teacher-student relationships enhanced the self-esteem and nationality of pupils in these schools.³⁴ According to Yağdı (2023), in Austria, Islamic educators purposefully built civic topics such as human rights compatibly with virtue and social justice into their teaching curriculum.³⁵

The findings challenge the idea of social isolation practices being promoted by Islamic schools. Rather, they suggest that Islamic education can produce students who are religious and civically engaged if supported in the Southeast Asian context. This is relevant to the Philippine context, where madrasahs long to fulfill their role in maintaining a sense of religious identity while preparing Muslim youth to participate fully in society.

1.2.2 Muslim Youth

Scholars have increasingly focused on how Muslim youth seem to be more religious in contemporary society. Often at odds with long-standing theories of secularization predicting the decline of religion in modern life, studies of people across a range of Western and non-Western experiences suggest a dynamic return to and re- engagement with Islam for many youths. Global scholarship seems to convey that religion among Muslim youth is not simply inherited, but often actively chosen and articulated. Lori Peek (2005), in her work with Muslim American students, names three stages of identity: "ascribed," "chosen," and "declared," to articulate how young people move from subscribing to an inherited religious affiliation to consciously and publicly affirming their faith. This dynamic process is particularly evident after incidents such as 9/11, where discrimination and socially exclusionary events created the conditions for

³² M. Danish Shakeel, "Islamic Schooling in the Cultural West: A Systematic Review of the Issues Concerning School Choice," *Religions* 9, no. 12 (2018): 392, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9120392>.

³³ Olivia Spiegler et al., "Dual Identity Development and Adjustment in Muslim Minority Adolescents," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 48, no. 10 (2019): 1924–37, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-01117-9>.

³⁴ Jochem Thijs et al., "Self-Esteem and National Identification in Times of Islamophobia: A Study Among Islamic School Children in The Netherlands," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 47, no. 12 (2018): 2521–34, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-018-0906-6>.

³⁵ Şenol Yağdı, "Islamic Religious Education and Citizenship Education: An Empirical Study of Teachers' Perspectives in Austria," *Religions* 16, no. 4 (2025): 502, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16040502>.

youth to feel compelled to engage with their religion more seriously as a way to resist exclusion and to further assert their identities.³⁶

This peculiar notion of religious identity is also evident in European ethnographic contexts; Islamophobia has also, ironically, increased religious observance. Dunne and Durrani (2014) show that youth in the UK develop religious identities partly in response to being labeled or excluded. Rather than abandoning their faith, they often reaffirm it. This phenomenon is situated within a wider set of theories concerning identity, where faith is a central mechanism of empowerment, identity-making, and self-definition in response to hardship.³⁷

Although earlier research emphasized binary piety versus secularism views of potential inclusion in the concept of youth religiosity, much of the literature published in recent years underscores the hybrid character of youth religiosity. Schielke's (2010) research critiques reductive understandings of religious life that are either about moral discipline or dogma. He argues young Muslims are placed on a continuum of belief and acceptability that is often entangled in ambiguity, doubt, and contradiction. This level of understanding characterizes religion as an experience lived and lived through an emotional lens, and as was noted before, shaped as much by introspective reflection and contextual evidence as by doctrine.³⁸

Soares and Osella (2009) elaborate on this idea by discussing "vernacular modernities," in which Islam and modernity do not operate in opposition. Typical of Muslim youth, they regularly "adapt" contemporary media, cultural artifacts, and practices, including tools, fashion, and even language, that reflect contemporary Islamic values in a way that is relevant to their contemporary contexts. This intersectionality of modest adaptation demonstrates the agency of practice relative to tradition³⁹.

Additionally, digital platforms have taken a central role in determining how Muslim youth learn and understand their faith. Research conducted by Zaid et al. (2022) illustrates ways that social media influencers incorporate Islamic ethical forms with lifestyle content, with many appealing to younger audiences through authenticity and relatable content. Importantly, social media influencers often operate outside traditional

³⁶ Lori Peek, "Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity," *Sociology of Religion* 66, no. 3 (2005): 215, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4153097>.

³⁷ Máiréad Dunne et al., *Troubling Muslim Youth Identities* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-31279-2>.

³⁸ Samuli Schielke, "Being Good in Ramadan: Ambivalence, Fragmentation, and the Moral Self in the Lives of Young Egyptians," in *Islam, Politics, Anthropology 2* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

³⁹ Benjamin F. Soares and Filippo Osella, "Islam, Politics, Anthropology," in *Islam, Politics, Anthropology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

clerical authority and utilize their narratives and experiences.⁴⁰

Similarly, Tryneses and Synnes (2021) use Goffman's frontstage/backstage behaviors to show how Muslim youth in Norway manage their identities; they create their religiosity online. The authors illustrate that young individuals may purposely not post anything blatantly religious on a public platform because of concerns of being excluded; however, they express their religious beliefs in very raw and idiosyncratic ways in private spaces. They show how internet spaces can live and limit religious self-presenting.⁴¹

The peer networks also influence religiosity. French et al. conducted a study of Indonesian adolescents and found that religiously committed friends were a great predictor of increasing personal piety over time. This brings out the aspect that faith identity is socially constructed, which is backed up by relationships and group norms.⁴²

In Southeast Asia, Islam is deeply embedded in national cultures, and Muslim youth religiosity often reflects this. In Malaysia, significant state-led Islamization has made religious education institutionalized and Islamic identity nearly indistinguishable from national identity. This has resulted, Liow (2011) suggests, in Malaysian youth making sense of Islam not simply through religious classes but also through state-run narratives presenting piety as a contingent part of patriotism.⁴³

The case of Indonesia is more decentralized. The research by Sakai and Fauzia (2013) describes the transition of Indonesian Muslim youth towards sociocultural Islamism as opposed to formal political Islam. In this case, youths have adopted Islam in informal religious study groups (*pengajian*), online *da'wah*, and individual moral initiatives as opposed to party membership. This is an indication of a shift towards ordinary, relational manifestations of faith based on moral self-discipline.⁴⁴

The research on Islamic education and identity among the Muslim youth has increased significantly, particularly in the context of diaspora and minorities in Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia. Many studies have noted that Islamic education not

⁴⁰ Bouziane Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022): 335, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040335>.

⁴¹ Irene Tryneses and Ronald Mayora Synnes, "The Role of Religion in Young Muslims' and Christians' Self-Presentation on Social Media," *YOUNG* 30, no. 3 (2022): 281–96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/11033088211063368>.

⁴² Doran C. French et al., "Friendship and the Religiosity of Indonesian Muslim Adolescents," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 40, no. 12 (2011): 1623–33, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9645-7>.

⁴³ Joseph Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316711811>.

⁴⁴ Minako Sakai and Amelia Fauzia, "Islamic Orientations in Contemporary Indonesia: Islamism on the Rise?" *Asian Ethnicity* 15, no. 1 (2014): 41–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2013.784513>.

only imparts religious knowledge to young Muslims but also provides the youth with a sense of community, cultural validation, and psychological strength against social marginalization (Zine, 2006; Kunst et al., 2012).

In Canada, as an example, Muslim girls who wear the hijab work on the construction of their identity that is intertwined with faith, resistance, and belonging (Zine, 2006), whereas the examples of the Netherlands and Germany draw attention to the role of Islamic education in assisting young people in overcoming the tension between secular norms and Islamic ethics (Spiegler et al., 2019; Thijs et al., 2018).

In Southeast Asia, it is demonstrated how Islamic institutions in Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia have been reforming their curricula to be more responsive to the realities of contemporary life and maintain core Islamic values (Hefner, 2009; Saepudin, 2022). These are in the form of inclusion of secular studies, use of local languages, and focus on nurturing character through *tarbiyah* (Islamic nurturing). Moosa (2015) is one of the scholars who promote the reform model of classical learning and critical reflection, as Islamic education is not only a kind of religious practice but a type of moral development, civic education, and resistance to socio-political marginalization.

Such findings are significant, but they are very much focused on majority-Muslim or urban, institutionally supported settings. This area still has a vast empirical and conceptual gap in the comprehension of how Islamic education, particularly about the *madrasah* systems, influences identity formation in the more marginalized and politically complicated areas like the Southern Philippines. Although the current literature on the Philippines recognizes the historical background of Islamic education (Majul, 1973; McKenna, 1998) and the efforts of the state to institutionalize *madrasahs* by the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) and the Bangsamoro Education Code (BARMM, 2021),

These findings are important, yet they remain heavily concentrated in majority-Muslim or urban, institutionally supported contexts. There remains a significant empirical and conceptual gap in understanding how Islamic education, especially through *madrasah* systems, shapes identity formation in more marginalized and politically complex regions such as the Southern Philippines. While existing scholarship on the Philippines acknowledges the historical roots of Islamic education (Majul, 1973; McKenna, 1998) and the state's attempt to institutionalize *madrasahs* through the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) and the Bangsamoro Education Code (BARMM, 2021), few studies examine how youth themselves experience *madrasah* learning in daily life. Although Islamic education and youth identity have been widely studied in majority-Muslim countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as in Western Muslim-minority contexts,

the Philippines, particularly in the Southern regions, remains underexplored. Existing literature often focuses on historical accounts, state-led reforms such as the ALIVE program, or policy frameworks like the Bangsamoro Education Code. However, these studies rarely examine how madrasah education is experienced by youth on the ground, or how it actively shapes their religious identity amid secular schooling, globalization, and marginalization. There is a notable lack of empirical research capturing the perspectives of students, parents, and asatidz within madrasah communities. This study addresses that gap by investigating how madrasahs function not only as sites of religious learning but also as spaces where young Muslims negotiate belonging, resilience, and moral agency in a complex social environment.

Although Islamic education and youth identity have been widely studied in Majority-Muslim countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as in Western Muslim-minority contexts, the Philippines, especially in the southern part of the country, remains unexplored. The existing literature is mainly focused on the historical accounts, on state-led reforms such as the ALIVE program, or policy systems such as the Bangsamoro Education Code. However, these studies rarely explored how madrasah education is practiced on the ground and how it assists youths to actively engage in the construction of their religious identity in the background of secular schooling, globalization and marginalization. There is a conspicuous lack of empirical studies that mirror the opinion of students, parents and asatidz in madrasah communities. This gap is addressed by investigating the role of madrasahs not only as sites of religious learning but also as spaces where young Muslims can create their belonging, resiliency, and moral agency within their social world marked by the complexity of the social environment.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research aims to examine how madrasah education functions as a formative space for cultivating Islamic identity among Muslim youth in the Southern Philippines. More specifically, this study seeks to:

1. Explore the role of madrasahs in shaping the religious consciousness, practices, and identity of Muslim students.
2. Analyze the experiences and perceptions of students, parents, and ustadz within madrasah communities regarding the preservation of Islamic values.
3. Investigate how madrasah institutions contribute to religious continuity amidst challenges posed by cultural pluralism and secular influences.

1.4 Research Questions

The role of madrasah education in shaping the Islamic identity of youth in the Southern Philippines is a compelling area of research, particularly given that this population lives within a predominantly Christian country. Despite the historical significance of madrasahs in nurturing Muslim identity, there remains a need to explore how these institutions currently contribute to the identity formation of Muslim youth. Some important questions:

1. What cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors influence Filipino Muslim parents' decision to enroll their children in madrasah education?
2. How do Filipino Muslim students perceive the role of the value of madrasah education in relation to their personal identity and future aspirations?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is vital for understanding how madrasah education helps preserve and reinforce Islamic identity among young Muslims in the Southern Philippines, a region characterized by rich Islamic traditions and complex histories of marginalization. In an era where globalization and secular norms increasingly challenge the moral and cultural foundations of young Muslims, this study emphasizes that religious education is more than just imparting faith - it is a lived experience of resilience, dignity, and belonging. The research specifically focuses on the perspectives of students, parents, and asatidz, addressing a clear gap in local scholarship that often overlooks the daily lives of those involved in madrasah communities. Additionally, it engages with the national discourse on inclusive education by showing that faith-based schooling can coexist with civic engagement and modern aspirations. More broadly, this work underscores the importance of community-based institutions like madrasahs in a diverse society, reaffirming the value of welcoming, religious identity, and moral principles for educators, policymakers, and everyone involved in the pursuit of cultural continuity, social cohesion, and educational equity in the Philippines.

1.6 Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach to thoroughly examine the role of madrasah education in maintaining the Islamic identity of young Muslims in the Southern Philippines. This method provided valuable insights into students' personal experiences, beliefs, and attitudes toward their madrasah education. Data were gathered from 15 participants, including students, teachers, and key stakeholders, through semi-structured interviews in one or two selected madrasahs. Students and key community members also

participated in focus group discussions to gain a broader understanding of the impacts of madrasah education.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and virtual focus groups to gather comprehensive perspectives from various participants. Since I was outside the Philippines, all interviews were conducted online. These methods allowed participants to share their experiences and perceptions freely, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives. All interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed, and analyzed thematically around identity formation, religious practice, and the role of madrasah education. Participants were selected intentionally based on their involvement with the madrasah system. Ethical guidelines were followed to ensure confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation.

1.7 Scope and Delimitations

This study examines how madrasah education contributes to shaping Islamic identity among Muslim youth across various Muslim communities in the southern Philippines. The main participants were madrasah students, their parents, and *asatidz* (religious teachers) involved in either traditional or integrated madrasah schools.

The scope was limited to qualitative data gathered through interviews, observations, and document reviews in selected communities. The research did not aim to assess curriculum effectiveness or compare Islamic and secular schools. Instead, it focuses on the perceptions and lived experiences of stakeholders in madrasah education, emphasizing how religious identity is formed, expressed, and maintained.

Delimitations included the study's geographic focus on Muslim-majority areas in the Southern Philippines, its exclusive focus on madrasah-based education, and its emphasis on youth perspectives rather than administrative or policy analysis. The findings aimed to provide a detailed, contextual understanding rather than a broad overview applicable to all Muslim communities in the Philippines. These boundaries were chosen to keep the study centered on the voices of those directly involved with madrasah life.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon theoretical insights offered by Adeline Masquelier and Benjamin F. Soares (2016), whose research on Muslim youth in a post-9/11 context reveals important implications for examining how religious identity is constructed, questioned, negotiated, and debated amongst young Muslims in a variety of socio-political contexts. The "9/11 Generation" refers to a global group of Muslim youth

impacted by the socio-political dynamics following September 11, and cultural anxieties about Islam. Although the youth they write about have diverse cultural and geographic roots, they all have one thing in common: the necessity to re-articulate their Muslim identities in increasingly more complex, and sometimes hostile, social contexts.

Masquelier and Soares define self-fashioning in their framework for studying young Muslims as processes characterized by ongoing negotiations of the competing influences of religious tradition, secular modernity, global media, and local expectations as youths pursue a meaningful Islamic identity. This is particularly evident in the Southern Philippines context, where Muslim youth live in a predominantly Christian society with a history of marginalization and cultural pluralism and ongoing political struggles for autonomy. In this case, madrasah education is used to frame how these young Muslims understand themselves, their religion, and their broader national and global identity.⁴⁵

They argue that Islamic identity is not merely inherited by the youth but rather is defined by generational experience, political discourse, and global Islamic narratives. Their concept of generational consciousness shows how youth simultaneously understand their identity as a moment in time, acknowledging their historical memory and their influence as one with the potential of social pressures. The authors focus on both emotional and political aspects of identity formation. Among the Muslim youth in the post 9/11 contexts, there is increased scrutiny and discrimination that may result in either alienation or re-engagement in religion. Madrasahs in Mindanao are not only religious schools but also places of moral strength and cultural continuity.

To further elaborate this framework, the study also relies on the analysis of the Indonesian pesantren by Pam Nilan (2009)⁴⁶, which further enriches our knowledge of how Islamic educational institutions are not only places of religious education but also important agents in fostering disciplined, morally grounded, and intellectually driven Muslim youth. Applying a Foucauldian perspective, Nilan brings forth the idea of the spirit of education to explain that Islamic schools instill an enthusiasm for lifelong learning through strict routines, ascetic conditions, and charismatic pedagogy. This resonates with the Mindanao context, where madrasahs likewise function within broader power-knowledge dynamics that shape the formation of Muslim youth as religious and moral subjects. Her concept of educational delight as a way of spiritual and intellectual

⁴⁵ Adeline Marie Masquelier and Benjamin F. Soares, *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*, School for Advanced Research Advanced Seminar Series (Santa Fe, Albuquerque: School for Advanced Research press, University of New Mexico press, 2016).

⁴⁶ Pam Nilan, *The "Spirit of Education" in Indonesian 'Pesantren,'* 30, no. 2 (2009): 219–32, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40375420>.

self-fashioning is consistent with Masquelier and Soares' concept of self-fashioning, a further indication of how madrasah education can offer dynamic, reflexive, and resilient Islamic identities to young people living in conditions of marginalization and religious revival.

Overall, theoretical concerns, elaborated by Masquelier and Soares, complemented by Nilan's insights, provide a complex interpretive framework for understanding how Muslim youth deal with issues of identity in the context of their status as a national minority and as part of global Islam. These frameworks emphasize that Islamic identity is dynamic, built through a complex social process that is both contested and shaped by historical memory and generational renewal and change, and socio-political forces. This study employed some of the key concepts, which include self-fashioning, generational consciousness, positionality, and the spirit of education, to view madrasah education not only as a site of doctrinal instruction but as an important context wherein young Muslims are actively fashioning, constructing, adopting, and asserting their identities. Collectively, these approaches contribute to helping further our understanding of how madrasah can be considered not only as educational institutions, but also a place where cultural persistence in a pluralistic, postcolonial, and increasingly globalized world.

1.9 Thesis Outline

The first chapter of this thesis will, therefore, provide an introduction that contains background of the study, research questions, Literature review, theoretical framework, research importance, methods, and outlines.

The second chapter explores two key topics essential to this study. The first part discusses how Islamic education and madrasahs have developed within the Muslim world and how they help maintain and reinforce Islamic identity, especially for Muslims living as minorities. It also explains how madrasah systems are influenced by both religious teachings and government policies. The second part examines why many Muslim youths are becoming more religious today, exploring reasons such as family influence, social environment, and global changes. Overall, this chapter offers a clearer understanding of how madrasah education shapes the identity of Muslim youth.

The third chapter covers the history and current state of madrasah education in the Philippines, emphasizing how it has evolved and adapted over time. It describes different types of madrasahs, including traditional and integrated schools, and explains how they have been influenced by historical events, government policies, and community efforts. This chapter also highlights how madrasah institutions remain vital centers for learning and identity among Muslim youth. It underscores how madrasahs address both religious needs and

modern educational standards, especially in the southern regions of the Philippines.

The fourth chapter examines the lived experiences of Muslim students, parents, and ustadz who participated in madrasah education. This chapter starts with their reasons for involvement or support of Islamic schooling. Then it discusses how madrasah influences the identity, religious practices, and community participation of students. The chapter also explains how participants challenge external forces, including secularism and social marginalization, whilst preserving religious identity. Finally, it looks at the role of madrasah in creating resilience, belonging, and faith-based confidence.

The fifth chapter contains the conclusion. It summarizes the research findings, considers the theoretical implications of madrasah as a space of identity formation, and suggests directions for future research and policy making regarding Islamic education in a minority context.

CHAPTER II

MADRASAH EDUCATION AND THE FORMATION OF ISLAMIC IDENTITY AMONG MUSLIM YOUTH

This chapter examines the role of Islamic education, particularly through madrasahs, in shaping and maintaining Islamic identity among Muslim youths. It begins with a review of the history of madrasahs and how they evolved from mere learning centers to institutions that also focus on building values and character. The chapter also discusses how madrasahs have developed in other regions of the Muslim world, such as in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and in countries where Muslims are a minority. Then, it explores why Muslim youth become more religious and how this may be related to factors like discrimination, modern life, and social media. The final section focuses on how Islamic education connects to identity, what motivates young Muslims to pursue it, and how it influences their sense of self and the challenges they face, especially in non-Muslim settings. All of this provides the background for this study, which concentrates on madrasah education in the Southern Philippines.

2.1 Islamic Education/Madrasah in the Muslim World and Islamic Identity

Islamic education existed long before the emergence of the modern nation state. The first phase of Islamic education was the *kuttab* or Qur'anic school, an informal learning environment where children learned how to read and memorize the Qur'an. The Qur'an was not just a medium for facilitating social and educational change or informal learning; over time, it became more formalized as an academic institution: the madrasah. Madrasahs were more often regulated where students studied. It was not uncommon for some madrasahs to offer even richer and more comprehensive courses in core Islamic studies such as Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsir*), *hadith*, theology (*aqeeda*), Arabic studies, logic, and ethics (*akhlaq*). Moosa (2015) notes that madrasahs were not merely academic institutions of learning; they were also places for moral and spiritual development. For generations, madrasahs have defined and shaped piety and identity in our communal space of being Muslim.⁴⁷

The term madrasah can have different connotations contextually. In Arab speaking countries, in a broad sense, a madrasah means any kind of schooling, secular included. In Southeast Asia, particularly in the Philippines, a madrasah is often associated with religious (private) Islamic schooling. Abu Bakar (2018) states that Such institutions are important because they provide religious instruction and also help to form an Islamic identity,

⁴⁷ Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?*

especially in marginalized settings where Muslims are subject to social and political marginalization. This provides context to the case in Southern Philippines, where madrasahs are a way for students to identify an Islamic context while being brought up in predominantly non-Islamic contexts.⁴⁸

As madrasah education spread across the Muslim world from North Africa and the Middle East to South Asia and Southeast Asia, some variation in the institutional structure and curriculum took place to address local needs. For example, in South Asia, the *Dars-e Nizami* curriculum was adopted by several madrasah institutions that combined Arabic grammar and classical logic, and traditional religious texts; while in Bangladesh, the Aliya madrasah system began to include Islamic and general education. Furthermore, Abu Bakar (2018, in South East Asia, madrasahs have even offered secular subjects when they adopted the national curriculum, so the madrasahs align with modern education systems while offering religious instruction; this was the case in Malaysia and the Philippines.⁴⁹

Although madrasahs are important, they have been criticized, especially regarding pedagogical techniques. A report published by UNESCO (2022) about madrasahs in Afghanistan found that some of the most common criticisms include the absence of standardized testing, a lack of emphasis on critical thinking, and an over-reliance on repetitive learning techniques. Similar remarks have been made about the British Muslim supplementary madrasahs, which emphasize recitation of the Quran, often too much compared to understanding or interpretation.⁵⁰ However, Moosa (2015), whose reconstructive scholarship is noted for locating the practice of memorization within the entire history of Islamic education, shows that criticisms like this are unfounded. Moosa explains that memorization and moral education through religious practice is one type of discipline to assist with internalizing moral values, along with moral education and contemplative education.⁵¹

In Muslim-minority contexts, madrasahs are even more important than simply providing religious education; they are a representation of the continuity of culture and resilience of community. Mokhtar (2010)⁵² examined madrasahs in Singapore and described their dual function as not only preserving Malay Muslim identity in an increasingly secular and pluralistic national context but also adapting to the challenges of

⁴⁸ Mukhlis Abu Bakar, ed., *Rethinking Madrasah Education in a Globalised World*, Routledge Critical Studies in Asian Education (Routledge, 2018).

⁴⁹ Mukhlis Abu Bakar, *Rethinking Madrasah Education in a Globalised World*.

⁵⁰ UNESCO, *Key Elements of Madrasa Education in Selected Countries*.

⁵¹ Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?*

⁵² Mokhtar, "Madrasahs in Singapore."

limited funding and regulatory scrutiny. The madrasahs in Mokhtar's research have implemented institutional reforms, including the development of modernized curricula, the inclusion of English as a language of instruction, and the introduction of STEM models. These changes exemplify a wider trend across minority Muslim communities in which madrasahs struggle to maintain religious authenticity while also offering students the necessary skills for future participation in civic life.

A similar trend can be found in the province of Pattani in southern Thailand, where Wekke et al. (2019) refer to madrasahs as an essential source of cultural defense of the ethnically Malay Muslim population. These schools are educational havens in the face of political marginalization and cultural oppression. They integrate the national Thai curriculum with Islamic studies, and they have graduates who are religiously grounded and at the same time socially competent to fill the gap between the religious tradition and civic responsibility.⁵³

In Western Europe, Islamic schools are often examined in terms of identity negotiation and psychosocial development. For example, Spiegler et al. (2019) conducted a longitudinal study where they found that Muslim youth with strong dual identities based on Islamic heritage, as well as national identity, reported better psychological well-being and fewer behavioral problems. The schools that fostered and nurtured these dualities promoted a structured environment where learners could negotiate potentially conflicting elements of their identities.⁵⁴

Expanding on this, Thijs et al. (2018) demonstrate that positive teacher-student relationships in Islamic schools play an important role in the development of students' self-esteem and feeling of belonging to the national community. Additionally, it is particularly significant to note the effect of non-Muslim teachers who respect students' religious backgrounds, thereby facilitating a sense of inclusion instead of exclusion. Thus, the findings challenge the perspectives that Islamic schools promote segregation, and instead reveal that they may also provide spaces for integration.⁵⁵

The same tendency can be observed in Austria, with Yaqd (2023) showing how Islamic educators are deliberately expanding the curriculum to cover human rights, social justice, and environmental stewardship. They want to raise not only pious people but morally active members of the state, which is an indicator of an active and situationally

⁵³ Ismail Suardi Wekke et al., "Islamic Education in Thailand Pattani Muslim Minority: What Are the Institutional Continuity and Change?," *Tadris: Jurnal Keguruan Dan Ilmu Tarbiyah* 4, no. 1 (2019): 127–34, <https://doi.org/10.24042/tadris.v4i1.3753>.

⁵⁴ Spiegler et al., "Dual Identity Development and Adjustment in Muslim Minority Adolescents."

⁵⁵ Thijs et al., "Self-Esteem and National Identification in Times of Islamophobia."

sensitive understanding of Islamic identity.⁵⁶

Shakeel's (2018) meta-analysis of 81 studies on Islamic education in the West supports these insights. He identifies three consistent themes: parental desire for moral continuity, student well-being and academic achievement, and the potential of Islamic schooling for citizenship. His interesting finding is quite the opposite of what Islamophobia indicates, and that is, Islamic schools often teach ethical values, students to be disciplined for a good cause, and to be socially responsible better than public institutions.⁵⁷

Comparative evidence from Southeast Asia and Western Europe shows that Islamic schools in minority contexts are very adaptable. These institutions, found in places such as Singapore, Pattani, and Vienna, focus on identity formation without being rigid or defensive; instead, they are open and developmental. Their effective approach combines strong leadership, community support, and a new curriculum that blends religious teachings with modern education. This allows young Muslims to stay true to their faith while confidently engaging with the broader society.

Madrasah education is an ongoing and active dynamic for not just teaching religious knowledge but for constructing and conveying Islamic identity. These institutions are not simply schools with religious studies; they are formative experiences where one's moral character is developed and where a sense of belonging to the Muslim community is cultivated. Moosa (2015) deeply emphasizes the role of madrasahs in transmitting sacred knowledge and shaping ethical selves. He posits that this learning process does not only entail learning of religious texts, but also training in disciplined ways of life, contemplation, and corporal actions which relate individual piety to a larger sense of *ummatic* identity. Notably, Moosa criticizes the representation of madrasahs as strict or old-fashioned, and she underlines their ability to connect the past with contemporary realities.⁵⁸

Expanding this perspective, Arshad Alam (2011) provides an ethnographic analysis of a madrasah in India, in this case, the Madrasa Ashrafiya. He illustrates how madrasahs exercise power, employ ritual, and utilize socialization to construct Islamic identity. According to Alam (2011), madrasahs are not simply neutral spaces nor strictly structured spaces, but spaces that socially construct religious norms through repeated actions, gendered roles, linguistic codes, and hierarchical relationships. He claims identity is constructed through social practice that is lived and embodied rather than simply learned

⁵⁶ Yağdı, "Islamic Religious Education and Citizenship Education."

⁵⁷ Shakeel, "Islamic Schooling in the Cultural West."

⁵⁸ Moosa, *What Is a Madrasa?*

cognitively in classrooms.⁵⁹

Muhammad Qasim Zaman (2002) places madrasahs within the larger struggle for Islamic authority in the modern world. Although scholars of madrasahs are often thought to be isolated traditionalists, Zaman sees the ulama as engaged participants in modern discourse who interact with the media, public institutions, and the state apparatus to reinvent, reinterpret, and preserve religious authority. In this way, madrasahs are active sites where sacred knowledge undergoes a continuous process of reconfiguration, acknowledging the pressures of modernity while still maintaining links to inherited tradition. Zaman also notes that madrasahs are sites of reform, and have been subject to both calls for internal reform and external reformation; some of which were accepted, while others were rejected based on what was considered Islamic authenticity.⁶⁰

A similar concern with reform is revealed in Mohammed Basheer's (2016) study of community-based madrasahs in Kerala. Basheer finds that these institutions are trying to modernise pedagogy and improve the facilities while preserving the ethical and spiritual missions of Islamic education. His work shows that innovation can coincide with tradition. In many cases, reforming madrasahs as moral and identity-forming institutions can be accomplished with the support of educational and religious stakeholders.⁶¹

Robert Hefner (2009) outlines in Southeast Asia the ways in which madrasahs in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines are actively engaging with modernity. Dealing with legacies of colonialism, secular education, and democratization. Madrasahs are revising curricula, pedagogical practices, and other educational activities to be relevant to the current needs of younger generations. Hefner notes that these institutions were not retreating from modernity but rather were strategically maneuvering through it, embedding religious values and rationalities into contemporary educational needs to retain Islamic identity in the present, and were oriented towards the future.⁶²

While Robert Hefner emphasizes how madrasahs in Southeast Asia have adapted to modern times, meanwhile, Yanwar Pribadi (2020) presents a more critical view by demonstrating that adaptation does not necessarily mean increased openness or inclusivity. His study of Sekolah Islam in Serang, Indonesia, shows that these schools, even though modern in structure and curriculum, tend to propagate a more exclusive and conservative version of Islam that is influenced by Salafi teaching. Rather than embracing diverse forms of faith, these institutions propagate a rigid form of Islamic identity, one

⁵⁹ "Inside-madrassas_Nov2011_8301.Pdf," n.d., accessed June 12, 2025, https://ippr-org.files.svdcdn.com/production/Downloads/inside-madrassas_Nov2011_8301.pdf. 17-22

⁶⁰ Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*. 1-3, 10-11

⁶¹ Education 84-165

⁶² Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims*. p.44

that is based on a visible religious discipline and rejects local traditions such as tahlilan and maulid. Rather than promoting pluralism, they are inclined to formulate a purist religious identity that mirrors the moral and social values of the urban Muslim middle class. Pribadi's findings challenge the assumptions that Islamic schools foster integration naturally. Rather, they demonstrate how particular schools can strengthen religious boundaries and hierarchies within the Muslim community, although they are modern and progressive.⁶³

Understanding Islamic identity in education requires viewing it from two perspectives, as a faith tradition and as a cultural tradition of culture. Shibli Nu'mānī (1995) characterizes Muslim identity not only in terms of belief and ritual, but also by participation in a larger Islamic civilization. Madrasahs thus have the responsibility to pass on not only the doctrinal teachings of Islam, but also the cultural-ethical frame of Islam, including history, moral behaviour, and collective memory, making them carriers for the transition of Islam's multidimensional nature.⁶⁴

Abdullah Sahin (2015) connects a modern lens to this conversation, defining Islamic education, especially in minority contexts, as an active process relating to identity formation. Sahin finds that many Muslim youths today experience an identity crisis as they attempt to reconcile their faith commitments within the boundaries of secular societies. Sahin also highlights that pedagogy ought to go beyond situations of rote and be intentionally developed to foster spiritually-rooted Muslim identities and for students to be socially confident.⁶⁵

This evolving educational philosophy is exemplified by Nurdin et al. (2024), who studied the use of digital resources in teaching *Aqeedah* and *Akhlak*. Their research highlights how teachers are using technology to facilitate Islamic studies, enabling them to connect with and be sensitive to a digital generation. Although still relying on traditional pedagogy, this demonstrates a strong focus on relevance and student-centered learning.⁶⁶

Likewise, Mahmud al-Hassan and Abuzar (2024) focus on the integrated nature of Aliya madrasahs in Bangladesh. They offer a combination of Islamic and secular

⁶³ Yanwar Pribadi, "Sekolah Islam (Islamic Schools) as Symbols of Indonesia's Urban Muslim Identity," *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 10, no. 2 (2022): 203–18, <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2021.15>.

⁶⁴ Mukhlis Abu Bakar, *Rethinking Madrasah Education in a Globalised World*, pp.3-4

⁶⁵ Abdullah Sahin, *New Directions in Islamic Education: Pedagogy & Identity Formation* (Kube, 2013).

⁶⁶ Nurdin Nurdin et al., "Beyond the Chalkboard: Digital Innovations in Islamic Learning through Interactive PowerPoint," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 3 (2024): 1099, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i3.1637>.

subjects, allowing students to participate in both the religious and modern public spheres. They describe how this integrated approach develops a religious identity while preparing students for broader social participation. In a related study, the authors describe how the Aliya madrasahs enable students to develop the three important components of an Islamic identity: spiritual development, moral action, and community participation. Students learn the fundamentals of the Muslim faith (e.g., prayer, Qur'anic recitation). Students also learn moral values about compassion, honesty, and social importance, including charitable work. The result of this learning is a kind of moral and social construction drawn from Islamic belief.⁶⁷

Echoing this trend, Raihani (2018) cited the increasing interest of Muslim families in Indonesia to send their children to Islamic or religiously affiliated schools, such as madrasahs, pesantren, and integrated Islamic schools and systems. Raihani attributes this increase to an increasing consciousness of their Islamic identity. This preference for sending their children to religiously affiliated institutions was not articulated in moral terms, but many Muslim families seem to be opting for an education consistent with their religious convictions in an age where education options are highly plural.⁶⁸

The role of Islamic education in shaping youth identity extends beyond various Muslim-majority settings. According to Abu Bakar (2018), madrasahs established by South Asian diasporas in places such as Europe and North America aim to promote religious learning and offer Muslim minorities religious knowledge along with moral guidance. For example, in the UK, Muslim schools not only provide religious education but also help students navigate their British Muslim identity while balancing their responsibilities as citizens. These institutions act as informal cultural anchors in multicultural and secular social spaces.⁶⁹

2.2 Muslim Youth: Why Do They Become More Religious?

In recent years, scholars have focused more on the increasing religiosity of the Muslim youth. This tendency is opposite to previous theories of secularization, which assumed a gradual loss of religion in contemporary societies. Rather, new research indicates that religious devotion among youthful Muslims is not only continuing but, in most instances, it seems to be strengthening, especially in diaspora populations where Islam is a central symbol of their identity, strength, and sense of belonging. The new generation of Muslims is proving that religious identity may live in harmony with modern

⁶⁷ Mahmudulhassan and Abuzar, "Developing Religious Identity."

⁶⁸ Mukhlis Abu Bakar, *Rethinking Madrasah Education in a Globalised World*. 216

⁶⁹ Nasar Meer and Damian Breen, "Muslim Schools in Britain: Ethnicisation, Securitisation and Identity," in *Rethinking Madrasah Education in a Globalised World* (Routledge, n.d.).

values and even be strengthened by them. This is a refutation of the old notion that modernization is bound to result in secularism. Religious identity serves as a significant reaction to the social, cultural, and political issues of the wider world for many young people, besides being a personal belief.

Lori Peek (2011) establishes a framework for understanding this process by discussing three stages in the religious identity development of Muslim youth: ascribed, chosen, and declared. Peek uses an ethnographic study of American Muslim college students to illustrate how major events such as 9/11 prompted a re-engagement with Islam among students, often as a way of confronting their marginalization and searching for more purpose-driven lives. Many of her participants were re-engaged in religious spaces and volunteer opportunities, which resulted in an ultimate strengthening of their faith. Peek's work highlights the dynamic and agentic nature of religious development in youth.⁷⁰ Similarly, Masquelier and Soares discuss the formation of a "self-conscious Muslim generation" influenced by a combination of personal reflection and broader societal forces. They reinforce the idea that religious identity for youth is an active process of construction shaped by their lived experiences, moral decisions, and the sociopolitical context around them. Together, these perspectives help move us away from a static understanding of identity and emphasize youth agency in the development of meaningful religious lives in their context.⁷¹

It is also important to note that the experiences of Islamophobia often contribute to an increase in, rather than a decrease in, religious commitment. A significant number of young Muslims feel that experiences of discrimination or misrecognition lead them to a stronger engagement with their faith. Dunne and Durrani (2019) note that Muslim youth often develop their identities as a direct challenge to being discriminated against or excluded from the mainstream. Marcia Hermansen (2014) goes further, suggesting that this can be a form of empowerment, promoting the reclamation of their religious identifications in ways that demonstrate dignity, resistance, and belonging. The idea of empowering youth to reclaim their religious identities relates to identity attitudes we see in broader theories of identity. In this sense, when a young person feels a sense of public misrecognition or social exclusion from the larger public, this often results in not a retreat, but a conscious reaffirmation of their religious belief and communal ties.⁷²

⁷⁰ Peek, "Becoming Muslim."

⁷¹ Masquelier and Soares, *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*.

⁷² Marcia Hermansen, "Muslim Youth and Religious Identity: Classical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges," in *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Cambridge University Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511894619.008>.

However, it is important to note that not all expressions of religiosity by Muslim youth can be attributed to an increase in piety or as a reaction to discrimination. Samuli Schielke (2010) critiques studies that emphasize these types of disciplinary and orthodoxy. In his ethnography, he emphasizes that concerning youth religiosity, these experiences are often characterized by discontinuity, ambivalence, and ambiguity. Many young Muslims navigate a relationship between their religious ideals and everyday desires, failures, and uncertainties. For Schielke, Islam is not merely a moral system; it is also messy, situated, and decidedly human. Schielke's observation leads us to consider religiosity as a fluid and evolving process influenced by ambiguity and contradiction, no less than structure or doctrine.⁷³

In connection with this complexity, Soares and Osella (2020) reflect on the tendency to construct Islam in rigid or essentialist forms. They note that young people's religiosity can be impacted by how they conceive broader political, social, or economic forces, and that for many, religious identity means more than just the relationship they have with belief or ritual. Young people increasingly claim faith as a lens through which they act in the world, from large-scale global Islamic media to local politics, and they do so not only based on their identity or positionality formed by beliefs or rituals, but through the complex web of everyday interactions, public performances of politics, and shifting structures of power. To this extent, expressing one's religion is both a personal and political act. Being pious, in some contexts, may leave one politically endangered; on a continuum between potentially religiously enriching to wholly mundane, and neither here nor there. Young people are drawing from faith in forms of self-representation, self-expression, resistance, and negotiation in relation to being visibly Muslim and potentially politicized in the eyes of others. This insight leads to a more grounded and contextualized understanding of the ways in which different youth religious identities can be learned and developed, stemming from both the social structures that young people inhabit and the way they act within these structures and social contexts.⁷⁴

Their theory of "vernacular modernities" is useful in understanding how youth reconcile having an Islamic identity with contemporary ways of living. Many young Muslims do not reject modernity; rather, they make modernity compatible with their values. Whether it is halal fashion, Islamic banking, or online religious content in more recent ways, we see how Islamic practices illustrate a lifestyle that is both modern and

⁷³ Samuli Schielke, "Second Thoughts about the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life," *State Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide* 41, nos. 3–4 (2023): 304–42, <https://doi.org/10.22394/2073-7203-2023-41-3-4-304-342>.

⁷⁴ Filippo Osella and Benjamin Soares, eds., *Islam, Politics, Anthropology*, 1st ed. (Wiley, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444324402>.

Islamic. Rather than religion being a remnant of the past, it is used as a way to make sense of the present. This mix of tradition and modernity reinforces how young Muslims are exercising their own creative agency to construct their own futures rather than always claiming fixed identities. It also takes up the challenge of binaries between religion and modernity, demonstrating how they can reinforce one another.⁷⁵

This hybrid engagement shows similarity to Nilan and Feixa's (2006) notion of "plural worlds", where youth create layered identities across religious, cultural, and digital domains.⁷⁶ In the Indonesian context, this is consistent with Parker and Nilan's (2013) notion of "moral subjectivity," in which young people manage religious piety, civic engagement, and their hopes for upward mobility in a creative manner. Indeed, Indonesian Muslim youth routinely demonstrate a blurring between the two orientations of tradition and modernity, for example, which shows us the developing pattern of syncretic identities across local and global norms.⁷⁷

This phenomenon is particularly visible in digital contexts. Bouziane Zaid et. al (2021) illustrate how Muslim social media influencers are redefining religious authority by producing content about faith that is a blend of storytelling, entertainment, and ethical deliberation. They are bypassing clerical authority and hierarchy to produce faith-based content designed to relate directly to young audiences. These influencers promote personal development and well-being in their posts, in a sincere and practical spirit of spirituality that is usually referenced in the framework of Islamic ethics. For Zaid, this illustrates the mediatization of Islam in a way that involves the emerging dynamic of not only how religious content is mediated, but also how they also mediate authority and authenticity in the new digital paradigm.⁷⁸

Similar dynamics can also be found in the work of Irene Trysnes and Ronald Synnes, who examine how young Muslims in Norway articulate their religiosity in their online presence. Drawing from Erving Goffman's notions of frontstage and backstage behaviour, they demonstrate that Muslim youth are careful when curating their online presence to balance exposure and risk. While public posts are typically moderated to avoid coming across as "too religious," there is more space to express their faith in private groups. Furthermore, these findings demonstrate that digital environments offer Muslim youth the possibilities to negotiate competing expectations and that these online

⁷⁵ Osella and Soares, *Islam, Politics, Anthropology*.

⁷⁶ Pam Nilan and Carles Feixa, eds., *Global Youth? Hybrid Identities, Plural Worlds* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁷⁷ Lyn Parker and Pam Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*, Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series 59 (Routledge, 2013).

⁷⁸ Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials."

platforms provide spaces for flexible religious self-presentation.⁷⁹

Social networks have also impacted religiosity. In a longitudinal study of Indonesian adolescents, French et al. (2020) found that friends' religiosity significantly predicts personal religious behavior. Youth who have close friends much more pious than they are adopt more pious behavior, while youth who hang out with more secular or troubled peers adopt less pious behaviors. This suggests that religious identity is not only personal but relational, and emerges from ongoing interaction, particularly friendships and group norms.⁸⁰

This peer relationship depicts a broader generational shift that is influencing the way young Muslim people are constructing their identity. Today, Indonesian youth can be seen as an intermediate generation by the fact that they are caught between the history of state-sponsored Islamization, the entry of the global consumer culture, and the post-Suharto period of democratization.⁸¹ Young people in the current world do not embrace fixed or oppositional identities. Rather, they mediate between rival traditions and forms of modernity and thus show how Islamic identity is formed through overlapping and fluid social formations.

In Southeast Asia, a more complex picture emerges across countries. In Malaysia and Indonesia, Islam remains deeply woven into national life, and the youth in these two countries typically relate to religion through state institutions and popular culture, working in ways to be faithful as well as engaged in civic life. In the Malaysian case, Liow explains how the state's Islamization policies developed into formalized pathways for youth to participate in religious life and often link Islamic practices to larger narratives of national identity.⁸² Observes young Indonesians' increasing readiness in ways of piety that resonate with democratic values; in this frame, young people are finding ways to mobilize around their faith in appropriate ways that are conducive to civic engagement and public life, drawing on Islamic engagement as a reference point. These cases show how Muslim youth in two different places in Southeast Asia have mediated their religious identity in different ways based on their local social and political settings. They also tell us that Islamic identity is not something that is simply fixed, but is instead being rearticulated in a fluid situation between institutional pressures and

⁷⁹ Trysnes and Synnes, "The Role of Religion in Young Muslims' and Christians' Self-Presentation on Social Media."

⁸⁰ French et al., "Friendship and the Religiosity of Indonesian Muslim Adolescents."

⁸¹ Suzanne Naafs and Ben White, "Intermediate Generations: Reflections on Indonesian Youth Studies," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (2012): 3–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2012.645796>.

⁸² Liow, *Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*.

grassroots developments.⁸³

This process is especially evident in Indonesia. Sakai and Fauzia (2013) argue that over time, young Muslims in contemporary Indonesia have shifted away from formal political Islamism to what they refer to as sociocultural Islamism. Using national survey data along with regional cases, they show that youth now pursue Islamic values through informal networks, religious study groups (*pengajian*), and digital media, rather than aligning themselves with Islamist political parties. Sakai and Fauzia's research suggests that this shift relates to an everyday moral orientation tied to ethical self-restraint, family piety, and modest forms of living. In various ways, these forms of religious engagement are often taking place outside the elite urban centers, where traditional authority is lessening and new forms of *da'wa* through media are taking hold. Their research suggests that religiosity, in the case of Indonesian youth, is not necessarily oppositional or political, but part of a more general moral project situated in the rhythms of everyday life.⁸⁴

While most studies highlight the negotiated religious identity of the Muslim youth in flexible ways, Rijal (2021) gives a contrary argument in his ethnographic study of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). He reveals how certain students in Makassar are drawn to HTI's strict interpretation of Islam because it offers order, certainty, and a strong sense of belonging. HTI not only teaches Islam as a religion, but as a religion, but as a comprehensive ideological system of law, politics, and society rooted in the teachings of its founder, Taqiyuddin An-Nabhani. Rijal refers to the indoctrination process as "An-Nabhanism," where members are socialized in small and closed *halqa* (study group) to adopt the worldview of the party without questioning. For young people feeling lost, isolated, or disillusioned with the modern world. Unlike the more fluid or creative forms of religiosity seen in other youth contexts. Rijal's study reminds us that religiosity may also be rigid, in which faith is used as an instrument of ideological control, rather than the spiritual or moral development. This gives a substantial balance to the prevailing accounts of hybrid and personalized youth religiosity.⁸⁵

In the southern Philippines, the situation is different. Often, the marginalized community of youth, as a minority group, sees religious education as a vehicle for

⁸³ Jayeel Cornelio, "Youth and Religion in East and Southeast Asia," in *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*, ed. Johanna Wyn et al. (Springer Nature Singapore, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-8606-4_40.

⁸⁴ Sakai and Fauzia, "Islamic Orientations in Contemporary Indonesia."

⁸⁵ Syamsul Rijal, "Indoctrinating Muslim Youths: Seeking Certainty Through An-Nabhanism," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 49, no. 2 (2011): 253–80, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2011.49.253-280>.

cultural survival. Jeffrey Milligan (2020) demonstrates how madrasahs in Mindanao serve as places of preserving religious knowledge as well as ethnic identity. In a predominantly Christian context, these spaces give youth the vehicle and the agency to maintain their heritage and base their identity around their cultural identity in opposition to assimilation. Education functions as a form of resistance and resilience.⁸⁶

Gender and class are also factors that shape religious expression. For instance, many young women who wear the hijab position themselves as both community members with faith and as self-determined people. According to Jasmin Zine (2008), there are Muslim girls who understand themselves as empowered by the hijab, as defying oppression, and as using their religious and ethnic identities to challenge stereotypes. Furthermore, access to education and urban resources also shapes how youth engage with religion, whether it be through online spaces or as activism and local community networks. Young men's and young women's experiences and expressions of religiosity can differ. For example, religiously prescribed gender role expectations can shape how young men and women understand what it is to be pious, what it means to lead, or what their visibility to their community will be. What does come through in all of this is that youth take agency in developing their lives and representations of faith. This illustrates how religiosity can cut across multiple social identities but intersect with larger cultural processes.⁸⁷

In order to gain a proper understanding of youth religiosity, scholars must be able to go beyond the basic dichotomies of religious vs. secular or traditional vs. modern. The lives of Muslim youth are not as simple as Schielke reminds us, and may consist of a combination of commitment and doubt, discipline and compromise. Not all people experience religion in the same way, nor is it consistent. It is usually shaped by the local norms, family structures, educational opportunities, and transnational forces. This complexity is important in understanding youth in a more realistic and respectful manner.⁸⁸

Soares and Osella argue that religion is not solely a private matter, but a way for youth to engage with the public sphere, to challenge dominant versions of reality, and to enact alternative understandings of belonging. Their work emphasizes the context of religious expression and demonstrates how it can serve a number of purposes, from personal development to public political visibility. These insights help illustrate how

⁸⁶ Milligan, *Islamic Identity, Postcoloniality, and Educational Policy*.

⁸⁷ Jasmin Zine, *Canadian Islamic Schools: Unravelling the Politics of Faith, Gender, Knowledge, and Identity* (University of Toronto Press, 2008).

⁸⁸ Schielke, "Second Thoughts about the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life."

youth religiosity can be a stabilizing force and a rearranging force. Religion works as a way of dealing with inequality, asserting cultural legitimacy, and enacting moral significance in daily life.⁸⁹

Instead of seeing youth religiosity as a regression, it's more reasonable to approach it as an adjustment to modern realities. Young Muslims are not simply retreating to their traditions, and they are not merely reverting to tradition, for they are engaging in interpretation, creativity, and meaning-generation exercises in a rapidly shifting contemporary world. Whether in prayer, political sensuality, art, or social media, religion provides the resource of meaning-generation opportunities amid uncertainty, choices, and pressure. As such, Muslim youth are exhibiting resilience and creativity in the contemporary era by employing faith while navigating an unpredictable world.

Overall, the increasing religiosity of youth is not only not uniform but is interconnected by various factors. Although the expressions of religiosity may vary between prayer, activism, fashion, or social media, young Muslims are striving to find meaning in their lives through their lived interpretations of Islam. Their expressions of religiosity are contingent on one or more of three factors, namely, context, agency, and aspiration. Understanding this variation of the scope of practice is crucial to understanding how madrasahs and Islamic education are evolving today, not simply as educational institutions, but as living spaces where the evolution of a future Islamic identity is being developed and lived.

2.3 Muslim Youth and Islamic Education: Motivations, Identity Formation, and Challenges

In our changing world, Muslim youth, especially those being raised as minorities, face distinct challenges trying to live their faith while also fitting into the community they exist. Islamic education becomes influential in this. It teaches them knowledge about Islam, in addition to fabricating who they are, what they value, and how they view themselves in the world. Not only is it important to explore how Islamic education helps Muslim youth form their identity, but also to unpack their motivation, their identity construction process, and their identity challenges.

2.3.1 Motivation

Many people think that young Muslims participate in Islamic education programs solely because their parents coerced them into it. However, the research demonstrates that young Muslims have much broader motivations for doing so. For many young Muslims,

⁸⁹ Osella and Soares, *Islam, Politics, Anthropology*.

learning about Islam is a way to also search for meaning in life, to ask questions about right and wrong, and create a safe space where they feel respected in life. In a European context that is increasingly influenced by rising Islamophobia and systemic exclusion, Muslim youth turning to Islamic education is a way to acquire religious literacy, but is also a way to reclaim their agency. Islamic Education Institutions give Muslim youth a sense of empowerment that challenges the dominant negative representations of Muslims. Rather than simply absorbing the information, Muslim youth are using Islamic learning spaces as a way to engage with their identities critically, to validate their lived experiences, and to build a sense of community that is often rejected at mainstream educational institutions.⁹⁰ This has implications that reinforce the argument that learning about Islam can serve spiritual understandings, but can also give young Muslims the capacity to claim their social and intellectual selves in contexts where they are often marginalized.

This pattern is also evident in Southeast Asia. In Brunei, for example, Islamic institutions that integrate religious and rational knowledge are becoming increasingly attractive to young people. These institutions do not just provide rote learning, but also emphasize critical and reflective engagement, and the relevance of Islamic teachings in contemporary applications. The model offers distinct differences from the more traditional curricula present in other Muslim contexts, whereby obedience is more routinely emphasized than inquiry. In Brunei, the teaching of Islamic ethics alongside secular subjects offers a form informed by spirituality and intellectual inquiry. This not only supports moral development, but it also prepares young people for a rapidly changing context.⁹¹ This is a model of Islamic education that might catalyze reform in minority Muslim contexts struggling with youth in pursuit of holistic and contextual diversity-informed forms of religious education.

Islamic education encompasses a broader view of the growth of the self. When youth are engaged in Islamic education in the form of a continuum, it allows the course of the tradition to stand alongside and help young people deal with the challenges of modernity: This is not merely delivery of Islamic teaching and practice, this is about an

⁹⁰ Hülya Kosar Altinyelken, "Muslim Youth Negotiating Boundary Maintenance Between the Sexes: A Qualitative Exploration," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 16, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3998/jmmh.534>.

⁹¹ Ahmad Yousif and Norarfan Hj. Zainal, "Islamic Education in Southeast Asia: A Study of the Integration of Knowledge in Brunei Darussalam," paper presented at 2nd International Conference on Religion and Education, INCRE 2020, 11-12 November 2020, Jakarta, Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia, *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Religion and Education, INCRE 2020, 11-12 November 2020, Jakarta, Indonesia*, EAI, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.11-11-2020.2308308>.

active dynamic journey in the formation of ethics, inward reflection, and spirituality. Rather than thinking of religious identity as something given or inherited, this educational model supports young people building an active sense of identity, actively drawing from and relating their constructed understanding of Islam to questions of modernity. When students are invited to internalize a way of being in Islam as distinct from simply performing a way of being, it is a means of developing a deeper and more purposeful understanding of their faith identity; it is shifting from a formal identity to an urban and resistant identity and capacity. Taking on the ethical tensions of a multicultural secular space becomes much easier.⁹²

At the same time, youth participation in Islamic education does not only occur in formal settings. Informal settings such as youth halaqas (study circles), digital religious platforms, and weekend religious classes provide alternative spaces for learning and identity affirmation. These non-traditional contexts frequently attract youth, as a result of various socio-political factors, who feel marginalized by the mainstream religious institutions, especially as members of diasporic communities. Not only do these flexible, youth-centered, and self-directed contexts allow learners to engage with Islam in their own way, but they also provide a sense of autonomy and relevance to their spiritual engagement. These different motivations emphasize the importance of Islamic education being responsive, flexible, and sensitive to the lived realities of Muslim youth.

2.3.2 Identity Formation

The process of identity formation for Muslim youth is not simple. They navigate experiences in various environments rapidly: home, school, mosque, and online spaces. Each of these environments has different expectations and value systems. Each Muslim youth's experience involves developing a religious identity in different ways depending on their experiences, gender, community, and events unfolding in the world. Some youth feel a deeper connection to their faith right away, while others go through developments and questions before reaching a more significant commitment.⁹³

Muslim youth in Western countries are often not simply one identity but a combination of cultural and religious identities. A Muslim teenager in Canada, for instance, might be fully immersed in Canadian life solely through the lens of Islam, and when pushed to identify publicly as either Canadian or Muslim, they struggle to choose between the two identities. The situation becomes confusing because the society in which they live and are wholly exposed often does not understand this dual identity, resulting in

⁹² Sahin, *New Directions in Islamic Education*.

⁹³ Sahin, *New Directions in Islamic Education*.

internal and external tensions for the youth. Research conducted on third-culture Muslim youth highlights how their identities are continuously in a transformative process influenced by shifting across cultural spaces of belonging in their lives. By examining the experiences of these youth, it can be seen that they frequently rely on being in-between cultures, pushing themselves to demonstrate cultural manifestations that simply do not fit into engaging a singular tradition. On one hand, this hybridity can be seen as tension and confusion. On the other hand, this new hybrid identity has the potential to be a source of resilience and creativity.⁹⁴

The Qur'an itself provides a meaningful and stable foundation for young Muslims as they navigate the complicated questions of identity. Young Muslims read the Qur'an not merely as a religious text but as a set of values. The Qur'an and other Islamic literature provide values such as tawhid (the oneness of God), *taqwa* (God-Consciousness), and *adab* (ethical conduct) that provide ethical grounding in a pluralistic world. In this way, they can achieve a certain level of coherence and direction in the competing expectations of their various roles, whether at home, school, peer groups, or digital spaces. When young people turn to the Qur'an, they find spiritual comfort and ways to rationalize the challenges they encounter in everyday life. The Qur'an guides them religiously and becomes a compass in the formative task of positioning themselves in the world, as they grapple with the complexity of identifying a way to build a grounded identity that incorporates faith and the demands of contemporary experience.⁹⁵

Recent studies also show how religious stigma profoundly influences the identity formation of Muslim youth. In a comparative study, Kunst et al. (2012) compare responses to Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice among a specific youth group and find that young Muslims have two opposing but equally meaningful strategies in response to stigma: some strengthen their religious identity as a direct response to stigma, while others disengage to avoid the unacceptable stigma of being 'too religious.' These strategies reflect how young people are constantly dealing with the emotional and psychological pressure of managing how they are perceived by the dominant culture. For many, religion is no longer just a personal faith or theological belief but a publicly acknowledged, contested space of negotiation. They point out that religious identity is not formed solely through personal or theological processes, even though it has these

⁹⁴ Tarek Younis and Ghayda Hassan, "Second-Generation Western Muslims: A Qualitative Analysis of Multiple Social Identities," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 56, no. 6 (2019): 1155–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461518804554>.

⁹⁵ Sara Mazzei, "The Identity Construction in Arab-Islamic Education Systems Into the Experiences of People from Morocco and Syria Living in Europe," *Journal of Education in Muslim Societies* 5, no. 2 (2024): 74–99, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jems.00005>.

dimensions, but also in relation to how Muslims are defined and treated in society.⁹⁶

Identity making is often an act of resistance. Zine (2006) explains that the Muslim girls attending Canadian Islamic schools were strategically negotiating their identities wearing the hijab both as a symbol of piety and a public assertion of their religious visibility. This negotiation is an act of resistance and shows agency in constructing what it means to be Muslim and Canadian, where these identities are seen as mutually exclusive. Islamic education is acting as a critical space where students learned to express their narratives.⁹⁷

Moreover, the identity work relating to Muslim youth is also shaped by a wide variety of representations and identities available online. Muslim youth may follow a variety of social media influencers, ranging from Islamic YouTube channels to TikTok influencers, who provide an amalgam of ideas, reflections, peer recognition, and commentary related to local and global sociopolitical issues. In these virtual environments, Muslim youth find new ways of engaging with the diversity of ideas and meanings associated with Islam, which complicates identity work positively. Similarly, the fluidity and negotiation of religious identities are shaped not only locally but globally through discourses stemming from online platforms.

2.3.3 Challenges

One of the most difficult things for young Muslims today is grappling with the contradiction between what they learn in Islamic contexts and what they experience in secular schools or within broader secular society. Muslim youth navigate very different environments in the Netherlands. In Islamic education, they learn about modesty, gender relations, and humility. By contrast, in public education, they are encouraged to speak out, work together in mixed-gender settings, and be physically demonstrative. These competing norms confuse and compel youth to always pivot their behavior depending on where they are in their daily lives.⁹⁸ Some young Muslims uphold their religious values without question, while others willingly compromise aspects of their behavior to conform to secular norms, or even consciously reject Islamic norms altogether. These are real choices that do not simply relate to behavior, but also impact a young Muslim's self-concept, their feelings of competence in their faith, and how they feel they are viewed and accepted by society.

⁹⁶ Jonas R. Kunst et al., "Coping with Islamophobia: The Effects of Religious Stigma on Muslim Minorities' Identity Formation," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 36, no. 4 (2012): 518–32, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.12.014>.

⁹⁷ Zine, *Canadian Islamic Schools*.

⁹⁸ Altinyelken, "Muslim Youth Negotiating Boundary Maintenance Between the Sexes."

Many Muslim youths in Europe come from countries like Syria, Morocco, or Pakistan, where the educational systems integrate religion with civic values and civic culture, as well as national history. Youth arrive with an understanding of how religion has been shaped and embedded in public life, guiding not only their moral behavior, but also their political and social consciousness. Their prior education often imparted an investment in religion as a civic responsibility and engagement with the ethical character of their society. When European youth were exposed to secular education systems, their experiences were not considered, or often were deemed to conflict with liberal democratic principles. European institutions have established a one-size-fits-all approach to integration that generally does not consider the diversity among Muslim youth and the multiplicity of formative experiences, imposing a narrow paradigm of religious exclusion from public life. Conflicts that arise from this paradox create misunderstanding for the youth and are sources of stereotyping, as well as a rejection of the educational and identity needs for civic engagement. The erasure or devaluation of educational and cultural experiences leaves youth to experience a range of invisibility and alienation that also complicate their sense of identity within host societies, creating challenges that risk marginality and disaffection. The gendered nature of these challenges is notable with Muslim girls in Canadian Islamic schools. For them, veiling becomes a complex negotiation within their practice of faith in public and secular spaces, yielding pride and an experience of vulnerability.⁹⁹

Moreover, Muslim youth also face real (and sometimes systemic) forms of discrimination. A school that does not allow youth time for prayer, that will not allow halal food in schools, or where teachers are ignorant of Islamic traditions and values cannot treat Muslim students as equally valued members of a school community. The absence of Muslim voices and histories in classrooms and textbooks only cements the sense of being erased. For many of these students, the silence represents an identity ignored or considered to be valueless. Over time, these trivial forms of marginalization may alter how youth see themselves and affect their confidence and place in the community. If these forms of marginalization are systemic, they will signal to Muslim students that their identity is only partially welcome or valued in educational spaces. For Muslim girls who wear the hijab, the systemic neglect can be even more exaggerated. As a visible marker of faith, the hijab often leads to bullying, stereotyping, or social exclusion, especially in multicultural but secular school contexts that treat difference with suspicion rather than inclusion. Hassan and Younis (2018) note that such experiences

⁹⁹ Zine, *Canadian Islamic Schools*.

create internal conflict for students as they navigate their social integration, improve their social skills, and work toward their psychological well-being as students learn to reconcile conflicting senses of belonging, identity, and acceptance.¹⁰⁰

Then there is the media. Whenever something negative happens that involves Muslims, young people feel pressured to explain or apologize, even if they are not involved. This is a huge emotional burden. Pressure often forces youth to either deny their Muslim identity or become hyper-visible in defending it. In both situations, this is an unfair burden.¹⁰¹ Most importantly, Muslim youth should not be seen as a problem. They are the ones who will shape the future of Islam in their communities. They deserve support, space, and respect as they learn, question, and grow into confident, faithful individuals.

Islamic education is not just a form of learning; it can be seen as a form of healing and resistance. It empowers youth to take pride in who they are as individuals, while also providing them with the tools to push back against hate and ignorance. The transformative nature of education is what makes Islamic pedagogy an ideal contributor to the holistic growth of young Muslims.

Education in Islam should emphasize the moral development of youth, not conformity to its belief system. Opening the door to tarbiyah (Islamic nurturing) as a gentler framework for Islam is beneficial for development as an ongoing, life-long process. Within tarbiyah, youth should be encouraged to question, contemplate life's meaning, and relate the lessons learned from Islam to their daily experiences. Institutional changes will be necessary to support this process; more training for teachers, improved resources in schools, and greater collaboration between Islamic institutes and public universities.¹⁰²

Islamic education and Muslim youth identity are a nuanced relationship. It is not just about acquiring knowledge, but also shaping identities in a world that often misinterprets them. Supporting youth identity is about understanding the difficulties of being vulnerable and the courage they exhibit in navigating their worlds, when we understand the important social and educational support that Islamic education provides them in their development.

While there are numerous studies on Islamic education and Muslim youth identity formation, in a variety of global and minority contexts, there is a considerable knowledge gap in the literature concerning how madrasah education works specifically as a site for

¹⁰⁰ Younis and Hassan, "Second-Generation Western Muslims."

¹⁰¹ Younis and Hassan, "Second-Generation Western Muslims."

¹⁰² Sahin, *New Directions in Islamic Education*.

maintaining Islamic identity among Filipino Muslim youth in the Southern Philippines. While some studies have examined the changing nature of madrasah education in Southeast Asia and broadly, including in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, they have examined themes such as reform, hybrid curriculum, and the role of religious education in identity formation, they have not critically examined the unique interrelatedness of culture, marginality, and religious learning in Mindanao.

To date, most studies on madrasah in the Philippines focus too broadly on the Philippines in an analysis of Southeast Asia or too narrowly on institutional reform rather than engaging with the lived experiences of youth, parents, and ustadz involved in madrasah systems. This dissertation will fill this empirical and conceptual gap by focusing specifically upon the Southern Philippines, a region of colonial history and socio-political marginality, and cultural resilience, for identifying how madrasah education serves not only as a means of religious instruction but as an important pedagogical site for promoting Islamic identity, feelings of community belonging, and resistance among young Muslims.

In conclusion, the literature shows that Islamic education, especially madrasahs, continues to play a vital role in helping Muslim youth maintain and strengthen their Islamic identity. Although some believe that madrasahs are outdated, most have managed to adapt to modern changes without sacrificing their Islamic values. Meanwhile, young Muslims today are finding new ways to connect with their faith, whether at school, on social media, or within their communities. They are influenced not just by tradition, but also by their surrounding environment. For minorities, religious education is more than just learning about Islam; it is about gaining a sense of purpose, belonging, and resilience.

CHAPTER III

THE HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT OF MADRASAH IN THE PHILIPPINES

Madrasah Education in the Philippines is an institution with a long history, serving as the center of religious and cultural life for Filipino Muslims for centuries. It reflects a deep tradition, originating during the early precolonial period, through the Sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao, and now reaching perhaps an even more significant era of madrasah education, which is currently integrated into the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The madrasah has provided an institutional way for people to engage in Islamic education while maintaining their Muslim identity amid changing political regimes and shifts in the educational landscape. This chapter explores the history, types, government policies, and issues facing madrasah education in the Philippines. It considers how madrasah education has adapted to colonial disruptions, government reforms, and modern educational needs. The diverse setup of madrasahs must be examined from the traditional family-based learning system to the formally established integrated school system within the country's socio-political context. This analysis will highlight the relevance and complex realities of Islamic education within a pluralistic and often secular landscape.

3.1 Historical Evolution of Madrasah Education

Madrasah education in the Philippines began during the 14th and 17th centuries during the Islamic Sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao. Long before the Spanish intrusion, traders and missionaries from Arabia and Malay colleagues, such as Majul (1999), noted, were bringing Islam into the Philippines. The first Islamic school was established in Tawitawi by Sharif Makhdum (1380), soon followed by Shariff Kabungsuwan's arrival in Mindanao in the early 1500s. In those days, most learning was informal and part of community practice. Learning occurred especially around mosques and community spaces. Local teachers called pandita or guru taught children to recite or read the Qur'an, learn Arabic, and fundamental Islamic teachings (*fiqh*). Most teachings were oral, where students merely memorized what the teacher had said, and the Qur'an provided the basis for an entire learning environment. Majul further illustrates how these early madrasahs helped Muslims foster their identity in relation to their religion and their Muslim values among many other religions.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Cesar Adīb Majūl, *Muslims in the Philippines*, 1999 ed (Diliman, Quezon City: Univ. of the Philippines Pr, 1999).

Even with the lack of a central government for much of their history, Muslim communities in the southern Philippines were able to maintain their educational institutions with the help and support of people's initiatives. The community madrasahs, which were at the core of these educational systems, employed religious educators who had received their education in Mecca, Malaysia, or Indonesia. When they returned, they would teach students about Islamic texts and share methodologies that combined local and Islamic practices, which was the start of creating a stronger social base for Islamic education.¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, a more structured madrasah system came from attempts to standardize and regulate madrasahs, especially given the colonial or postcolonial administrators.

However, Madrasah education in the Philippines was interrupted by the arrival of colonialism. During the Spanish era (1565-1898), missionaries were mainly sent to Luzon and the Visayas, meaning the people of Muslim Mindanao were not targeted for conversion. However, when the Spanish labeled Muslims “Moros,” it showed that they saw Islam as a danger to their Catholic rule. Though they did not overpower the sultanates completely, the Spaniards interrupted the trade and diplomatic ties that had supported Islamic education.¹⁰⁵ The most drastic changes occurred during the period of American domination, 1898–1946. The Americans wanted Mindanao to be a colony, unlike the Spanish, who had limited it to the control of the friars. The Americans established schools, in English, teaching Western subjects, to promote their culture through education. Constantino (1975) argues that the American educational system was not an educational system, but rather an assimilation system. As a result, Muslims were made to conform to Western education, subordinating their religion and culture to a less important place in their lives.¹⁰⁶

According to McKenna (1998), the American colonial government established a public education system that did not include any religious education. In other Muslim areas, new public schools were established and provided free and compulsory education to many, which helped people learn to read and perform math, but traditionally, madrasahs lost some of their prestige in educational aspects of religious education for Muslims. Parents struggled to decide because they hoped their children would adapt to

¹⁰⁴ Carmen Abu Bakar, “Mainstreaming Madrasah Education in the Philippines: Issues, Problems and Challenges,” in *Islamic Studies and Islamic Education in Contemporary Southeast Asia*, ed. Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad and Patrick Jory (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Ilmuwan, 2011), 75-92.

¹⁰⁵ Majūl, *Muslims in the Philippines*.

¹⁰⁶ Renato Constantino, “THE MISEDUCATION OF THE FILIPINO,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 1, no. 1 (1970): 20-36.

modernization, but didn't want to give up their Islamic beliefs. Many individuals had to decide whether to attend a formal school or a religious one. Even so, traditional madrasahs continue to be in various places. Many developed some kind of school within the community, often with well-off families or groups in the local area supporting schools. While the purpose of the madrasah was to teach religion, in larger communities, some madrasahs began to offer lessons in some secular subjects. Despite this, as these schools were not sanctioned by the state, they could not issue diplomas that were accepted by the state. For this reason, these students have fewer opportunities to apply for studies at public universities or for employment in government and other official positions.¹⁰⁷

At the time of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines (1942-1945), Muslim leadership had a little more autonomy, and Islamic schooling went through a brief revitalization. Nonetheless, because there were no established policies for madrasahs, the revitalization was short-lived. For many years, madrasahs were completely overlooked in the educational system due to the neglect of both Spanish and American rule, and as a result, Muslim communities still experience educational inequality today.¹⁰⁸ After independence was achieved in 1946, the government did not change the public school system from the American system, and continued to ignore the educational needs of Muslims. Although the national curriculum lacked religion, madrasahs were usually ignored and treated as institutions of religion only.¹⁰⁹

In the early 2000s, Islamic education gained national recognition in the Philippines. Responding to the increasing demands of peace negotiations and civil society, the Government of the Philippines officially recognized madrasah education through the Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 51, series of 2004, which warranted the Madrasah Education Program (MEP). As part of this program, DepEd specified an operational framework to be developed by madrasah education, in particular by implementing the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) program (DepEd, 2004). Under this program, all public elementary schools with a minimum of 15 Muslim students had the opportunity to modify their regular curriculum and include ALIVE lessons taught by *asatidz* (Islamic teachers), which was a significant shift in government policy. For the first time, the state officially recognized Islamic education and provided the first steps toward financial and institutional support. Additionally, well-

¹⁰⁷ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*.

¹⁰⁸ Majūl, *Muslims in the Philippines*.

¹⁰⁹ Bustamam-Ahmad and Jory, *Islamic Studies and Islamic Education in Contemporary Southeast Asia*.

trained teachers were formally trained in new skills, while private madrasahs were encouraged to register as "standard madrasahs" with the Department of Education for the opportunity to access course materials and sit the standard assessment tests. However, problems began to emerge. A large number of *asatidz* had no formal qualifications to be a teacher, the facilities of the schools were sometimes inadequate, and it took too much effort to register as a standard madrasah for small community Madaris (DepEd, 2012).¹¹⁰

While the MEP has endured a series of challenges to forge a solid base for (greater) reforms in the aftermath of the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in 2019, the Bangsamoro Education Code, introduced in 2021, formally incorporated madrasah education into the educational landscape across the region (BARMM, 2021). This Code has provided a clear framework under which public madrasahs can be established, how private institutions can be accredited, and how teacher development interventions can be established. The Code further increased recognition of a variety of Islamic educational experiences, including *tahfidz* (Qur'an memorization schools) and *tahdiriyyah* (Islamic preschools), and provides valuable steps to preserve and affirm Islamic identity across the region.¹¹¹

3.2 Typologies and Structures of Madrasah Education in Southern Philippines

3.2.1 Traditional Madrasahs

In the Philippines, they are usually founded and operated by the local community rather than the government. They are sometimes located in a mosque, a home, or a standalone building on donated land. A recent study by Samid (2022) estimated that nearly 60% of Philippine Madaris are family- or community-founded, with the remainder affiliated with larger organizations. Attendance is usually free, and voluntary donations are welcome. Most traditional schools base their curriculum heavily on memorizing the Qur'an, Arabic grammar, Islamic law, and theology. Many *ulama* or *asatidz* have studied at foreign universities (43% at Saudi institutions), while many are not certified by the Department of Education. Classes are informal, often given on a Saturday or Sunday, to allow attendance at a secular school from Monday through Friday. A traditional madrasah in the Philippines might have Islamic subjects from primary to secondary school. Instruction is provided exclusively in Arabic, often without a formal curriculum or lesson

¹¹⁰ August 28, 2004 DO 51, s. 2004 – *Standards Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private MADARIS Amended by DO 40, s. 2011 – Amendment to DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004 (Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris)* | Department of Education, n.d., accessed April 30, 2025, <https://www.deped.gov.ph/2004/08/28/do-51-s-2004-standards-curriculum-for-elementary-public-schools-and-private-madaris-amended-by-do-40-s-2011-amendment-to-deped-order-no-51-s-2004-standard-curriculum-for-elementary-public/>.

¹¹¹ *Bangsamoro Education Code*, n.d.

plan. Because these madrasahs do not provide diplomas recognized by the Department of Education, this means students must go to a secular university as formal students or study abroad if they choose to further their education.¹¹²

3.2.2 Private Madrasah

In the Philippines is formalized and has a specific educational trajectory, from elementary school (*ibtida*), to junior high school (*mutawassit*), to senior high school (*Thanawi*), and finally, to a college level (*kulliyah*). Students need to follow this path and abide by the institution's policies. The educational programs are guided by Islamic theology and have minor subjects, namely, Mathematics, Science, and History, which are also at times altered, and they are taught according to levels, along with the lessons. It has mother tongue as the means of instruction from elementary up to high school, a mother tongue and Arabic for senior high school, and Arabic at the college level. Classes for elementary to senior high school are on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, which allows students to enroll in a public school during the weekdays. For colleges, four-year programs are offered in fields like *Shari'ah*, *Da'wah*, and *Tarbiyyah*, where classes normally start on Mondays and Thursdays. Most teachers are scholars who were educated in Islamic institutions from the Middle East or any other accredited and assumed or recognized Islamic schools locally or abroad. The limitations of the institutions and the absence of state recognition influence the action that students should choose and study more outside of the Philippines, especially in the Middle East, and graduates cannot find jobs as the Philippine government departments do not recognize degrees from these madrasahs for a proper job placement.¹¹³

3.2.3 Special Qur'an Memorization Madrasah.

This institution is typically called the 'halaqat' in the Philippines. The participants were mainly children, aged about four to ten. The teachers must know at least how to read the Qur'an with proper pronunciation (*tajwid*). In some places, this Madrasah institution has a minimum number of other religious subjects. The class schedules are usually conducted in the mosque for a particular time, determined by the teacher. This is an informal institution, with a noisy vocal class with students reading the Qur'an at once, and sometimes with a microphone.¹¹⁴

Toril Madrasah (also known as a markaz) is an institution where students are

¹¹² Samid, "Filipinler'de İslami Eğitim ve Medrese Okullarının Gelişimi."

¹¹³ Sahraman Dimakuta Hadji Latif, "Islamic Education: Opportunities and Challenges in Secular Philippine State," *SAINTEKBU* 7, no. 1 (2014): 75, 1, <https://doi.org/10.32764/saintekbu.v7i1.73>.

¹¹⁴ Latif, "Islamic Education," 75.

instructed to memorize the complete Qur'an, thus becoming 'hafidz' (the title of someone who has memorized the entire Qur'an). Also, they learn the Arabic language. The students are required to stay on campus 24 hours a day since the teacher will oversee the students while they memorize the Qur'an during the day and night. On weekends, the students are required to attend a formal private madrasah to study other religious subjects. The teacher will be able to read the Qur'an, *tajwid*, and speak the Arabic language fluently. The course is usually two to three years, and the students must complete the memorization of the Qur'an before progressing onto the next level, which entails learning the exegesis (*tafsir*) of the Qur'an.¹¹⁵

3.2.4 Integrated Madrasahs

This type of Madrasah is acknowledged by the Department of Education (DepEd) and combines national subjects with Islamic learning. These schools must follow DepEd's approved curriculum while also teaching Islamic values. For example, DepEd classifies "Integrated Madaris" as private or sectarian schools accredited by the government.¹¹⁶

Another distinct government-supported model is the ALIVE program (Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education) is a special program developed by the government to provide Islamic studies in public schools. According to DepEd Order No. 41(2017), the Ministry of Education launched ALIVE classes in a few public elementary and secondary schools, mainly in regions with many Muslims. In Alive schools, contract-based *asatidz* are assigned to teach two subjects each week, Arabic and Islamic values/morals. In addition to the standard curriculum, these subjects are available, but only schools with many Muslim students have the ALIVE section. The purpose is to provide formal education about their religious heritage to Filipino Muslim students, while still keeping them in the general system. ALIVE effectively establishes Islamic schools within the public school system. DepEd points out that this program makes sure Muslim Filipinos have educational opportunities that align with their culture. While not every Muslim child goes to an ALIVE school, the program is an official way for the state to include Islamic education in the school system.¹¹⁷

Another distinct government-supported model is the ALIVE program (Arabic

¹¹⁵ Latif, "Islamic Education," 76.

¹¹⁶ Abdul Haiy Abdul Sali and Arlyne Canales Marasigan, "Madrasah Education Program Implementation in the Philippines: An Exploratory Case Study," *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development* 22, no. 3 (2020): 201–17, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCED-06-2019-0034>.

¹¹⁷ Sali, "Sociological Understanding of Muslim Education in Multicultural Philippines."

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Alongside government-led and community-run madrasahs, numerous private education models are also operating. Many of these programs are cultivated based on the needs of the community and initiated by a mosque, NGO, or community group. In communities without a formal DepEd campus, some community madrasahs evolved out of a community need for children to get basic reading, vocational courses, and/or some early learning of Islam. Some centers are small Quranic preschools called tahderiyyah, while others are larger schools. Some centers were not registered and were not regularly monitored. Many of these schools are also supported by local NGOs and civic organizations. Muslim community organizations and some city governments have provided some form of training, study materials, and/or financial support to teachers in these schools. One study in General Santos City even found that some NGOs provided support to the Asatidz through training, books, scholarships, and community-level campaigns to increase awareness on the importance (in the areas of education). Religious leaders and community elders have a key role in establishing or sustaining these schools. Parents may combine their donations to provide teachers with minimal compensation, or band together with local groups to build a simple structure for learning and worship. Although support and involvement from the government are limited, the private/community madrasahs have created and continued to promote cultural elements of the community.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Sali, "Sociological Understanding of Muslim Education in Multicultural Philippines."

¹¹⁹ Almera Mode Sales et al., "Enabler of Madrasah Education: The Case of LGU-Supported Traditional Madrasah in General Santos City," *Journal of Modern Islamic Studies and Civilization* 3, no. 01 (2025): 59–73, <https://doi.org/10.59653/jmisc.v3i01.1343>.

Overall, Southern Philippine madrasahs can be categorized as traditional weekend/home-based schools, or controlled by religious groups, madrasahs recognized by DepEd standards, and madrasahs established by Muslim households or organizations. Each of these categories has defined structures, funding sources, and areas of emphasis. In a traditional madrasah, creed and Arabic are taught to students through the efforts of volunteers. In an integrated madrasah, there is both secular schooling and teaching of Islam, and in a community madrasah, local organizations were able to support non- governmental groups to support the Muslim children.

3.3 State Policies and Educational Reforms

Since 2000, the Philippine government has made significant efforts to officially integrate madrasah education into the national education system. A notable milestone took place when the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) in 2010. Part of the MEP roll-out included the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) program in public schools across the Philippines, and it created a Standard Madrasah Curriculum for private madrasahs. The intention was to cater to the educational wants of Muslim learners and provide quality education without violating religious and cultural identity. An educational policy analyst noted that the MEP intends to promote equitable access to quality education for all Filipino children. In support of this notion, DepEd was mandated to help the Bangsamoro region in the context of Muslim Mindanao. Through ALIVE and collaborating organizations like the Bureau of Muslim Mindanao, the Bureau of Muslim Education, and the BARMM/BDARMM's Directorate of Madaris Education, various agencies were able to send ustadz/ustadzah (Islamic teachers) into public schools. They instruct students in Arabic, Islamic values, and cultural subjects in conjunction with standard curricula.¹²⁰

In addition to DepEd initiatives, integration of the madrasah education system in the even-max educational system has legal backing in Article XIV of the 1987 Philippine Constitution that promotes relevant, culturally appropriate education systems. This constitutional provision, along with others, is part of the desire to accommodate the diverse educational requirements of the heterogeneous Filipino people, particularly the Bangsamoro. Over many years, there have been many agencies and acts of legislation aimed at promoting the formal integration of madrasah education into the curriculum in both public and private educational institutions. For example, it began with the First Madrasah Congress in 1982, followed by several resolutions, policies, and acts of

¹²⁰ Sali and Marasigan, "Madrasah Education Program Implementation in the Philippines."

legislation, including the Department of Education's issuance of Order No. 51, which called for the institutionalization of Arabic language and Islamic values education in both private and public schools. The recent milestones in legislation represent meaningful legal advances, particularly Republic Act No. 11054, the Bangsamoro Organic Law. For example, Section 16 of the law gives authority to the Bangsamoro Government to create educational policies relevant to its culture and spirituality. Section 18 contains specific provisions aimed at recognizing madrasah education by requiring the integration of Islamic and Arabic Studies at the elementary and secondary levels for Muslim students attending public schools in the Bangsamoro region. These actions illustrate the recognition of madrasah education as a right for all Muslim learners; a right that has constitutional and political support in the Philippines.¹²¹

The Bangsamoro Organic Law mandates that the regional government create an education system that accommodates the needs and objectives of the Bangsamoro people and requires the inclusion of Arabic instruction and madrasah education as part of the regional educational policy. Therefore, the Bangsamoro Education Code of 2021 included Madaris as part of its public education system, stipulated minimum standards for teachers, created a policy for trilingual instruction (Arabic, English, Filipino), and sought to include mother-tongue-based instruction for elementary school-aged children.¹²²

Despite the positive intentions behind these reforms, the implementation of the MEP has encountered persistent challenges. Several studies have shown that School administrators and implementers often lack explicit directives/guidelines, training opportunities, and significant access to support systems for use in the implementation of the MEP and Madrasah education. Survey responses also indicated they faced issues related to unstable infrastructure, lack of availability of teaching materials, and infrequent or inadequate financial support for *asatidz*.¹²³ While DepEd officially included Arabic and Islamic lessons in the K-12 curriculum with DepEd Order No. 51, s. In 2004, there were still disagreements. Marasigan (2019) noted that the K-12 reform in education in 2013 meant that Muslim learners in madrasah had to meet the same national standards as all other students in an expanded curriculum because madrasah students were learning mostly religious subjects. While the MEP intends to mainstream madrasah, it is hindered by the lack of full integration. Many teachers and students continue to report that the

¹²¹ Andang-Alaiden et al., "Analysis of the Socio-Political Dimension of Madrasah Education Program in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao."

¹²² Jeconiah Louis Dreisbach and Sharon Mendoza Dreisbach, "Prospects for the Expansion of Language Policies in the Bangsamoro Education Code," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 23, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.23.2023.255>.

¹²³ Sali and Marasigan, "Madrasah Education Program Implementation in the Philippines."

curriculum expectations and standards are unclear.¹²⁴

In response, DepEd has issued several policy refinements. For instance. For example, in the middle of 2021, the DepEd had updated the implementing guidelines for the Madrasah Education Program (DepEd Order No. 25, s.2021), and by 2024, was making adjustments to allowances and the support available to ALIVE teachers, including the monthly honorarium for asatidz, which indicated ₱12,500 per month. These policies are examples of continued efforts to improve program delivery. Meanwhile, with the transition from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) to the newly created Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BARMM) that transpired from 2019-2022, reforms were offered at the regional level. The Bangsamoro Education Code (2021) aligned the BARMM to the national education code and provided government subsidies to private madrasahs.¹²⁵

The Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) in BARMM has prioritized improving Islamic Studies and Arabic Language (ISAL) education. As a significant policy initiative, the MBHTE has focused on recruiting and improving Islamic Studies and Arabic Language teachers, also known as asatidz. Even though many of these teachers have Islamically-accredited higher education, such as the Kuliya degree, they tend to lack training in formalized, modern teaching practices, especially as they relate to secular subjects. In order to remedy these deficiencies, the MBHTE developed discrete training programs for asatidz in order to provide them with effective methods of delivering instruction, including culturally relevant methods. These programs indicate the region's willingness to invest in the quality of its teachers and provide students with a comprehensive education that is based on both fundamental Islamic teachings and more educationally and academically competencies.¹²⁶

Since the establishment of BARMM in 2019, madrasah education has begun to experience significant change. Under the auspices of the MBHTE, the Directorate General for Madaris Education (DGME) was officially created in 2023, with the central aim of the inclusion of traditional and private Madaris into the system while maintaining the values of Islamic education. The DGME shall accomplish this by updating curricula, adding peace education and Islamic studies, teacher training, and facility upgrading. This new directorate is recognized widely by stakeholders as a significant step toward institutionalizing Madaris into the formal education system in the absence of existing

¹²⁴ Arlyne C Marasigan, "Sustainability Concerns of the Madrasah Education Program," 2019, n.d.

¹²⁵ *Bangsamoro Education Code*.

¹²⁶ "The Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education," Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education - Bangsamoro, accessed July 6, 2025, <https://mbhte.bangsamoro.gov.ph/>.

policies.¹²⁷

3.4 Madrasah as a Site of Cultural and Islamic Formation in the Philippines

Madrasahs in Mindanao are viewed as the custodians of Filipino Muslims' cultural and religious identity. Scholars collectively assert that madrasahs play a foundational role in Islamic civilization and are integral to Muslims' lives. Madrasahs are intended to center on capturing the core beliefs of Islam, including scripture, rituals, and ethics, so that these commonly understood beliefs are transmitted to the next generation. An analysis of regulated elementary madrasahs revealed that, despite their limited resources, students gained more knowledge of Islamic studies and Arabic, which helped them become better Muslims.¹²⁸ As Ontok Balah et al. (2023) point out, madrasahs are one of the oldest established schools in Mindanao and contribute to the preservation of Islam in the Philippines. Madrasahs teach Muslim youth a way to speak Arabic, religious practice, and moral conduct, thus allowing them to form and build their religious identity.¹²⁹

In addition to the academic components of education they provide, traditional madrasahs also become an opportunity for young Muslims to learn the long-established Islamic traditions, and thus they learn not just a spiritual life but also a cultural identity. Through repetitive daily activities, which include Qur'an recitation, memorization of the Hadith, and teaching Islamic adab (ethics), students develop self-discipline, humility, and their moral sense. Parents of students indicate high levels of satisfaction with the behavioral outcomes of madrasah education, particularly concerning their children being perceived as respectful, modest, and more responsible in the school community. Madrasah students were more likely to display an increased awareness of how to live their religion in their daily lives, whereas their peers in public schools typically focus on promoting tolerance and modeling moderate Islam. Thus, madrasahs in Mindanao are, and will continue to be, critical in the development of the future generations of Muslims, who are not simply religious students, but equally students of the Islamic culture and identity.¹³⁰ Thus, madrasahs in Mindanao remain central in the development of future generations of Muslims who are not only religious students but are also embedded in the Islamic culture and identity.

¹²⁷ Andang-Alaiden et al., "Analysis of the Socio-Political Dimension of Madrasah Education Program in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao."

¹²⁸ Naima Tomas and Saidamin Bagolong, "Regulated Elementary Madrasah in the Philippines as Basis for Policy Integration in the Bangsamoro Region," 2024 3 (2024), file:///C:/Users/rodsm/Downloads/1530-Article%20Text-4541-1-10-20240721%20(6).pdf.

¹²⁹ Khadiguia Ontok-Balah, *Exploring Muslim College Students' Experiences*.

¹³⁰ Samid, "Filipinler'de İslami Eğitim ve Medrese Okullarının Gelişimi."

3.5 Challenges Faced by Madrasah Institutions

Despite their cultural importance, madrasahs encounter a lot of difficulties in how they function. Two major problems are a lack of financial support and poor teacher preparation. Because most madrasahs receive little help from the government or the community, they have difficulty finding adequate funds. Many studies have found that a lack of resources is one of the main reasons institutions find it hard to implement Islamic curriculum programs.¹³¹

Another ongoing challenge is the social stigma and marginalization of the madrasah students and the schools themselves. Many in the wider population who are not part of Muslim social groups tend to misperceive Islamic schools. Worldwide, there is a negative perception of madrasahs with an image of them being insular or even considered extremist. There was a very public escalation of this stigma after events like September 11, when media reports sometimes called madrasahs "breeding grounds for terrorism."¹³² Locally, non-Muslims misinterpret madrasah education to mean radicalization. Muslim students in places with a Christian majority also experience discrimination. For example, in areas ravaged by conflict during fieldwork, it was noted that "discrimination also impacted Muslim students as bullying, resulting in some students quitting school, and that displaced Muslim children were sometimes segregated or treated differently."¹³³

In the classrooms, madrasah and non-madrasah students can be teased because they wear their traditional outfit or speak Arabic. Because of this stigma, some families do not send their children to a madrasah because others look down on them for this choice. Some of the stigma makes madrasah students feel marginalized and will face bias in the job or college application process. In some cases, Muslim students in Catholic schools must participate in the Catholic school's religious ceremonies and activities and get little support for their religion, which shows how little respect there is for minority faiths. (Though this study was conducted with Catholic students, their feelings show what madrasah students experience in broader society.) In general, many people's negative biases about Islam make madrasah graduates' lives and sense of belonging difficult.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Rita L. Salindab and Allan A. Maglantay, "Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) Implementation, Pedagogical Practices of Alive Teachers and Learners' Performance," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* IX, no. IV (2025): 1137–50, <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90400087>.

¹³² Ernesto Doloso, "Fake and Facts on Madrasah Education," *International Journal of Research Studies in Education* 14, no. 6 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrse.2025.25031>.

¹³³ Jonamari Kristin Floresta, 2022/66 "Situating the Role Schools Have Played in the Mindanao Conflict" by Jonamari Kristin Floresta, 2022, no. 66 (2022), <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2022-66-situating-the-role-schools-have-played-in-the-mindanao-conflict-by-jonamari-kristin-floresta/>.

¹³⁴ Arjie B. Barihasion et al., "Exploring the Unseen: Muslim Students' Journeys in Catholic

Madrasahs face challenges in blending religion with national curriculum criteria. The Philippine education system is secular by law, and DepEd has attempted to develop a K to 12 curriculum for Islamic schools. Therefore, madrasahs must focus on religion and also teach the standard DepEd curriculum. In 2004, DepEd Order No. 51 created a “Standard Curriculum” for madrasahs, and in 2016, all schools teaching the ALIVE program were told to use “consistent guidelines.” However, the application of the law has been inconsistent. Many traditional madrasahs are still not registered with DepEd and don't use the DepEd syllabus at all, focusing almost entirely on religious instruction. For example, an investigation found that in these madrasahs, there is generally a focus on religious instruction, and there is generally no established curriculum or grading. Because of this, some children in madrasah schools were getting life skills education, and other subjects, other than religion, only to obtain very basic levels of education (in full for none, like science, social science), and therefore very often not even having completed many of them. Other learners may not be able to transition into regular schools as their diplomas may not be recognized as per the DepEd's standards.¹³⁵

Overall, Madrasahs in the Philippines must maintain their special religious tradition and also meet the national goals for education. Because they do not have adequate funds or trained teachers, their capacity is limited, social stigma makes it hard for students to be motivated, and the rules make it difficult for madrasahs to teach non- religious subjects. Overcoming these difficulties is necessary so that madrasahs can keep helping their students and serving their cultural role. It is argued by an expert that, to improve the quality of madrasah education, we must equip them with more resources, connect them to mainstream schools, and give madrasah students and their achievements proper recognition in society.¹³⁶ Meeting these challenges is necessary for madrasahs to continue as strong anchors of Muslim life in the Southern Philippines.

The historical trajectory and recent development of madrasah education within the Philippines have exemplified the perseverance and ingenuity of Muslim communities amidst colonial disruption, educational sidelining, and systemic inequities. The madrasah has transitioned from an early community-based function to more formalized iterations recognized by the state; nonetheless, it has remained a fundamental institution for shaping Muslim identity and transmitting Islamic knowledge. While national and regional initiatives like the ALIVE Program, the Madrasah Education Program (MEP), and the

Religious Education Classes,” *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*, August 28, 2023, 465–96, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol22.iss2.art7>.

¹³⁵ Khadiguia Ontok-Balah, *Exploring Muslim College Students' Experiences*.

¹³⁶ Salindab and Maglantay, “Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) Implementation, Pedagogical Practices of Alive Teachers and Learners' Performance.”

Bangsamoro Education Code have provided institutional support, many challenges persist, such as a lack of resources, underqualified teachers, curriculum tensions, and social stigma. Ultimately, madrasahs serve as key arenas of cultural agency, moral and social development, and religious learning. For them to thrive and to serve contemporary Muslim learners, having sustained support, inclusive implementation of policy, and recognition in society at large must all be prioritized. Reinforcing madrasah education is not only about equity but is also a recognition of the plurality of Philippine society.

CHAPTER IV

MADRASAH EDUCATION AND THE FORMATION OF ISLAMIC IDENTITY AMONG MUSLIM YOUTH IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

This chapter presents and interprets the major findings of the study, based on interviews with students, parents, and *ustadz* involved in madrasah education in the southern Philippines. The findings are organized thematically around three central areas: (1) the motivations for pursuing madrasah education, (2) the formation and expression of Islamic identity among students, and (3) the challenges faced in maintaining religious commitment within a minority setting. By capturing the lived experiences of Muslim youth and their communities in non-Muslim-majority contexts, the study contributes to the broader scholarship on Islamic education in the context of the southern Philippines, where madrasah education takes on unique meanings in relation to the roles of not only educating about Islam but also developing moral character and reinforcing cultural identity. The chapter discusses the functions of madrasah institutions as spaces for spiritual development and ethical foundation in the context of social, economic, and ideological pressures. Overall, the findings based on the thoughts of students, parents, and religious educators demonstrate that Islamic identity is understood not only to be taught but also developed, fostered, and maintained as a continuing embodiment of daily life.

As a contribution to the scholarship on Islamic education, this study highlights the lived experiences of Muslim youth and their communities in a non-Muslim-majority context. In the southern Philippines, madrasah education assumes distinctive roles not only in transmitting religious knowledge but also in shaping moral character and reinforcing cultural identity. This chapter explores how madrasah institutions serve as vital spaces for spiritual development, ethical grounding, and resilience in the face of social, economic, and ideological pressures. Drawing on the perspectives of students, parents, and religious educators, the findings illustrate that Islamic identity is not only taught but also practiced, nurtured, and sustained in everyday life.

4.1 Motivation

4.1.1 Students' Motivation for Participating in Madrasah Education

For many of the student participants, family remains the earliest and most consistent source of motivation. As Sulaiman Giamalon shared, "*What motivates me to study in madrasah education is, first, my parents, and second, my desire to attain Jannah or paradise.*" His words illustrate the impact that parents can have on their children to

encourage them to pursue a career in Islamic education, as a part of the parental goal is faith shaped by actions. For students like Sulaiman, Islamic education, when viewed through this lens, is more than just education; it is a stage in their journey towards achieving Jannah, which exemplifies family and faith-guided aspirations.

Parker and Nilan (2013) noted that in Indonesian society, religious education is often learned for more than academic purposes; it shapes the character of a student and meets the demand for social and familial expectations. They note that many people send their children to pesantren not only to get knowledge but also to help their children be better disciplined, respectful, and spiritually guided people. In this context, Islamic learning is more than just an educational qualification; it is an obligation to moral development, obtaining *barakah* (blessing), and ultimately, honor and duty to family and faith.¹³⁷

Nabay Banog similarly explained, "*It was my parents who motivated me to study at the Madrasah so I could learn Islam.*" Over time, however, this motivation deepened into a personal conviction. She added, "*If I had to choose, I would prefer to study at a Madrasah because studying at a Madrasah will help me in the afterlife.*"

Her statement reflects an internalization of values initially instilled by family; a process in line with what Nilan and Feixa (2006) refer to as a "reflexive habitus." This term describes the mechanisms by which young people can take up inherited traditions while also adapting them as they shape their reality, rather than merely conforming to them¹³⁸. Similarly, Masquelier and Soares (2016) point out that Muslim youth, especially post-9/11, are arguably not picking up religion and positions of piety exclusively as obligations, but as part of their effort to construct a meaningful moral self in reaction to social, political, and global pressures. The process of self-construction is active in that the youth consciously adopt Islam, wanting their view of Islam to be informed by their personal beliefs and collective identity. Nabay's desire to continue her madrasah education, not just to meet the wishes of her parents, but to enhance her chances of a good afterlife, is indicative of this active and reflexive moral agency.¹³⁹

Students also pointed to the importance of role models within their social environments. Abdul Wahid Dimalilay emphasized the influence of his teachers and peers, saying, "*The ones who motivate me are my ustadz and my friends who are very knowledgeable in Islam. Even though I study in a secular school, alhamdulillah, my friends encourage me to study at the madrasah.*"

¹³⁷ Parker and Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*.

¹³⁸ Nilan and Feixa, *Global Youth?*

¹³⁹ Masquelier and Soares, *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*.

These relationships help him focus and find inspiration that strengthens his desire to continue studying religion. While he attends a secular school, he finds moral support from friends as well as his ustadz's sermons. Faith becomes something they practice together in these daily encounters, in those encouraging words, in identified and shared aspirations to better or stay on track. These relationships provide him with a sense that he is not alone in his efforts to be a better Muslim. Such support is especially important due to the limited access to madrasah or formal religious spaces in his life. This demonstrates how peer relationships and mentors can play an important role as a support system to help people stay committed to their faith. It isn't only about learning together, but about surrounding oneself with people who value the same things and who remind each other of their goals. Parker and Nilan (2013) similarly suggest that in Indonesian pesantren, youth commitments are shaped not only by institutional structures but also by peers, informal religious circles, and influences from previous connections. Motivation, then, should be viewed as relational, embedded in the presence of respectful, practicing Muslims who are part of their everyday lives.¹⁴⁰

This idea of relational motivation was echoed by several respondents, who identified madrasah as a space that balances spiritual and worldly pursuits. Habiba Butt stated, "*I prefer to study in a secular school because I feel that in our generation, it is really important to study in such a school, so that we can lay the groundwork for our future here in the world, but it doesn't mean that I forgot my Akhirah. It's all about my worldly and temporary life here; this is why I prefer to study secular education.*"

Her comment captures the pragmatic reasoning of many young Muslim people who are trying to be successful in this life, as well as in the hereafter. For Schielke (2010), this is the "ambivalence of the good life," a status in which Muslim youth are consistently negotiating the various definitions of the good life that include forms of success such as professional, religious, and moral.¹⁴¹ Hefner (2007) makes a similar point when he argues that, among other goals, reformed madrasah education should aim to build Muslims who are both spiritually healthy and can interact with modernity.¹⁴²

Habiba also shared how studying in the madrasah helped her grow both morally and personally. She listed five important lessons she learned: "*I have five valuable lessons that I've learned in madrasah: the importance of knowledge; spiritual growth;*

¹⁴⁰ Parker and Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*.

¹⁴¹ Schielke, "Being Good in Ramadan: Ambivalence, Fragmentation, and the Moral Self in the Lives of Young Egyptians."

¹⁴² Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton university press, 2007).

community and brotherhood; discipline and self-control; and respect and humility.” These values illustrate how Habiba's motives to continue studying in a madrasah are driven by daily experiences of becoming a better person, rather than long-term purposes, like entering into Jannah. Parker and Nilan (2013) discussed similar themes of growth among pesantren students who internalized Islamic virtues such as *adab* (manners) and *taqwa* (God-consciousness) in their identity. For students like Abdul Wahid, who explained the importance of *taqwa* in his life, the madrasah serves not only as an instructional space but as a moral community through which young Muslims can develop and uphold a moral path.¹⁴³

Similarly, Abdul Wahid described how madrasah learning shaped his moral discipline: *“The most important lesson that I learned in madrasah is the importance of being strong in faith and obeying Allah at all times. I learned the significance of taqwa and love of Allah.”*

These ideas resonate with what Pam Nilan (2009) refers to as the 'spirit of education', as being a sense of moral purpose that encourages students to learn not just for school achievement but as a way to better themselves as Muslims. In Indonesian pesantren, this spirit is forged through discipline, modesty, and reverence for religious knowledge. This concept helps make sense of what some students in this study described, such as learning with sincerity, developing *taqwa*, and staying committed even when it's difficult, showing that their motivation is not only academic but spiritual and personal.¹⁴⁴

A further theme in the students' reflections is resilience, or their ability to stay strong despite challenges. Nabay shared, *“Whatever trial comes to you as a student, you must accept or endure because one of the weapons a student has to achieve his dream is what he has called sabar.”* Her response indicates how madrasah learning helps students build inner strength. Nilan (2009) explains that students in Indonesian pesantren often built patience and resilience because they followed a disciplined routine or lived a simple life, both of which they saw as part of their spiritual development. Students' experiences of hardship were not interpreted in a negative light but rather as opportunities to solidify character and enhance their commitment to their religion.¹⁴⁵

Rohaina C. Butt introduced more of a theological dimension in her explanation of motivation, by asserting: *“The greatest lesson for me is Imam Nawawi’s Hadith: when a man dies, all his works (or deeds) stop, except for three ongoing charities (sadaqah jariyah), and beneficial knowledge, and a righteous offspring (child) who ask for him.”*

¹⁴³ Parker and Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*.

¹⁴⁴ Nilan, *The “Spirit of Education” in Indonesian ‘Pesantren.’*

¹⁴⁵ Nilan, *The “Spirit of Education” in Indonesian ‘Pesantren.’*

Her emphasis on beneficial knowledge ('ilm nāfi') is important because it gets to the heart of why madrasah education remains meaningful. It is not just about individual salvation, but about creating a legacy of goodness that continues even after death. Hefner and Zaman (2007) describe how madrasah reform in various parts of the Muslim world has sought to produce students who embody both personal piety and public ethics, those who live their faith in ways that contribute positively to society.¹⁴⁶

The motivational themes drawn from these interviews demonstrate a multifaceted commitment to Islamic learning. Engaging in madrasah is not an obligation for students; instead, it is purposeful, identity-reinforcing, discipline-producing, and moral clarifying. The students' motivations are the result of their families, community, teachers, friends, and their meaningful relationship with Islam. As Nilan and Feixa (2006) note, Muslim youth are shaped by plural influences, and the madrasah provides an institutional space in which their religious identity can be developed.¹⁴⁷ And as Masquelier and Soares (2016) remind us, Muslim youth are not bound by the expectations of their faith; they are negotiating their religious selves through choice, reflection, and willful striving.¹⁴⁸

4.1.2 Parents as Primary Moral Guides in Nurturing Islamic Identity

Parents are among the primary forces in constructing their children's religious commitments and educational priorities. With specific reference to madrasah education, parental motivation is generally predicated on notions of childhood well-being, a desire to raise children with strong Islamic values and ethics, and to instill spiritual resilience, in what many parents see as an immensely modernizing world. In the interviews for this study, all participants believed Islamic education provides not only religious knowledge but also the ethical foundation necessary for raising upright Muslim children.

One of the most prevalent motivations of parents is fostering discipline, normative character, and respect for moral values that they believe are becoming increasingly endangered in today's society. As Sheila Malagat mentioned, "*I taught them discipline, and how to read Arabic, even just the Arabic alphabet; they could learn it.*" Her intention to emphasize both character development and basic religious literacy reflects a more general desire on the part of the parents for early Islamic formation at home, regardless of formal teaching. Sarha Paguilidan similarly described her role in the preparation of moral and linguistic preparation, "*At home, I begin by teaching my children the importance of good character and moral conduct. I also introduce them to the Arabic alphabet.* For

¹⁴⁶ Hefner and Zaman, *Schooling Islam*.

¹⁴⁷ Nilan and Feixa, *Global Youth?*

¹⁴⁸ Masquelier and Soares, *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*.

these parents, religious education starts as a personal responsibility. It goes beyond academics or ritual practice, but also entails instilling the moral foundation that they would like to guide their children throughout their lives.

Such foundational guidance supports the view that religious identity often begins within the family, especially through the actions and example of mothers. As Samsodin Nawal shared, As Samsodin Nawal explained, *“First of all, applying Islamic values at home starts with the mother. We make sure they join prayer at the masjid so they can slowly learn and gain some knowledge.”*

His words reveal a shared understanding among parents: that early exposure in Islamic practice, even in its most basic form, contributes to the child’s developing sense of faith and belonging. This reflects what Soares and Osella (2010) describe in their research with Muslim families, with normative everyday practices like praying together, showing respect, and performing salah as normal but powerful ways of developing children's piety and consciousness of being Muslim.¹⁴⁹

For most parents, enrolling their children in a madrasah is a conscious decision, a response to the social and moral pressures they associate with secular schooling and modern media. It becomes a way of regaining control, reinforcing values, and protecting the child. Theks observed it this way: *“They were more disciplined. They learned how to do the things, and now it is easier to guide”*. This shift was seen as academic but also spiritual and behavioral. Similarly, Amina Latipa noted, *“They were more obedient and they listened to us more.”* Madrasah education serves for these parents as a means to navigate and restore their child's behavior to be consistent with their interpretations of Islamic values, in a world of distractions and complexities.

Parents also described clear religious improvements with gratitude: *“They greet us with Assalamu alaykom. Before going to bed, they pray each night and recite Surahs from the Qur'an, and they have learned proper ablution and how to pray properly.”* This reflects Soares and Osella's (2010)¹⁵⁰ Observations regarding Islamic piety, as something not abstract nor exclusively learned in schools, but as cultivated through day-to-day habits, relationships, and routines. It is also similar to Schielke's (2010). The idea is that religious development is often realized through small and continuous practices, not dramatic changes, but gradual circumstances and reflection enacted regularly, that will transform a person.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Soares, and Osella, “Islam, Politics, Anthropology.”

¹⁵⁰ Soares, and Osella, “Islam, Politics, Anthropology.”

¹⁵¹ Schielke, “Being Good in Ramadan: Ambivalence, Fragmentation, and the Moral Self in the Lives of Young Egyptians.”

While most parents affirmed their appreciation for secular education, many highlighted a clear differentiation between secular schooling's emphasis on worldly success and madrasah's priority on spiritual growth and doing good in preparation for the afterlife. Shiela shared,

“In terms of religion, a madrasah helps them to focus more. They don't forget to pray (salah), while in secular school, I do not see the same level of religious interest or focus.”

In a similar vein, Sarha said, *“Madrasah education focuses on preparing children for the afterlife.* In contrast, the secular schooling prepares them with knowledge and skills important for worldly success. Samsodin was more direct: *“What they learn in a madrasah they will take with them even in the afterlife.”* As these comments indicate, both types of learning are considered valuable by many Muslim parents, with an emphasis placed on religious learning because it represents spiritual importance for eternity.

Importantly, parents were aware of the issues and consequences of modernization and technology, and many expressed concerns about the impact of digital media on their children. Amina Latipa noted, *“My main concern is the use of gadgets, which can negatively influence the Islamic values of young Muslims.”* Sarha echoed this: *“Modernization brings both positive and negative effects. It causes irregular eating habits and reduces sleep due to excessive time spent on online games and gadgets.”* Yet, rather than rejecting technology outright, some parents, like Shiela, recognized its potential when paired with strong parental supervision: *“Gadgets can be helpful as long as parents are there to guide their children and set limits.”*

All the respondents, despite these concerns, expressed a very strong desire to assist their children to achieve a balance between religious and modern social life. Some, like Theks and Sarha, spoke of giving equal support to madrasah and secular education, as there was value in both. Others, such as Sheila, emphasized religious education: *“I put more emphasis on their madrasah education. I am not too much interested in secular.”* I strongly support their education in the madrasah.” Even the advocates of the two tracks, like Samsodin, do so with full knowledge of their varying objectives: *“In a secular school, it is more about enhancing the livelihood of a person. However, what they are taught in a madrasah becomes their lifestyle.”* For many parents, this dual commitment does not involve them taking sides between this world and the next but rather acknowledging the need to equip their children to fit in both worlds.

In addition to their hopes for spiritual growth, some parents also expressed aspirations for their children to become future leaders in the Muslim community. One

parent shared, *"I hope they will become da'iyah (Islamic preachers), so they can help strengthen Islam in our community."* This kind of visioning for the future indicates an ability to conceive of the madrasah not just as personal growth, but as being in service of others, and to the larger ummah. In this sense, Islamic learning comes with responsibilities that are not only individual, but also contributions to a collective, to develop and continue the community life of their faith traditions.

In general, the testimonies of these parents disclose a strong conviction that madrasah education is a critical component in producing children who are morally upright, spiritually centered, and socially responsible. They are not merely trying to maintain Islamic identity, but they are raising it intentionally, and instilling their children with the values and discipline they will require to live faithful lives in this world, and the world to come. In a politicized or marginalized setting of Islamic identity, as Masquelier and Soares (2016) describe, religion and, specifically, education usually become a means of establishing family values, building resilience, and continuity as a way of coping with the situation. Muslim parents in the Southern Philippines are particularly conscious of the social and cultural marginalization that their children might experience, being considered outsiders in secular schools, stereotyping of Islam, or lack of support for their religious beliefs. These realities in the eyes of many families reinforce their determination to invest in madrasah education, not just as a religious education but as a form of cultural protection and identity affirmation. In this way, parents not only perform the role of caregivers but also of moral custodians as they seek to nurture their children spiritually, in a world where Islamic beliefs can be ignored, misinterpreted, or even undermined. Through this, madrasah serves as a haven and a source of empowerment to the children so that they can live life with dignity, conviction, and a sense of identity.

Overall, the testimonies of these parents expose an in-depth conviction that madrasah education plays a vital role in creating morally upright, spiritually strong, and socially responsible children. Their goal is not simply to preserve Islamic identity, but to nurture it deliberately, equipping their children with the values and discipline needed to live faithfully in both this world and the next. In the situation of politicized or marginalized Islamic identity, as Masquelier and Soares (2016) note, families often turn to religion and education specifically to express their values, build resilience, and ensure continuity.¹⁵² In the Southern Philippines, Muslim parents are very conscious of the social and cultural marginalization their children are likely to experience, like being considered as outsiders in secular schools, being stereotyped about Islam, or a

¹⁵² Soares, and Osella, "Islam, Politics, Anthropology."

lack of support for their religious beliefs. These facts make many families even more determined to invest in madrasah education, not only as the source of religious teaching but also as the source of cultural safeguarding and identity confirmation. In this light, parents act not only as caregivers but as moral stewards guiding their children's spiritual development.

4.1.3 Ustadz as Moral Mentors and Spiritual Guides

The motivation expressed by the *ustadz* in this study is to teach in the madrasah. It is highly embedded in their religious devotion and a sense of social responsibility among the Muslim youth in their society. They regard Islamic education as an essential process of guidance, not only as religious education, but as the development of moral character and protection of children against ignorance and bad outside influences. To most of them, the madrasah is not just a learning institution, but a spiritual and moral institution where the young are trained to live with faith and dignity.

"Ustadz Muhammad Ambod stressed the important role of a madrasah in the development of a Muslim's life from an early age. He defined the madrasah as *"a very important place that every community should have, it helps develop the youth... this is where children start to learn and study Islam...to give them direction so they won't get left behind or become ignorant."* His framing of madrasah was more than a school; it was a venue for children to learn about Islam and a framework for establishing a broader moral direction. This view echoes the broader perspective found in much of the literature on Islamic education where madrasahs are seen as key institutions for early religious socialization and the transmission of ethical and spiritual values within Muslim communities.

In their ethnographic volume (Masquelier and Soares, 2016) observe that Islamic educators often act as moral guides: their aim is not only to impart knowledge, but to foster pious, disciplined, and moral individuals. As moral guides, these educators often hold a dual role of *ustadz* and *murabbi* as they train students' behavior and morality through continuous interactions, mentorship, emotional support, and ritual training. This view of the religious teacher as a *murabbi* closely matches what the *ustadz* in this study describe as their motivation: to lead youth away from *jahiliyya* (ignorance) and toward a life grounded in Islamic teachings.¹⁵³

Ustadz Mustahar Sueb, for example, referred to the necessity to keep children from moral confusion: *"One of the objectives of the madrasah is to prevent the children from*

¹⁵³ Masquelier and Soares, *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*.

becoming jahil. The goal is for the children to learn Islam and grow up with proper knowledge and behavior.” His emphasis on Aqeedah al-Islamiyyah, creating a strong belief in the tenets of the Islamic faith, shows his larger goal of solidifying students’ identities in faith. For him, religious education is not merely about teaching ideas; it is about creating the way that children perceive themselves as Muslims. This reflects Schielke's (2010) example of the embodied and emotional dimensions of Islamic pedagogy, where the students are taught how to feel Islam, not just understand it.

Likewise, Ustadz Sulaiman Macabangin stated that his teaching goal is to prepare students for real life through Islamic guidance: *“We guide them to the right path, encourage good behavior, and teach them how to understand and read the Qur’an and the Hadith... so they can apply it in their daily lives.”* His focus is not just on transmitting knowledge, but on shaping how students live and act in the world. He wants Islamic teachings to become part of their everyday choices and character. This practical and moral orientation reflects a broader trend noted by Soares (2016)¹⁵⁴, who explains that religious teachers often act as bridges between tradition and modern life, helping young Muslims understand classical texts in ways that make sense in their current social realities.

Several ustadz also paid attention to how specific subjects they teach are used as instruments of change. Ustadz Muhammad mentioned *Tawheed, Hadith, Fiqh, Nahu, Surah, and Quran* as the main subjects; *“These are the main topics that can assist in shaping the Islamic identity of the student.”* For him curriculum is not just a series of lessons, but a systematic course of moral and spiritual education. This formative effort was highlighted by Ustadz Jubaida, who works at the preschool level, by stating, *I emphasize the teaching of the Arabic alphabet and vowel marking. It helps the students to read fluently and make use of religious texts.”* This early focus on literacy is seen not simply as an academic step, but as the beginning of a deeper process, one that connects children to Islamic knowledge and sets them on the path toward spiritual maturity.

In these ways, the ustadz considers that they are responsible for something more than simply religious teaching; they are also moral and spiritual role models, shaping the ethical landscape of young people. This is consistent with how Ustadz Munina Budzal interprets her role: *“It remains our obligation to impart Islamic knowledge to the youth. The spiritual and moral lessons that we give them are also much more valuable than material goods”.* We can see with her quote that she has a strong sense of responsibility in her role and is not only a teacher but someone with an *amanah* (sacred trust) to develop

¹⁵⁴ Masquelier and Soares, *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*.

the next generation of Muslims in faith and character.

Across all interviews, the *ustadz* expressed the same feeling of personal and religious dedication. They do not work to get material reward, but they are driven by a conviction in the transformational capacity of Islamic education. They view themselves as the forefront of moral and religious education, and they are determined to make sure that, despite the secular education and technological distraction of the current environment, the next generation of Muslims does not become spiritually lost. These teachers can be stabilizing forces in turbulent times, as the Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation research makes clear, and as we saw in the case of the madrasah, they can be used to both preserve Islam and make it experienced, lived, and embodied in daily life.

4.2 Formation of Islamic Identity: Shaping Belief, Behavior, and Belonging

The process of constructing Islamic identity among Filipino Muslim youth is a continuous, embodied, and relational process. It is not just a matter of simply believing, but becoming shaped through a process of education, family practices, religious rituals, and emotional commitment. What students think and articulate about their Muslim identity is connected to how they pray, how they behave, how they dress, how they interact with others, and how they think about life. The words of students, parents, and *ustadz* all suggest that identity is not given; it is practiced, modeled, and learned through practice, reinforcement, and experience.

Some students elaborated on their sense of Islamic identity and belonging not as something fixed or fully formed but as an ongoing process of growth and struggles that matter to them. Habiba Butt stated, "*I am a striving Muslima, still working my faith according to the pillars of Imān and Islam. I am not perfect, but I am willing and determined to learn,*" which encapsulates some of what Pam Nilan (2009) observed in Indonesian pesantren, wherein the development of student identity is not about transforming immediately, but involves a long process of instilling values through a myriad of structured and repeated acts and religious discipline. Nilan has described how the boarding school students begin to develop what she calls the "spirit of education", which is a disciplined desire to learn that is rooted in religious purpose and which is often developed under austere conditions and which forms their intellectual pursuit and moral orientation.¹⁵⁵

The other students demonstrated that identity is connected with actions and visible behaviors in everyday life. According to Rohaina C. Butt, "*I try to perform both the*

¹⁵⁵ Nilan, *The "Spirit of Education" in Indonesian 'Pesantren.'*

Sunnah and the obligatory acts, especially salah (prayer). Wearing the hijab is also very important to me.” To her, faith is not merely a belief, but what she feels and enacts through the body, emotions, and consistent practice. This is what Hefner (2007) argues that the madrasah education in many Muslim societies is not only about passing knowledge, but also about shaping ethical, emotionally engaged Muslim citizens who will be able to live their faith in contemporary settings.¹⁵⁶

This is closely associated with how Pam Nilan's (2009) analysis of Indonesian pesantren students internalized the "spirit of education" through long-term exposure to ritual, modest living, and moral routines. For many of the students in her study, Islamic learning is not pursued for the academic or professional rewards that might accompany it, but rather as a sincere effort to develop pious individuals, where self-discipline, repetition, and submission to the "structure" of religious life are used to develop a strong ethical self.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, Rohaina's emphasis on regular salah and hijab as markers of faith complements this way of developing a moral and spiritual self through daily repeated practices and commitment to religious expectations.

Likewise, Sulaiman Giamalon said, I consider myself a Muslim. Islam teaches me to be truthful, humble, and accountable to Allah.” These are not some abstract ideals to him; these values determine his everyday behavior and identity. In combination, their reflections indicate that Islamic identity is integrated into behavior and feeling, a continuous practice that provides form to how they live and define themselves. This is also in line with what Robert Hefner (2007) argues that Islamic education, particularly in contemporary madrasahs, is not only meant to produce religiously literate students but also morally upright citizens, emotionally committed to their faith, and able to translate its values into their daily lives. Hefner emphasizes the response of modern Islamic schools in Southeast Asia to altered social conditions in creating pious subjects who do not withdraw into the world, but rather encounter it morally.

Both the ustadz and parents are important in strengthening and demonstrating Islamic identity. Ustadz Mustahar Sueb emphasizes the teaching of *Aqeedah al- Islamiyyah* (Islamic belief), which he elaborated as one of the methods to strengthen their faith and to make them understand and feel Islam with their heart. This is indicated in his approach that identity is not only taught but internalized. Ustadz Mustahar views *Aqeedah* as the base that anchors the faith of a young Muslim by rooting the student in a profound emotional and intellectual knowledge of his or her beliefs. Students without this

¹⁵⁶ Hefner and Zaman, *Schooling Islam*.

¹⁵⁷ Nilan, *The "Spirit of Education" in Indonesian 'Pesantren.'*

inner grounding can easily be influenced by external forces, but once they feel their belief and understand it well, their identity becomes established and strong.

Ustadz Muhammad Ambod shared a similar perspective, stating, "*Tawheed, Hadith, Fiqh, Arabic grammar, these are not just academic subjects. They are tools for building character.*" His point is that learning in a madrasah is never just for the sake of passing tests or collecting knowledge. It is about shaping the student's heart and actions. The purpose is to develop a student's heart and habits inside and outside the madrasah. This reflects a holistic perspective of education in which students are the subject of the education. The purpose is to develop a disciplined and God-conscious person. This holistic perspective is supported by Nilan (2009), who reported that religious identity is built not only through lessons but also by the daily practice of the values valued in the learning environment by teachers, peers, and elders.

For parents, identity is often witnessed through small but meaningful changes. According to Sheila Malagat, "*They are more respectful, less disobedient, and they apply what they learned in their daily lives.*" Samsodin shared similar reflections, noting that his children started saying Islamic greetings, praying before meals, and even correcting their siblings' behavior after attending madrasah. These everyday actions that the lessons taught in school are not just memorized, but they are absorbed, practiced, and supported at home. To parents, these changes are indications that religious identity is being established as it becomes a part of the way their children live and interact with others.

This kind of identity is also social. It is formed through the family and the school, as well as within a broader context of community. Parker and Nilan (2013) found that in some Islamic schools in Indonesia, young people are developing a religious identity when they practice the religion with peers, teachers, and family. It was through these everyday interactions that religious values are reinforced, and they come to feel a part of a community of believers.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, in this study, students explained that they learned from classes but also learned from observing others, participating in youth groups. Their identity has developed among people who have similar faith values and shared practice, and they received support from those around them.

This everyday manifestation of Islam reflects what Benjamin Soares (2016) refers to as Muslim youth identity's "visible formation," in which being Muslim is something that young people not only know intellectually but feel, show, and act out as a part of their family and community.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Parker and Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*.

¹⁵⁹ Masquelier and Soares, *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*.

Several students also shared that their understanding of Islamic identity includes a duty to help others live Islam. Abdul Wahid Dimalilay shared, “*Madrasah taught me discipline, faith, and daily guidance so I can live as a good Muslim with fear and love for Allah.*” Meanwhile, Nabays Banog said that learning right from wrong helped her interact with others more respectfully and even correct misconceptions about Islam.” Because of how I explained things to non-Muslims, they gradually began to understand.” Such considerations imply that identity construction entails more than the sense of self-awareness; it also entails an emerging sense of agency and responsibility. When students develop confidence in their religion, they start to be the faces of Islam as they enter into the world and practice silent forms of da'wah by conversing with people and treating them respectfully in their everyday interactions.

Furthermore, students exemplified their Islamic identity through their participation in youth groups or Islamic organizations. By being part of a collective, youth organizations provide spaces for identity development not only through formal learning but also through informal associations and shared commitment. According to (Masquelier and Soares, 2016)¹⁶⁰Religious identity among youth is frequently nurtured through moral companionship relationships with peers that enhance social reinforcement, ethical guidance, and an opportunity to express faith in a supportive environment. In these groups, students have the opportunity to encourage one another on how to live their beliefs, thus creating an Islamic identity that is practiced, enacted, and affirmed together rather than as an isolated individual with a separate and unique 'individual' identity.

For Ustadza Jubaida, who teaches at the *Tahdiriyyah* level (Kindergarten), identity formation begins even before the child starts formal schooling. “*Teaching the Arabic alphabet is not just about reading. It’s the first step toward them beginning to understand who they are as Muslims.*”

She said that for her and other teachers, early education is about more than teaching content; it is the first part of laying the foundation for Islamic consciousness through behavior. Ustadz Sulaiman added, “*We teach them how the Prophet lived, so they have a living model to follow.*” Through character, Qur'anic knowledge, and Prophetic example, these ustadz believe they are forming not just what students know but who they will become.

This is consistent with Nilan's (2009) study of Indonesian pesantren, whereby she learned that students are developing their Islamic identity not only by engaging in formal religious teaching but also through participating in structured daily routines such as

¹⁶⁰ Masquelier and Soares, *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*.

dealing with early mornings, prayer, Qur'an recitation, and discipline. These daily routines help develop humility, obedience, and moral awareness through repeated rituals that often begin in a child's early years and form what Nilan describes as a "spirit of education" that is tied to a religious aim and to the formation of the moral self. In both contexts, Islamic identity is learned not only through traditional teaching but also through habit, structure, and example.¹⁶¹

This self-awareness is amplified in the way students articulate pride and certainty in being Muslim. When asked whether they feel pressure to conceal their faith, the overwhelming majority gave confident responses. Nabay answered, "*Never, why would I feel pressured when I know in my heart that Islam is the straight path?*" Rohaina similarly said that her non-Muslim friends respected her belief because of her confidence in carrying herself. These reflections indicated more than simply personal confidence; they indicated a stronger internalization of Islamic identity as unyielding, unwavering, and fundamentally worthy of being practiced liberally in both public and private contexts.

In conclusion, the formation of Islamic Identity in this study emerges as a collaborative and ongoing process, rooted in madrasah instruction reinforced by the guidance of parents, and enacted through students' worship, discipline, speech, and interrelationships engaged in whilst there. The identity was not built in a single instance but cultivated over time, through prayer, practice, character, and community. As students move between their homes, schools, and wider social worlds, they carry with them a faith identity that, importantly, is not merely taught, but lived; one that is formed equally by relationships and experience, in addition to more formal forms of knowledge.

Ultimately, the formation of Islamic identity in this study emerges as a collaborative and ongoing process, rooted in madrasah instruction, strengthened by parental guidance, and brought to life through the students' acts of worship, discipline, speech, and social interaction. It is not formed overnight, but nurtured gradually through prayer, practice, character, and community. As students move between their homes, schools, and wider social worlds, they carry with them a faith identity that is not only taught, but lived, an identity shaped as much by relationships and experience as by formal knowledge.

4.3 Challenges Faced in Maintaining Religious Commitment Within a Minority Context

While Muslim families and educators are highly motivated to provide Islamic

¹⁶¹ Nilan, *The "Spirit of Education" in Indonesian 'Pesantren.'*

education and instill values related to faith, many respondents in this study spoke honestly about the continuing barriers that Muslim youth face in practicing Islam consistently in a changing secular world. A primary concern that was shared by most respondents considering their roles as students, parents, and ustadz was the modern environment, social media, societal academic pressure from secular schools, and a lack of appropriate support structures, meant that there were considerable barriers to being able to maintain their religious commitments in the routines of their daily lives. Some students shared that practicing Islam in secular environments can be difficult. Sulaiman mentioned that *it's not always easy to find time or space to pray at school, especially with a busy schedule.*

Parker and Nilan (2013) in their research among Indonesian adolescents have discovered that a lot of Muslim students cannot be consistent in practicing their religion due not to the lack of mosques, but to the peer culture and school routine, which discourages any visible sign of piety. They described that even in a society where Islam is dominant, students might experience the conflict between the desire to be religious and the desire to be liked by peers, to be popular, or not to be labelled as too conservative.¹⁶²

This tension becomes even more critical when discrimination goes from peer-based comments to institutional pressure. For Nabay Banog, the issue was not just logistical; it was also social. As a student studying in a secular institution, she recalled Muslim students in a secular university, she remembered personal encounters with religious discrimination and pressure to conform.

"I was bullied by other religions," she shared. "They ask a lot of questions that may be insulting to Islam, some say Muslims are murderers, terrorists."

This kind of stigmatization mirrors the painful realities of many Muslim youths in non-Muslim-majority contexts, where their religious identity becomes an object of scrutiny or suspicion, not acceptance. Even more concerning, rather than acceptance. Nabay reported that teachers required her to engage in non-Islamic practices, and when she refused, she was threatened with grade penalties.

"If you do not participate, they can lower your grade."

Such situations present Muslim youth with ethical dilemmas and psychological distress that can threaten both their dignity and their faith. Hefner (2007) highlights the way secular school systems often do not accommodate the religious needs of Muslim minorities, resulting in alienating experiences that can lead to identity conflicts due to a

¹⁶² Parker and Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*.

feeling of marginalization.¹⁶³

This theme was further represented in the parental experiences, especially among those parents who had seen their children change behavior when facing many of the secular influences outside the madrasah. Amina Latipa explained, *“In secular schools, they sometimes miss prayers and may pick up inappropriate language from others. But in a madrasah, their good behavior improves.”* Similarly, Bpa Dods observed, *“The negative side is that they don’t eat on time, they sleep late, and they often see inappropriate things on social media. Worst of all, they are not very focused on their studies anymore.”* These reflections illustrated some of the parents' concerns about the moral distraction of secular peers and the modern technology present, with respect to the children's discipline and lessons from their madrasah.

Parker and Nilan (2013) mentioned this in their study. They reported that Muslim youth exist in a dualism between a world formed by religion and a world of modern culture. Without family and teacher support, youth will often opt for whatever is most engaging and/or easiest. This concern was made evident in the interviews, where parents expressed their frustrations about balancing school obligations, time on technological devices, and their religious responsibilities.¹⁶⁴

Many parents, such as Sheila Malagat and Theks, also voiced concerns about managing both secular duties and their religious obligations. Shiela noted, *“Modern technology has a lot of benefits, but parents need to be responsible and set boundaries.”* Theks added, *“It wastes their time on meaningless things and can negatively impact their thinking.”* These comments affirm that whereas modernization provides important educational and economic opportunities, it often interferes with the religious routines and expectations of children and families when digital entertainment takes the place of prayer and study. This supports Hefner's observation (2007), which identified the reality that Islamic schooling today must also compete with powerful counter-narratives that have emerged from the global media, which often reconstitute what is "normal" or "aspirational" for young people.¹⁶⁵

The ustadz respondents offered a wider angle, pointing to not only personal struggles but to deeper structural challenges within the madrasah system itself. Ustadz Muhammad Ambod stated,

“Even if we tried to teach them properly in the madrasah, we can't deny that the modern environment does have a larger impact on them. For example, madrasah is only two days

¹⁶³ Hefner and Zaman, *Schooling Islam*.

¹⁶⁴ Parker and Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*.

¹⁶⁵ Hefner and Zaman, *Schooling Islam*.

a week, while the secular education system is taught Monday to Friday.”

This imbalance in time makes it difficult for students to fully absorb and practice what they learn in their religious classes. With limited reinforcement during the week, religious lessons are often overshadowed by the demands of secular subjects. As a result, many children start to prioritize academic success while religious obligations are pushed aside. Hefner (2007) explains that the challenge of achieving moral continuity among the students receiving part-time religious instruction becomes very difficult among the Islamic educators in Asia. The hegemony of secular schooling timetables and curriculum tends to diminish the shaping role of the madrasah. The power of secular schooling schedules and content often marginalizes the formative influence of the madrasah.¹⁶⁶

Ustadz Mustahar Sueb pointed to deeper ideological threats: *"If students don't take learning seriously, they will be easily misled. We call this ghazwul fikri, meaning harmful ideas or influences that can corrupt the student's thinking and character,"* he explained. The term ghazwul fikri is sometimes translated as "intellectual invasion," and reveals an increasing concern in Islamic education that secularism, foreign ideas, or one-dimensional anti-Islamic messages promulgated by media, education, and peer culture are subtly influencing how young Muslims think and behave. For educators such as Ustadz Mustahar, madrasah education is not only about conveying information, but safeguarding the intellectual and spiritual domains of their students among clashing ideas.

To provide a pragmatic component to this concern, Ustadz Munina Budzal raised the language issues: *"Many of them do not even speak their language anymore. The language barrier has affected their understanding of unfamiliar Islamic terms and concepts,"* she articulated. This is a point that signifies a growing problem. The more students are connected to digital media and modernity, the more students lose that connection to both Arabic and the local language. The language barrier makes it harder for students to grasp foundational concepts in Islam, especially when those fundamental terms and concepts do not easily translate into the language they use every day.

In addition, Ustadz Mustahar Sueb emphasized that "the children need proper tarbiyyah (upbringing) from their parents, which is very important in shaping their values." For these educators, madrasah education is only effective to an extent, unless it is supported at home, particularly in the process of instilling discipline, etiquette, and religious devotion.

The worries expressed by the respondents are more than just personal dilemmas; they identify a shared reality that is present in the literature. In *Schooling Islam*, Hefner

¹⁶⁶ Hefner and Zaman, *Schooling Islam*.

(2007) notes how in pluralist and modernizing societies, Islamic schools are charged with forming ethical citizens while navigating competing values from state institutions and media in society. As a result, madrasah educators and parents are consistently in a position of reacting to influences that are presented as "progress" or "neutrality," but are built upon foreign ideologies.

The concern expressed by the respondents is more than just personal dilemmas; they reflect a broader reality noted in academic literature. In *Schooling Islam*, Hefner (2007) notes how in pluralist and modernizing societies, Islamic schools are charged with forming ethical citizens while navigating competing values from state institutions and media in society. As a result, madrasah educators and parents are consistently in a position of reacting to influences that are presented as "progress" or "neutrality," but are built upon foreign ideologies.¹⁶⁷

Challenges also arise from the physical environment in which students engage in religious practice. Ustadz Sulaiman Macabangin commented on how technology and habitual behaviors can confidently distort the regular discipline of religious practice: "*With excessive exposure to technology, the behaviors of students may be exhibited in ways that are inconsistent with Islamic values.*" Ustadz Jubaida, who teaches younger learners, addressed the complexity of managing and balancing learning contexts: "*Their development stage requires planning to ensure religious education takes place at an age-appropriate, but engaging level.*"

Many educators are experiencing the challenge of keeping the attention of young learners when they find that religious lessons compete with the instant stimulation of digital media that drives major movements in our culture. Pam Nilan (2009) indicates that one advantage of pesantren education in Indonesia is its "spirit of education," an emotional and moral intensity of teaching fostered by the charisma of teachers, strict routines, and shared living. However, she also notes that in a consumerist age, this spirit is increasingly difficult to instill unless educators adapt their methods to engage the hearts and minds of youth.¹⁶⁸

Particularly, Ustadza Munina Budzal stressed the necessity of updating the teaching methods: "*Madrasahs need to implement more interactive programs and activities that will make learning more fun for the students.*" She identified that overdependence on rote memorization may result in boredom and a lack of interest, particularly when students are not engaged with emotion and intellect. Similarly, Ustadz

¹⁶⁷ Hefner and Zaman, *Schooling Islam*.

¹⁶⁸ Nilan, *The "Spirit of Education" in Indonesian 'Pesantren.'*

Sulaiman embraced *the idea of reading exercises, examinations, and assignments as learning tools. These will test them and assist them to gain more knowledge and understanding of Islam.*” These recommendations are part of the wider demand to have more organized, participative, and student-focused instruction, a recognition that the conventional approaches might no longer be sufficient to address the needs of the current learners.

Overall, the student, parent, and ustadz narratives in this study tell a complex story: one in which Islamic identity and practice are constantly being negotiated in light of competing social, cultural, and technological influences. These pressures do not diminish the value of Islamic education, but rather highlight the need for a more integrated and contextually sensitive approach to religious formation. For young Muslims, particularly those who are studying in non-Islamic settings, every act of practicing their faith is a daily act of resilience and courage. The challenge for all madrasah teachers, parents, and community leaders is not only to instruct the doctrine, but also to support youth in their struggles to navigate a world that is often pulling them away from their Islamic beliefs and practices.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the role of madrasah education in preserving Islamic identity among the youth in the Southern Philippines, specifically in an environment that is characterized by marginalization, cultural pluralism, as well as globalizing forces. Based on the interviews with students, parents, and ustadz, the researchers examined how madrasah institutions are not only places for learning but also important in Identity formation and religious continuity, and community resilience.

The findings assert that madrasah education is crucial and multi-dimensional in preserving Islamic identity in young Muslims. To most students, the madrasah serves not only as a learning institution where religious studies are taught, but it is also a kind of retreat where faith, values, and cultural heritage are fostered amid the challenges of secular education and broader societal change. Students constantly stressed the importance of their participation in the madrasah as it made them feel more connected to their religion and gave them a sense of moral purpose and belongingness. Parents, on the other hand, were keen to have their children cling to the Islamic values not because this was simply a personal piety but as a safeguard against cultural dilution and moral confusion.

One of the key lessons learned from the study is the strong intentionality Muslim families have when choosing to send their children to madrasah schools. Although factors like socio-economic and practical concerns (such as location and affordability) are also important, the main motivation is the desire to instill and uphold Islamic values. Making this decision is particularly challenging in areas where madrasah education is not fully supported by local institutions, and where Muslim students are often misunderstood or marginalized. For parents, madrasah education is a way to preserve cultural and spiritual identity and to affirm their presence in a context where they are frequently unseen or misinterpreted.

Among the major lessons learnt through the research is the seriousness of the deliberateness that Muslim families attach to the choice of sending their children to madrasah schools. Although other factors like socio-economic factors and pragmatic concerns (location and affordability) are also applicable, the overriding factor is the need to inculcate and maintain Islamic values. This is not an easy decision in areas where madrasah education is not fully supported by the institution, and in areas where the Muslim students are usually misrepresented or marginalized. Madrasah education,

especially to parents, is an action of cultural and spiritual maintenance an identity statement in a place where they are unseen or misinterpreted most of the time.

The students themselves tended to describe the madrasah as a life-altering place. Some of them discussed the fact that studying in the madrasah allowed them to acquire a clear understanding of what is wrong and what is right, a better relationship with God, and a renewed desire to fulfil their religious obligations. They also acknowledge the unique challenges of living in a society that sometimes views overt expressions of Islamic identity with suspicion or indifference. Nevertheless. The madrasah assisted them in feeling proud of their religion, especially due to organized Quranic learning, ethical education, and community involvement in their Muslim identity. These experiences helped them gain both inner confidence and external involvement with their Muslim identity.

The ustadz, as teachers and moral instructors in these schools, play a pivotal role in this identity formation process. They are in the center of the moral formation of the students because of their dual responsibilities to give religious instruction and to act as role models. Most of the interviewed teachers not only view their work as a profession but also as a da'wah (Islamic propagation). They consider their callings as a responsibility to safeguard the future generation against the loss of their religious foundation to the world in which individualism, secularism, and consumerism are encouraged. Although they lack institutional support and material resources, these ustadz are very much committed to developing young Muslims, and in most cases, they tend to exceed their official duties to make sure that the students internalize what they are being taught.

However, the results also indicate many challenges that madrasahs still encounter. These include poor facilities, inability to standardize the curriculum, inability to train teachers adequately, and social stigma towards the students of the madrasah. Some of the participants in the interviews expressed worry that Islamic education continues to be regarded as inferior to secular or mainstream education, which has a negative impact on the confidence of its students and the overall legitimacy of madrasahs as educational institutions. Outside the Bangsamoro region, where there might be limited institutional support and minimal government assistance, people rely primarily on local community resources and volunteer teachers.

This fact is an indication of the continued neglect of Islamic education in the Philippine education context. Although there are national initiatives such as the ALIVE program and policy changes such as the Bangsamoro Education Code, the assimilation of

the madrasah education into the national education system is still uneven. Many madrasahs continue to work informally or are not subject to state funding and thus find it hard to upgrade infrastructure, pay teachers well, or modernize pedagogy. Consequently, students and teachers both have to deal not only with pedagogical issues but also with more general concerns of legitimacy, recognition, and inclusion.

Meanwhile, the madrasah is evolving and changing. This paper has discovered that most institutions are trying to reconcile the traditional religious materials and the contemporary educational needs. Some madrasahs are starting to teach secular subjects, and some have introduced digital tools or even collaborated with the local schools in order to expand their teaching. All these are attempts to make madrasah education more relevant to the modern needs of Muslim youth without losing the foundation of Islamic principles. Although such developments are still at an early stage, they are a good sign of the future, a future that balances tradition and modernity in significant ways.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Letter of Research Permit



Faculty of
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Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia
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Jalan Rayn Bogor KM. 33.5
Cisaleki, Sukmajaya, Depok, West Java 16416
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LETTER OF RESEARCH PERMIT

Ref. No : 75/Dek/FSI/UIII/SIP.02/08/2025 Depok, August 4th, 2025
Attachment : -
Subject : Request for Research Permit

Dear,
Students, Parents, and Ustadz Actively Involved in Madrasah Education in the Philippines

Assalamu'alaikum wr. wb.,

We hereby certify the following student:

Name : Rodsma L. Mangindalat
Student ID Number : 01212320007
Faculty : Islamic Studies
Study Program : MA in Islamic Studies

Is conducting research for her thesis with the following details:

Thesis Title : Preserving Islamic Identity through Madrasah Education
among Muslim youth in the Philippines
Research Duration : May-June

We respectfully request your assistance in granting research permission to the student. The research data will only be used for academic purposes and will not be disseminated for other purposes.

This request letter is made for its definite intent. Thank you for your kind attention and cooperation.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb.,

Kind Regards,
Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies



Faculty of
Islamic Studies

Prof. Yanwar Pribadi, Ph.D.

Appendix 2. Questionnaire

Interview Guide for Students

Personal Background

Name: _____ Age: _____ Gender: _____

I. Understanding of Islamic Identity

1. How do you define yourself?
2. What practices or values are most important to you as a Muslim youth?

II. Role of Madrasah Education

3. What motivates you to study in a Madrasah? If you had the choice, would you prefer to study in a secular school, and why or why not?
4. How has madrasah education helped you understand and live as a Muslim?
5. What are the most valuable lessons you've learned in madrasah
6. In what ways does madrasah education support or influence your daily religious practice?

III: Challenges in a Modern Society

7. What challenges do you face in practicing Islam in your school or community?
8. Do you feel any pressure to change or hide your religious identity? Why or why not?
9. How does the orientation of Madrasah education influence interactions with non-Muslims?
10. Does it promote exclusivity or not? Does it encourage separation or division from people who are different?

IV. Influence of Family and Community

8. How do your parents or family support your religious identity? 9. Do your friends or community activities help you stay connected to your faith?

Interview Guide for Parents

I. Religious Upbringing at Home

1. How do you teach and support Islamic values at home?
2. What are your expectations when you send your child to madrasah?

II. Observations and Impact

3. What changes have you noticed in your child after attending madrasah?
4. How do you see the difference between a secular school and a madrasah in your child's development?

III. Concerns and Challenges

5. What are your concerns about how modernization is affecting the Islamic identity of young Muslims?
6. How do you support your child in balancing religious life and modern social life?

Interview Guide for Madrasah Teachers

I. Goals of Madrasah Education

1. What is the main goal of madrasah education for youth in your community?
2. What subjects or teachings do you focus on to help shape students' Islamic identity?

II. Challenges in Modern Context

3. In your experience, how does modernization affect students' religious understanding and behavior?
4. What are the biggest challenges madrasahs face in preserving Islamic values among students?

III. Collaboration and Support

5. How do you work with parents and the community to support students' religious development? 6. What improvements or changes do you think madrasahs need to address modern challenges more effectively?