

The Development of Kindergarten Madrasah Curriculum Model

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Abstract

A Kindergarten Madrasah Curriculum Model as the hallmark of Arabic Literacy and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) principles was the main objective of this study. Specifically, it aimed to find out the extent of utilization of Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers and ascertained the performance of the kindergarten learners along with the seven curricular domains. The study also determined the significant differences in the implementation of the Madrasah curriculum between the public and private schools. Moreover, a flexibility provision was conducted; thereby common insights of the stakeholders were explored. The data was gathered through the utilization of questionnaires, face-to-face group discussions with the principals, formal interviews with the teachers, and informal interviews with the parents. The findings of the study revealed that the Asatidz had **partially met the standards** across the seven domains, articulated in the PPST. As to the performance of the kindergarten learners, public school only reached **approaching proficiency** level while the private school was **proficient**. There was a **significant difference** in the performance of the kindergarten learners in the domains of Physical Health and Motor, Aesthetic and Creative, Mathematics, and Understanding of the Physical and Natural Environment. The output of this study would pave plethora of opportunities for the Asatidz to equip themselves on how to carry out the noble principles of ALIVE in Kindergarten Madrasah Education. It is recommended that the newly designed curriculum be utilized.

Keywords: Madrasah, Asatidz, Madaris, PPST domains, curricular domains

I. INTRODUCTION

The Education System of the Philippines is characterized by the occurrence of traditional religious madrasah and a conventional co-curricular and curricular education. The prevalence of this duality had surfaced as one of the ultimate problems in promoting an integrative curriculum across the country. The difference between these two groups of people could be observed not only in their orientation and thinking but also in all aspects of life ranging from the style of dressing to commitment towards politics. Those coming out of the general education system dominate educated society and the national development process, while those who received education through the madrasah system usually lived on religious activities and rituals and its teaching. Hence their contribution towards national development

was hardly visible. As the mainstream of education, general education occupied about 85 percent of the country's total enrolled students. The overwhelming majority of educated people engaged both in private and public sectors. arts, history, philosophy, economics, sociology, etc. On the other hand, Madrasah Education aspired to develop young Muslims who have balanced growth of the integrated personality, made up of the heart, the spirit, the intellect, the feelings, and the bodily senses. Thereby, a young Muslim would be fortified with Islamic principles (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009). Differences between Islamic and secular education in the structure of education systems made comparisons somewhat tricky. Unlike in Western schools, under the Islamic education system, students did not progress regularly from one grade level to the next, nor were their clear-

cut divisions between primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, based on performance standards and examinations. Schools generally had looser time tables, and students' progress individually, with those who were more advanced helping those who have learned less (Bajunaid, et al. 2011). Madaris varied widely in size and quality, and also in the duration of studies. They range from informal religious instruction for young children, with classes usually taught at the local mosque or in private homes, to prestigious secondary schools. Most informal madaris offered a few hours of instruction over the weekend in makeshift classrooms. Some madaris were full-time, offering classes from five to seven days a week. Well-endowed institutions offered programs for intensive study leading to tertiary Islamic studies. Depending on the madrasah and its resources, classes might be offered to young children, from preschoolers to older children and for the high school age (Ahmad & Jory, 2011).

Though the historical underpinnings of Madrasah Education mirrored the traits of traditionalism; research on madrasah education strongly revealed that the institution was isolated from the vibrant discourse on reforms in contemporary education: both of curriculum and its pedagogical modalities particularly in early childhood. In the religious realm, Towler, as cited by Abu Bakar (2007), claimed that the religious beliefs and traditions formulated by savants of the past, transmitted through generations had maintained its unquestioning acceptance. Thus, the lack of connectedness or application of knowledge received to concrete contemporary issues and problems were further manifestations of traditionalistic pedagogy. Hoodbhoy as cited by Abu Bakar (2007) shared the same observation that the emphasis on learning by rote and the lack of critical discussions was another stark trait of this mode of thought.

On this vein, Miller (2011) strongly postulated that the transition to a learning society might involve schools moving away from "mass-era" approaches that used norms and common culture as the basis for forging an identity and making

decisions toward the goal of equipping children with identities derived from diverse, specific communities and self-generated choices. To make use of particular competencies, non-traditional education from many sources would be considered more. Traditional classroom teaching methods continued to undergo essential changes as the experience was gained with new modes of engaging the minds of students of all ages in post-education, especially in preschool education.

The report of National Statistics Office (2005) clearly stated that there was a need to review present education, policies, and practices and examined how programs, projects and services for Muslim children and youth in school and out of school could best be implemented to reform and save a system that had failed. While rethinking the aims and practices of modern education were developing dynamically; the prevailing consideration was whether the Muslim religious schools, commonly referred to as madrasahs were connected to and impacted by these developments.

Similarly, report of United States Agency for International Development (USAID), European Laboratory for Structural Assessment (ELSA), and EQuALLS (Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills) in 2007 revealed that children and youth in Mindanao were the least likely to stay in school. Only half (53.6%) of the 6 to 24-year-olds in the ARMM region were reported to be in school. The very poor academic performance of the learners described in the report reflected the tremendous challenges to the formal school system on improving equity, expanding access and promoting the quality of primary education for all our children and youth, especially in Mindanao. These statistics revealed an increasing number of learners who were identified to have insufficient knowledge and narrow understanding of Islamic doctrines and principles.

Moreover, the Policy Research on Access to Quality Basic Education for Muslim Learners conducted by USAID, ELSA and EQuALLS (2007) revealed that there were serious concerns

regarding the qualifications of madrasah teachers or ustadiz. In this regard, the Department of Education officials recommended a program to professionalize madrasah teachers. Muslim education, particularly in rapidly globalizing Philippines, had to negotiate changes which both the education sector specifically and society generally had faced. Some of these changes have challenged madrasahs, which provide Muslim religious education, to introduce a new curriculum. Other changes were challenging the nature of the educational process that madrasahs were offering and which made them unique in the educational sector (Sencil, et.al, 2010).

The legal bases for madaris and their relationship to DepEd was a complex issue, and how the national DepEd and the DepEd ARMM defined their respective jurisdictions over madaris was in flux. DepEd Order No. 51 of 2004 on a "Standard Curriculum for Private Madaris stipulated the incorporation of basic education subjects into the daily schedule of private madaris." It instructed madaris to merge the government's basic curriculum (English, Math, Civics, Language), and the Madrasah Curriculum (Arabic, Qur'an, Hadith, jurisprudence). To date, however, the Standard Curriculum was only a policy. There were no accepted syllabi or instructional materials to support its use in classroom teaching. A small number of madaris were attempting to introduce secular subjects though their efforts were significantly limited by funding, by few of any instructional materials and lack of trained teachers.

According to Prudent (2017), a program of integrated Quranic education was implemented in high Muslim concentration areas, an additional one to two hours in elementary and three to four hours in high school. However, Quranic subjects are treated differently from core subjects. Curriculums were vague, and standard books were non-existent. These were left to the appreciation of the heads of Islamic studies in each school. There was no governing body. There was no national standard evaluation and very little literature available on this topic.

Sponsoring and recognizing religious education were sensitive. People based their moral values, their beliefs and some of their political views partly on religion; and Islam was a religion that carried an inherent issue of consensus on significant topics. Moreover, Tahfiz (Malay Institute of Memorizing the Quran) deserved specific scrutiny. They were non-accredited structures that focused solely on the memorization and interpretation of the Quran.

In Tawi-Tawi, particularly Madrasah education was projected to be like other curricular subject taught in learning Arabic which focused on language literacy. It was observed that Islamic values which are the foundation of teaching Madrasah had been overshadowed losing the noble mission of the curricular program. Muslim religious leaders emphasized that when Madrasah principles could be taught to the young learners, this could bring positive influences to their moral development leading them away from the misconceptions of lawless elements in the region which in the past decades had exploited young children as combatants against the government force.

While there have been few studies on analyzing existing Madrasah curriculum, other researchers focused on the studying of the effectiveness of madrasah comprehensive development and promotion; no one had ventured to validate the status of madrasah education in the province of Tawi-Tawi. To determine the extent of utilization of Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers in Kindergarten Madrasah and ascertain the learning competencies of the Muslim Kindergarten learners in terms of the seven curricular domains to pave the elucidation of the findings as the factual basis for a design of Madrasah Curriculum Model in preschool education, the researcher thought of conducting this study.

This study was anchored on the philosophy of the primary Islamic Studies Education (ISE) as postulated by Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) which aimed to produce a Muslim who is knowledgeable, a firm believer, skillful, virtuous and is morally excellent based on the Holy Qur'an and the tradition (of the Prophet Mohammad)

so that he is to become a God-conscious servant of Allah who would contribute to enhancing the Islamic civilization and the nation.

The ISE philosophy geared towards the literacy acquisition of children particularly on their ability to: (a) read selected chapters from the 30th juzu' of the Holy Qur'an properly and eloquently so as to inculcate interest in its reading and develop this into a habit; (b) memorize selected, commonly read verses of the Qur'an; (c) understand the meaning of selected chapters of the Qur'an and internalize its lessons as a commitment to the guidance from God; (d) understand the fundamental articles of belief and is committed that these are stronghold and bastion of faith.; (e) practice the essential rites of worship; and (f) understand and derive lessons from the history of the Messenger of Allah as the basis for human civilization. Also, this study underscored the Kindergarten Curriculum Guide (KCG) which drew from the goals of the K to 12 Philippine Basic Education Curriculum Framework and adopted the general principles of the National Early Learning Framework (NELF).

The framework upholds that the teaching-learning process in the early years must be built upon constructivism, integrative, thematic, collaborative, inquiry-based and reflective teaching in play-based approaches with the application of the Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP).

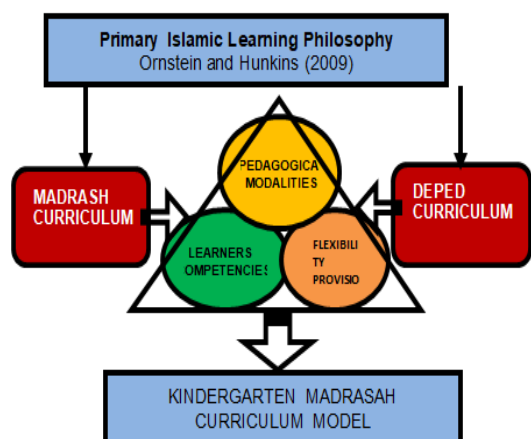


Figure 1. Schematic Presentation of the Theoretical – Conceptual Framework of the Study

Considerably, the National DepEd Kindergarten aimed to develop children to become holistic as reflected in the seven learning domains which could be to wit: Socio-Emotional Development, Values Development, Physical, Health & Motor Development, Aesthetic/Creative Development, Mathematics, Understanding of the Physical and Natural Environment and Language and Literacy and Communication. The domains were enclosed by the learning areas children will meet in Grade one onward for which they were being prepared for. (National Kindergarten Standards and Competencies for Five-Year-Old Filipino Children, 2016).

Moreover, the DepEd Curriculum for Kindergarten Education aims to effectively promote the children's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development, including values formation so that they would be ready for school. It is also the stage when self-esteem, the vision of the world, moral foundations are established, and their mind's absorptive capacity for learning was utmost considered.

In this study, the Madrasah curriculum was validated based on the three indicators: pedagogy, learning competencies, and flexibility provision. The analyses of these three focal areas had been the bases for the design of the curriculum.

This study was framed with variables that would be instrumental for the curriculum designing; which in effect, could give birth to a Contextualized Madrasah Education to which the researcher aimed to produce a curriculum model in madrasah preschool education. The variables in this study involved: Madrasah curriculum, pedagogical and learning competencies of learners and the National DepEd Kindergarten curricular benchmarks.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed method of quantitative-qualitative research design. This research also used a descriptive questionnaire that would determine the assessment of school administrators, preschool teachers, and parents from the identified schools. The survey included the flexibility provision of the newly crafted

Kindergarten Madrasah curriculum in the province of Tawi-Tawi. The learning competencies of the preschoolers, as well as the strategies and methods employed by the teachers in teaching kindergarten, were also assessed.

Documentary analysis approach was employed to validate the implementations of the Madrasah curriculum in the province of Tawi-Tawi during the academic year 2018-2019 and to sum up the flexibility provision of the school administrators, preschool teachers and parents. The results of both research methods were used as bases in designing a Kindergarten Madrasah Curriculum Model which was the main thrust of this study.

III.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Extent of Utilization of the PPST Domains

Table 1 Summary of the Extent of Utilization of PPST in the Kindergarten Madrasah

| PPST Domains | Public School | | | Private School | | |
|---|---------------|----------------|------|----------------|----------------|------|
| | Average Mean | Interpretation | Rank | Average Mean | Interpretation | Rank |
| Personal Growth and Professional Development | 3.34 | A | 1 | 3.62 | A | 1 |
| Community Linkages and Professional Development | 3.14 | O | 2 | 3.44 | A | 2 |
| Assessment and Reporting | 2.82 | O | 3 | 2.98 | O | 5 |
| Learning Environment | 2.58 | O | 4 | 3.15 | O | 4 |
| Diversity of Learners | 2.54 | O | 5 | 3.26 | A | 3 |
| Curriculum and Planning | 2.26 | S | 6 | 2.90 | O | 6 |
| Content and Pedagogy in Madrasah | 1.71 | S | 7 | 1.86 | S | 7 |
| Totally | 2.63 | O | | 3.05 | O | |

Legend:

| | | | |
|-------------|----------|-----------|------------------------------|
| 3.25 – 4.00 | A | Always | -Fully met the standards |
| 2.50 – 3.24 | O | Sometimes | -Partially met the standards |
| 1.75 – 2.49 | S | Sometimes | -Initially met the standards |
| 1.00 – 1.75 | N | Never | -Have not met the standards |

Data showed that most of the teaching practices in Content Knowledge and Pedagogy among teachers in public schools had an average mean of 1.71 which is categorized as Never. This means that the Kindergarten Madrasah teachers in public and schools have not met the standards on the domain above.

The K to 12 Reform (R.A. 10533) in 2013 changed the landscape of teacher quality requirements in the Philippines. The reform process warranted an equivalent supportive focus on teacher quality; high-quality teachers who are properly equipped and prepared to assume the roles and functions of a K to 12 teachers. Currently, the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers had institutionalized the quality of teachers in the Philippines. The standards described the expectations of teachers' increasing levels of knowledge, practice and professional engagement. At the same time, the standards allowed for teachers' growing understanding, applied with increasing sophistication across a broader and more complex range of teaching/learning situations.

As such, it can be inferred that the Kindergarten Madrasah teachers need to cope with the required standards under the principles of PPST in consonance with the Madrasah policy guidelines. These teachers had succumbed to the idea that principles and articulations of Kindergarten Madrasah were ambiguously lingering for the reason that on the onset of the

promulgation of the K-12 program such curriculum for the young Muslim learners was put on hold for considerations only the Department of Education could give light. Though limited learning materials were available; these were for primary graders.

This implied that teachers in kindergarten classrooms might use several teaching methods to ensure that young Muslim learners could learn what they ought to know. However, the same teaching methods were designed and employed to help all Muslim learners cope with the learning standards. This had remained challenging for other learners were lagging to catch up. More so that these Asatidz would incorporate a wide range of instructional strategies. The range of academic abilities could have varied effect; for young learners were distinct and developed differently. Hence, Asatidz may employ differentiated instructions. This method could require them to know how each Muslim kindergarten learner would learn most effectively for learning is tailored upon the prominent needs especially for the very young Muslim learners.

The challenge on the domain above is also experienced by the private school Kindergarten teachers as data also indicated that they only have initially met the standards of pedagogical modalities in terms of Content & Pedagogy with an average mean of 1.86 which is categorized as Sometimes. Based on the results, it could be deduced that the said teachers had started to adapt the teaching practices specified in the PPST while continuously gauging their practices with the Madrasah teaching principles. However, it was with paramount importance that the Asatidz should be provided with enough support to meet the expectations of a quality teacher especially the challenge in the 21st-century teaching.

Nonetheless, both public and private schools have often utilized teaching practices along the domain of learning environment. Thus, it implied that both schools have partially met the standards having obtained an average mean of 2.58 of the former and 3.15 of the latter. Notably, both schools had achieved a highest mean score

of 4.00 with an equivalent interpretation of Always on statement two which signified that these teachers established Islamic-friendly classroom and maintained learning environments that promote fairness, respect and care to encourage learning.

Despite their difficulties in Content & Pedagogy, the Asatidz were mindful of the Islamic culture of the learners. With abovementioned results both public and private schools with madrasah program promoted equality in the learning environment.

The figures also indicated that while the public school has often practiced the teaching methodologies mentioned along with the Diversity of Learners domain, the private school Always utilized these teaching strategies in their Kindergarten Madrasah classes. Thus, public school teachers had partially met the standards while teachers in private school had fully met the standards along the domain above obtaining average mean scores of 2.54 and 3.56 respectively. Undoubtedly, the data suggested that public school teachers need to cope with the large population and diverse learners as shown evidently in their responses interpreted as Never to statement 17 which states “Implement teaching strategies that are responsive to the special educational needs of Muslim learners in difficult circumstances, including: geographic isolation; chronic illness; displacement due to armed conflict, urban resettlement or disasters; child abuse and child labor practices. (e.g., assist to slow learners, provide opportunities to all learners, etc.)” By then, it could be well understood that they were too honest to admit that they were not ready for such circumstances. They further admitted that they had not accommodated those children yet with special educational needs as they were not trained however to cater and address the needs of the said children. Considering that the private school has a lesser number of teacher-learner ratio, the teachers claimed that they made sure they provided the diverse needs of their maximum of 20-25 young learners per class.

Although lecture maintained to be the most widely used method in the classroom, Madrazo

and Motz (2005) remarked that countless studies indicated that acquired knowledge could have long-term memory should learners be engaged through teaching others, practicing by doing, and discussing in groups. Immediate, active use of learning is the best means of retaining information. Also, students have a peak and low times during the day and the course of lessons in which they tend to take in the most information towards the beginning of lessons, and then experience “down time” when retention decreases. Therefore, shorter, several lessons with different means of instruction may be much more effective than an ongoing lecture environment. As a result, sleep (resting the brain) is critical in consolidating learning. Finally, classroom setting and the emotions of students play significant roles in the ability to learn. Experiences generate emotions, which bring relevancy and meaning to students. Teaching tied to positive emotional experiences will lead students to generate new thought and motivation to learn. Teachers can enhance classroom environments in many ways. One important practice is to link the indoors with outdoors for movement to stimulate the uptake of oxygen, which has a positive effect on learning. Another is to create a rich, stimulating environment through hands-on activities and classrooms with rich colors, textures, and students’ work to indicate “ownership” of knowledge.

In terms of Curriculum and Planning, the public school teachers have employed these teaching practices sometimes while private school teachers have often used them with average mean scores of 2.26 of the former and 2.90 of the latter. Contemplating upon the data shown, it could be concluded that both public and private schools in Tawi-Tawi must be given the opportunities for exposure in Kindergarten Madrasah curriculum planning and development as records revealed that public school teachers have only initially met the standard while private school teachers have just partially met the standard. Due to an insufficient budget, training and workshops on Madrasah curriculum planning were also inaccessible to the teachers.

With the massive paper works and multiple school tasks assigned to them, the Asatidz admitted that they could hardly devote time for curriculum planning. They added that they would appreciate much if a curriculum guide for Kindergarten Madrasah will be provided instead. However, as clearly stated in the policy, Asatidz shall participate in all other school learning activities so their involvement with the school would not just be limited to teaching. This could include their active participation in the design of the curriculum. This observation was first claimed by Deporo (2015) wherein the involvement of the teachers and school administrations played essential roles in the success of the curriculum implementation and instructional planning. In this manner, it revealed that external factors had played vital roles in the decisions concerning the teaching activities. Curriculum programs and textbooks appeared to be the most influential tools in the process of instructional planning. In other words, the teachers excessively rely on the curriculum and the textbooks in their teaching activities. Education Program Supervisors (EPS) along with school principals would demand full implementation of the curriculum programs from the Asatidz despite the inadequacies of teachers-professional development.

This implied that administrators or principals must come up with a unique design that would meet the needs of the Muslim kindergarten learners to pave the way to the Madrasah Comprehensive Development and Promotion Program in ARMM. The curriculum might have insufficiencies on the implementation not because the Asatidz had limited knowledge but because curriculum design needed some improvement, monitoring, and assessment for them to be able to provide the deliverables of the curriculum.

Collectively, figures also showed that both public and private schools had often used teaching practices along the Assessment and Reporting domain with average mean scores of 2.82 and 2.98 respectively. This means that both the public schools and private schools had met the standard on the use diagnostic, formative and

summative assessment strategies consistent with the Madrasah curriculum requirements and on the utilization of assessment data to inform the modification of teaching and learning practices in Madrasah programs. Though the teachers had conducted different forms of assessments, provided timely, accurate and constructive feedback to improve the performance of the learners, and notified the parents and guardians as to the progress and development of the learners, there is still a need to implement the standard methodologies in Assessment and Reporting in madrasah program.

Further, while the public schools have partially met the standards in Community Linkages & Professional Development with an average mean score of 3.14 described as Often; the private school, however, have fully met the standards on the domain having obtained an average mean of 3.44 categorized as Always.

Home-school relationships as observed by Adamski et al., (2013) may be critical to alleviating the adverse effects of behavior problems and cumulative risk and to fostering the success of Muslim kindergarten learners in the Madrasah program. When families and schools work together, learners benefit emotionally, academically, and behaviorally. Children whose families engage with schools enjoy school more than those whose parents are disconnected from school. In fact, as an early childhood education provider and enthusiast, those above could also contribute to the Social Competence of the very young Muslim kindergarten learners via Cognitive Development, Communication Skills, Literacy Development, Vocabulary Growth, Expressive Language, Comprehension Skills, Positive engagement with peers, adults, and learning.

It can be concluded that parent-teacher relationship quality has a bearing on children's social competence and adaptive behaviors. When parents have high-quality relationships with teachers, they are more likely to participate in their children's schooling which results in positive academic outcomes for their children.

Based on the results, it appeared that public school Asatidz needs to intensify their

management specifically on involving parents to participate in school activities that promote their children's learning progress. Teachers must explore alternative approaches that will help them persuade parents to cooperate in school events collaboratively. In the same manner, data entailed a necessity for public school teachers to discuss with colleagues teaching and learning practices as these can enrich their knowledge with existing tradition and practices of the faithful Muslims which will be of advantage for strengthening community linkages.

In addition, both public and private schools have fully met the standards in Personal Growth and Professional Development. Moreover, results showed that both schools had fully met the standards. With the average mean of 3.34 in Personal Growth and Professional Development; the Kindergarten Madaris had Always employed the teaching practices. In line with the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Act of 2016, teachers are obliged to earn units in Master's Degree and attend seminars so they could be able to renew their professional licenses. Due to unique geographical location, the Asatidz often being deprived of the chances to attend relevant trainings and opportunities to enhance their knowledge on how to carry out the correct facilitation of teaching-learning process in a Kindergarten Madrasah. So much so that there seemed to have insufficiency of funds. Thus, private schools hired teachers who were graduates of Bachelor of Science in Teaching Arabic to seemingly address the dilemma on professional qualifications as far as Kindergarten Madrasah teaching is concerned.

It is possible, however, that public school teachers attend more training and professional development events not just because these training were mandatory, even though these training might not be able to enhance their skills and competencies being Asatidz. This manifestation mirrored the claim of, Lubienski (2008) that public school teachers reported participating in more forms of professional development than teachers in other schools regardless of their relevance and positive contribution to heighten their ability to teach

Madrasah education. It is unclear whether additional training makes a better teacher.

Montoro (2012) believed that in the current educational environment, teachers are required to understand teaching and learning with strong content knowledge, and make connections between life experiences and the curriculum. Asatidz were expected to be continually learning to improve their practices. Professional learning is essential in this process. Research on professional development practices in various school contexts shows how teachers can improve and develop better instructional practices through a variety of learning experiences.

Though the teachers had grown professionally and personally, there is still a need for school leaders to create professional development funding in their budgets, plan quality professional learning activities in cooperation with teachers who have content-rich and relevant strategies, share current literature on quality and effective professional practices, model life-long, professional learning, and encourage informal, teacher-directed learning that includes experimentation and reflection.

Moreover, both public and private schools also are confronted with the standards they are obliged to meet along the domain on Content and Pedagogy. These records strongly suggested that it is high time for administrators to exert more efforts and discover ways and means to increase teaching quality and equity inside Kindergarten Madrasah classrooms. Not surprisingly, if this issue would not be mitigated, it could emerge with an even greater problem that could result in low learner achievement and a current learner achievement gap in Kindergarten Madrasah. Thus, teachers must be able to acquire sufficient knowledge of the content reflective to diverse pedagogy and specific effective teaching-learning practices in Kindergarten Madrasah.

Performance of the Kindergarten Learners in Madrasah

The basic competencies of young children would serve as the bases for the teaching and learning plan and all other teaching efforts. These basic competencies were capabilities that would allow young Muslim learners to start understanding their culture, beliefs, and practices to cope with the most diverse life situations. Hence, it is the responsibility and obligation of parents, teachers, stakeholders, and administrators to support the child in acquiring these basic competencies because learners continually explore their surroundings and gradually recognize in the process their abilities and potentials.

The standards and competencies of The Kindergarten Madrasah (DO No. 47, s 2016) curriculum were aligned with the National Kindergarten curriculum with relevant competencies for young Muslim learners. The curriculum was designed to integrate Islamic values and Arabic language into the Kindergarten curriculum totally reflecting those seven domains, namely: (1) physical health and motor development; (2) socio-emotional development; (3) values/moral spiritual development; (4) creativity and aesthetic development; (5) mathematics; (6) understanding of the physical and natural environment; and (7) language, literacy, and communication. Consistent with the Kindergarten Education program, it aimed to ensure that five-year-old Muslim children achieve the standards and competencies expected of them. It sought to promote the holistic way by which young children grew and developed. It also aimed to recognize the role of families and communities in supporting the development of the very young Muslim learner.

Table 2 Summary of Performance of Kindergarten Learners in Madrasah

| Learning Competencies | Public School | | | Private School | | |
|--|---------------|----------------|------|----------------|----------------|------|
| | Average Mean | Interpretation | Rank | Average Mean | Interpretation | Rank |
| Socio-Emotional Development | 3.81 | P | 1 | 4.18 | P | 1 |
| Values/Moral/Spiritual Development | 3.54 | P | 2 | 3.97 | P | 4 |
| Physical and Natural Development | 3.42 | P | 3 | 4.01 | P | 2 |
| Mathematics | 3.33 | AP | 4 | 3.98 | P | 3 |
| Physical, Health and Motor Development | 3.03 | AP | 5 | 3.77 | P | 5 |
| Creativity and Aesthetic Development | 2.89 | AP | 6 | 3.60 | P | 6 |
| Language, Literacy and Communication | 2.77 | AP | 7 | 3.25 | AP | 7 |
| Totality | 3.26 | AP | | 3.82 | P | |

Legend:

| | | |
|-------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| 4.20 – 5.00 | A | -Advanced |
| 3.40 – 4.19 | P | -Proficient |
| 2.60 – 3.39 | AP | -Approaching Proficiency |
| 1.80 – 2.59 | D | -Developing |
| 1.00 – 1.79 | B | -Beginning |

As shown in the preceding table, the learners from public school obtained an average mean of 3.03 which is described as Approaching Proficient while private school learners garnered an average mean score of 3.77 in the Physical, Health, and Motor Development which is regarded as Proficient. Specifically, Kindergarten from public school attained a mean score of 1.00 which resided Beginning in terms of drawing pictures and figures mentioned in Qur'an and 1.20 categorized Beginning in performing the necessary steps of wudhu-cleansing before prayer. The figure above revealed that young children from private schools performed better than those from public schools.

The findings refuted the study conducted by Camliguney et al. (2012) which revealed that physical education classes offered to public and private primary school students did not affect their physical fitness parameters other than leg strength differently. Tests results were not significantly different between groups, while leg

strength tests were statistically significant. The approach to PE classes displayed no difference in favor of enhanced physical fitness. Girls and boys attending private schools had more leg strength due to differences in lifestyle and the higher amount of extra-curricular physical activities.

According to (Matvienko&Ahrabi-Fard (2010), an intense after-school program can produce significant, sustainable improvement in motor skills and fitness of children. The relation between fine and gross motor abilities in children (boy and girl) showed that the level of motor ability is correlated with school activities (Piek, Baynam, & Barrett as cited by Camliguney, 2012).

Further, a gender-based difference among private school students was observed. It is concluded that the higher flexibility scores of private school female students may be due to the special education (private dance and ballet classes) that these girls may have been taking, and girls have a more flexible body in terms of

physical fitness characteristics. Generally, families who have high socioeconomic status prefer private schools for their children education.

Kindergarten Madrasah teachers admitted that they had not started yet introducing these skills to their learners as they mainly focus on grades 1-6 Madrasah content and learning. They also explained that the unavailability of instructional materials and indefinite clear cut of Kindergarten Madrasah content is also a contributing factor to the present scenario. In the same manner, private schools confessed too that currently, they were not confident with their Kindergarten Madrasah implementation as their young children were still approaching proficiency in the learning mentioned above competencies. They were hopeful that DepEd in coordination with ALIVE supervisors and coordinators would provide them the Tahderriya curriculum which up until now is still on the process of scrutiny and evaluation.

Data also revealed that children in both public and private schools are now proficient in terms of Values/Moral/Spiritual Development. The competency scores of these young children indicated that they have already awareness about Allah (Swt.) and could even practice the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). This is evident in their performance tasks as they obtained a mean score of 4.12 interpreted as Advanced specifically in performing tasks independently such as whisper a prayer before getting in and out from the bathroom. They were rated also Advanced by their teachers on the use of cultural gestures of greeting without much prompting like saying Assalam Allaikum or responding immediately when greeted.

According to Haslip (2014), moral development has consequences chiefly in social relationships. Spiritual development, however, takes effect mainly in terms of inner emotions and sentiments. Beyond reasoned moral conviction and effective social action, there is the inner life of the spirit which gives warmth and drive to dispassionate precepts of morality. Although consent to moral values may be dictated by reason, their driving power is generated by the

spiritual and emotional loyalties which they create in the hearts of mankind. There is a spirit of cooperation that transcends any behavior that may be termed "cooperative"; there is a spirit of justice that goes beyond any knowledge or understanding of what is; there is a spirit of helpfulness which belies description in terms of whatever helpful behaviors are manifested.

On the other hand, values have always played an important role like the individual and his / her relationship to society. According to Fulop (2014), both Dewey (1939) in his theory of pragmatism and Parsons (1937) in his theory of action, viewed values as essential contributors to their conclusions. Rokeach (1973, 1979) brought the concept of values into modern focus. Spirituality and Values based on which Schwartz, as cited in Fulop (2014), developed his widely known model of value priorities (Hitlin, 2003.). Schwartz defined values as "criteria people use to select and justify actions and evaluate people (including the self) and events." They are guiding principles which serve different interests and, have different types and contents. Though individuals and groups may differ in the relative importance they attribute to values, thus having different value priorities, the nature and structure of values are universal and recognizable in all cultures

Collectively, public school kindergarten acquired an average mean of 2.89 categorized as **Approaching Proficiency** and 3.60 **Proficient** for the private school learners in the Creativity and Aesthetic Development. Noticeably, young children in public school were still Developing in learning competencies such as cutting and pasting various shapes with different textures, drawing a piece of art that is typically recognizable to others with mostly realistic proportions, and in performing simple plays.

Usually, early childhood educators are constantly searching for the most effective learning experiences that can help to enhance the quality of education for young children (Lim, 2005) and aesthetic experiences, in particular, have proven quite successful especially in the teaching of arts and even across disciplines (Harter et al., 2008). Expert analyses have

established that aesthetic experiences have the effect of expanding the learning environment thus providing an essential tool that the early childhood education teachers can explore within the integrated curriculum to enrich teaching and learning in the early childhood educations. Dewey (2005) conceptualizes the notion of aesthetic experiences as the moment of quality when individuals realize the aesthetic potential of situations and the ordinary becomes noticeable. Thus, they entail all the moments of feeling that provoke deeper inclination that is different from ordinary experiences. Teachers have observed that children become more active and make much more conscious and intentional choices, especially reserved those children become more active and make much more conscious and intentional choices when encouraged to explore and manipulate different material in the classroom and this is because this material intensifies their aesthetic delight. In this respect, in aesthetics early childhood education, the teaching, and learning of music in kindergartens, children's visual arts and children's pretend play are certainly the three most significant activities in early childhood education; this is so because such activities suffuse emotional experiences (Lima, 1995) that enrich the learning environments thereby enhancing the children's motivation to learn.

Carter, 2008 claimed that creativity is a skill parent can help their children develop. It is not an inborn talent child either do or do not have. How parents raise their sons and daughters could end or foster creativity. Creativity is the freest form of self-expression. There is nothing more satisfying and fulfilling for children the than to be able to express themselves openly and without judgment. The ability to be creative and to create something from personal feelings and experiences depend on children's emotional health and how they were nurtured in their environment. The Whole Child advocate, Denise (2018) stressed that the experiences children have during their first years of life can significantly enhance the development of their creativity. Thus, it is essential that parents, caregivers, and educators should be aware of

many childhood experiences that impair the children's creative development.

Table 2 also revealed that Kindergarten in public school reached only the **Approaching Proficiency** level with an average mean of 3.33; while learners in private school were in the **Proficient** level with an average mean score of 3.98. Thus, this implied that the learning competencies of Kindergarten enrolled in private school were better in Mathematics. The results denoted as well that children in public school need more enhancement activities and fun-filled learning experiences particularly in recognizing and identifying so much so with reading and writing Arabic and Hindu-Arabic numerals from 0-20 for these learners were approaching proficiency in those areas.

Evident in Table 2 were the accumulated mean scores in Physical and Natural Environment of both public and private schools which obtained average mean scores of 3.42 and 4.01 respectively categorized as **Proficient**. With such results, it could be inferred that young children in both schools were performing well in the aforementioned learning area. The Muslim Kindergarten learners were responsive to the various learning activities in and outside the classroom. They exhibited interests on the lessons about plants, different kinds of weathers, and classification of objects according to observable properties, etc. This achievement on the average mean score escalated for the reason that the Asatidz would bring their learners outside the classroom for outdoor activities tapping the lessons at hand.

Data however also revealed that these Muslim Kindergarten learners both from the public and private schools were still in **Approaching Proficiency** in Language, Literacy, and Communication having obtained average mean scores of 2.77 of the former and 3.25 of the latter. Noticeably, these young learners from public school were still on the beginning category in terms of retelling prophet stories in 1 to 3 sentences through pictures and dramatization. This same group of learners was on developing stage in telling stories about Allah SWT and his creations, telling the missing parts in a specific

surah/hadith and in tracing, copying, and writing the Arabic letters. In terms of listening discriminately to correct recitation of Al-Fatiha, identifying parts of the holy book Qur'an and copying and writing the Arabic letters; Muslim kindergarten learners in private schools were still in approaching proficiency category.

In totality, results indicated that the level of performance of Kindergartens was quite high in terms of Socio-Emotional Development as they obtained the highest mean score among all developmental domains in this area categorized as **Proficient**.

Hence, the data depicted a good indication that young learners from both schools had remarkable socio-emotional well-being. The socio-emotional health of children affected their overall learning. The research of Kostelnik et al.(2015) indicated that children who are socio-emotionally healthy show greater motivation to learn, have a more positive attitude towards school, participate more eagerly in class activities, and demonstrate higher academic performance than less mentally healthy peers. Children who exhibit social and emotional difficulties tend to have trouble following directions and participating in learning activities. Compared with healthier peers, they may be more likely to suffer rejection by classmates, have low self-esteem, do poorly in school, and be suspended. Thus, the social and emotional health of children is just as important as their physical health as it affects their capacity to develop and potentials to lead a fulfilling life.

On the contrary, among the seven developmental domains, these young children got the least average mean score in Language, Literacy, and Communication categorized as **Approaching Proficiency**. As their asatidz have mainly focused thus far on Arabic literacy, other

learning areas in Kindergarten Madrasah are still expected to be introduced soonest possible when lesson guides can be provided by the DepEd.

Literacy development is a vital part of a Muslim child's overall development. It is the foundation for doing well at school as it is the basis for the child's ability to read, write, communicate and socialize in any Islamic fora. Renowned child development advocate Piaget (1936) stressed that the development of language is strongly interdependent with, and supports, the child's brain development and cognitive development. Studies have shown that having a large vocabulary increases creativity and helps individuals to come up with new ideas.

Consequently, there are serious negative consequences of failing to learn how to communicate. Researches on language and literacy have associated delayed development with academic difficulties, learning disabilities, shyness, and social difficulties, anxiety disorder, behavioral problems, and ADHD.

As a Muslim child grows, parents and caregivers could start reading them simple prophet stories. By then, the child may talk and explain her likes and dislikes about the story. Madrasah teachers can play games with a child, such as naming objects mentioned in the Holy Qur'an or practicing concepts of direction; for example: in, out, over and through. By exposing children to some video prophet stories, parents, caregiver, and teachers can teach a child Muslim prophet simple stories and rhymes to encourage repetition and language communication development. As such this claim aligns with what Brannagan, (2017) suggested that a parent can encourage the development of language skills with a child by regularly interacting, singing songs and reading simple stories.

Significant Difference in the Extent of Utilization of the PPST Domains in Kindergarten Madrasah

Table 3. *Significant Difference in the Extent of Utilization of the PPST Domains in Kindergarten Madrasah*

| PPST Domains | Public | | Private | | T-value | P-value | Remarks |
|--|--------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|------------|
| | X | SD | X | SD | | | |
| 1. Content Knowledge & Pedagogy | 2.80 | (1.06) | 3.50 | (1.10) | 2.05 | .050 | Sig |
| 2. Learning Environment | 2.58 | (1.26) | 3.15 | (.82) | 1.68 | .110 | <i>NS</i> |
| 3. Diversity of Learners | 3.00 | (.82) | 3.26 | (.79) | 1.02 | .321 | <i>NS</i> |
| 4. Curriculum and Planning | 2.26 | (.99) | 2.90 | (.82) | 2.22 | .039 | Sig |
| 5. Assessment and Reporting | 2.82 | (.99) | 2.98 | (.79) | .56 | .579 | <i>NS</i> |
| 1. Community Linkages & Professional Development | 3.14 | (.79) | 3.44 | (.70) | 1.27 | .219 | <i>NS</i> |
| 2. Personal Growth & Professional Development | 3.34 | (.67) | 3.62 | (.52) | 1.47 | .157 | <i>NS</i> |
| Totality | 2.85 | (.70) | 3.26 | (.79) | 1.46 | .156 | NS |

Legend: **Sig** – Significant

NS – Not Significant

As teachers in private schools were graduates of BS in teaching Arabic, they have better performance in terms of teaching practices along the areas above. They added that they were given a specific time for curriculum planning as they were encouraged to be a part of it while their schools continue to progress and adapt to the current trends in teaching. However, public school teachers were challenged with loads of paper works and multi-task assigned to them who have to deal with around forty to sixty children per class. Overall, there was no significant difference in the extent of utilization of PPST domains.

Hanani (2013) in Isomuddin (2017) concluded that generally, teachers must recognize the students' skills in all aspects; one of the elements of effective learning as an excellent teacher. It includes one of the main components of Pedagogical Content Knowledge. Thus, Islamic Education teachers who have accurate knowledge about their students are considered as the most important element in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (Sws.). The research found out that teachers know their students on five key characteristics, namely the student's

background, learning problems, characteristics, academic level, and motivation. In conclusion, the teacher's knowledge had pushed to plan and carry out the effective teaching and learning process.

DepEd reported last January 2017 the perennial challenges on access, quality and governance impact which echoed in the Madrasah Education Program. While DepEd was already offering ALIVE (Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education) Kindergarten and Elementary, the remaining challenge was expanding access of Muslim children in public schools. In addition, as the number of permanent ALIVE teachers was increasing, the bulk remains with the contractual teachers. ALIVE and Private Madrasah enrollees have now reached the 300,000; however; the number of permanent teachers is still relatively few. Some ALIVE teachers have passed the LET but have not been awarded permanent items yet and school heads, with ALIVE Program in their schools, have not been trained on the program operations, cultural and language immersion. DepEd Order 30, s. 2012 emphasized in their Policy Guidelines on the Hiring and Deployment of Madrasah Teacher. All Muslim applicants

must take and pass the qualifying examination to ensure their competence in Arabic Language and Islamic Studies. Passers of the Qualifying Examination shall undergo a 23-day live-in pre-service Language Enhancement and Pedagogy (LEaP) training workshop, and only those who have completed and passed such training shall be deployed in public schools. For professional growth and development, the ALIVE teachers deployed in public schools are encouraged to enroll and take the 24-month course approved by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Professional Regulation Commission

(PRC), known as Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP) with a full subsidy from DepEd. After completing and passing the ATEP, the enrollees shall have earned the degree equivalent of a Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) and are qualified to take the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). After completing the ATEP and obtaining the degree of BEEd, the ALIVE teacher (Asatidz) is already qualified to take the LET. If he/she passed the LET, a Teacher I item shall be given to him/her and to be appointed accordingly by the respective School Division Superintendent.

Significant Difference in the Performance of the Kindergarten Learners

Table 4. *Significant Difference in the Performance of the Kindergarten Learners*

| Curricular Domains | Public | | Private | | T-value | P-value | Remarks |
|--|--------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|------------|
| | X | SD | X | SD | | | |
| 1. Physical, Health & Motor Development | 3.03 | (1.41) | 3.77 | (.97) | 1.92 | .030 | Sig |
| 2. Socio-emotional Development | 3.81 | (1.02) | 4.18 | (.90) | 1.23 | .11 | NS |
| 3. Values/Moral/Spiritual Development | 3.52 | (1.28) | 3.97 | (.97) | 1.26 | .107 | NS |
| 4. Aesthetic & Creative Development | 2.89 | (1.21) | 3.60 | (.97) | 2.07 | .021 | Sig |
| 5. Mathematics | 3.33 | (1.14) | 3.98 | (2.02) | 2.02 | .020 | Sig |
| 6. Understanding of the Physical & Natural Environment | 3.42 | (1.15) | 4.01 | (.87) | 1.83 | .037 | Sig |
| 7. Language, Literacy & Communication | 2.77 | (1.40) | 3.25 | (1.13) | 1.19 | .118 | NS |
| Totally | 3.25 | (1.23) | 3.82 | (1.02) | 1.84 | .036 | Sig |

Legend: **Sig** – Significant **NS** – Not Significant

Data revealed that there is a significant difference between the public and private schools in the performance of the Kindergarten learners as reflected in the four domains namely; Physical, Health, and Motor Development Aesthetic & Creative Development, Mathematics, Understanding of the Physical & Natural Environment. Children from private

schools have better performance along these domains as their schools for many reasons have better facilities, instructional materials, exposure to varied learning activities and teachers who were professionally qualified to teach Madrasah. Researchers and advocates had long debated the different effects of school governance on student achievement. Some studies had found that students in private schools significantly outperform public school. As highlighted by the

Heritage Foundation, a conservative advocate for market-based education reform, as far back as 1981 research by James Coleman suggested that private school students performed much better than their public schools.

The study of Awan (2015) found out that private schools are becoming more favorite and attractive for majority of the students due to their better education systems, test criteria and knowledge creation. Public schools, which comparatively qualify but inefficient are losing their attraction such that parents preferred to send their children in private schools and avoid public schools.

This implied that pupils from private schools performed better than those who are from public schools. In an interview conducted, most of the parent preferred to enroll their kids at private schools. The results would support the notion of Scheper (2013) that many parents took school choice very seriously, trying to determine the best environment for their child. Parents were starting to become more involved in the way their child experiences school. Perhaps parents had become aware of how much a school influences future success. Therefore, they were taking the necessary steps to educate themselves on the issues affecting education today.

Moreover, since private schools were able to select their students, it could be easy for them to choose only the learners who improved in their academic record. Learners attending private schools also had parents who were willing to pay the tuition. Therefore, these parents may be more devoted to their child's education, which would improve overall academic success.

In most cases, the choice of parents between a public/city school and a private/religious school would matter. Public and private schools had always competed. Public schools were run by the government and must adhere to any standards and regulations given while remaining within the established budget. The circumstances surrounding every aspect of a public school depending on how much money the government provides. Also, public schools were required to serve every student; for this reason, public schools were usually very diverse. In contrast,

private schools are managed independently, although they still must meet certain curriculum standards usually set by the state. The government gives no financial help to a private school, so tuition is required for attendance. Because of this, the population at a private school is usually less diverse. The average private school tuition was usually much higher than the public schools. (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2008).

On the contrary, Nichols (2010) averred that tuition was not of the most important aspect when deciding for a school. The following factors were listed in order of importance: student body, location, test scores, basic programs, staff, facilities, after-school, community, and special programs (Schneider & Buckley as cited in Scheper, 2013). Therefore, parents seemed to be most interested in the student body and the location of a school. However, every parent was different and would consider various factors when choosing a school. This implied that moral and financial support of the parents, sufficient budget, availability of resources, facilities, equipment, classroom environment would significantly affect the performance of the learners.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report in 2012 stated that advocates of private schools argued that private involvement in school management leads to more efficiency and responsiveness to parents' demands. Principals in these schools had more autonomy to manage than public school principals do, although the extent of school autonomy varied across countries. Privately managed schools had the authority to hire and compensate teachers and staff, and thus could select better-prepared teachers and introduced incentives for performance. Privately managed schools also had more discretion on curricula and instructional methods, and so could adapt them to the interests and abilities of their students. Also, privately managed schools had greater incentives to reduce costs and might be subject to more flexible regulations. The need to attract students meant that privately managed schools must be more sensitive to parents'

demands concerning curricula, teaching methods, facilities, and discipline and more responsive to student's needs.

When Kindergarten education was institutionalized as part of basic education and was implemented partially in the school year 2011-2012, it was made mandatory and compulsory for entrance to Grade 1. Republic Act (RA) 10157, otherwise known as "The Kindergarten Education Act," provided that the curriculum was designed to cater to the needs of the learners with special needs or children who are gifted, those with disabilities, and other diverse learners by adopting services in addition to the standards provided, such as Headstart Program for the Gifted, Early Intervention Program for Children with Disabilities, Early Intervention Program for Children with Disabilities, Kindergarten Madrasah Program (KMP), Indigenous People (IP) Education, and Catch-Up Program for Children under Especially Difficult Circumstances.

The Indigenous Peoples Education, on the other hand, should ensure the preservation, recognition, promotion, and protection of the rights of indigenous people, their ancestral domain, cultural identity, and heritage. It incorporated special needs, histories, identities, languages, indigenous knowledge, systems and practices, and other aspects of their culture, as well as their social, economic, and cultural priorities and aspirations. For young Muslim kindergarten learners enrolled in public schools, the Kindergarten Madrasah Program (KMP) required a provision to the children with Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) classes, as well as those in private madaris using the Standard Madrasah Curriculum prescribed by the Department of Education. However, the said program did not fully benefit the many Muslim young learners in the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao. The exhibited results of the data gathered strongly conveyed that the Madaris learners from Tawi-Tawi at present, lack competitive skills requisite in the policy guidelines for Kindergarten Madrasah because the Madaris in the province did not fully implement the

standard curriculum of the Department of Education yet. While the teachers in the province had partially met the standards stipulated in the PPST and of DO 30, s. 2012, Kindergarten Madrasah curriculum for the young Muslim learners were non-existent. Thus, these present scenarios entailed a design of an Outcome-Based Kindergarten Madrasah Curriculum for the province of Tawi-Tawi and the ARMM.

Flexibility Provision of the Kindergarten Madrasah Curriculum Model

Republic Act No. 10533 otherwise known as Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 Section 5, entitled Curriculum Development mandated that our curriculum should be flexible, contextualized and culture-sensitive; thereby allowing schools to localize, indigenize and enhance curriculum based on their respective educational and social contexts. Thus, the development of a curriculum could not limit only from educational theory and research but also considered foremost the diverse individual learners and their teachers who had different backgrounds and expectations as such curriculum must incorporate competencies for lifelong learning with consideration of its acceptability from the stakeholders particularly the principals, teachers, and parents as well.

To ensure and respond to the diverse needs of the kindergarten learners in the province of Tawi-Tawi while recognizing the cultural context of the Muslim learners, a flexibility provision of the Contextualized Kindergarten Madrasah Curriculum was conducted. With unique purposes that could integrate content and competencies which are relevant and of interest specifically to the young Kindergarten learners, the principles of Arabic Literacy and Islamic Values Education were identified to be the core elements in those above newly crafted curricula.

Based on the data gathered, the following were the common insights of the stakeholders:

The Perceptions of the Principals

1. The Kindergarten Madrasah provides activities towards the holistic development of the learners.

Principals reported that the newly crafted curriculum is beneficial to the holistic development of young children as it integrates the Arabic Literacy and Islamic Values Education to the seven curricular domains.

One principal participant narrated:

“It is high time that we must be able to implement holistic Madrasah Curriculum for Kindergarten in order to balance the secular and religious knowledge of young children in our region.”

This was supported by another participant who mentioned:

“This curriculum is an awakening to all Muslims here in the province in a sense that while we are open to enroll our kids to Adventist and Catholic school allowing them to learn about their religious beliefs, it is a must also that we begin teaching our young Muslim learners about Islam through this newly crafted Kindergarten Madrasah curriculum.”

The holistic development of children in early childhood is an aspiration and basic guiding principle in all programs of early childhood. It includes socio-emotional, values/moral/spiritual, physical health and motor, aesthetics, mathematics, understanding of the physical and natural environment development and language, literacy and communication. The early childhood experiences of the children may encourage or hinder their holistic development. Young learners need support in order to be healthy, to have good nutrition, protection, encouragement and learning. As a result, learning objectives should be multidimensional. They are achieved when children are physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally safe, and when the learning process is culturally and spiritually aware, and aesthetically creative.

Voco, et.al. (2014) emphasized that holistic development needs: health, nutrition, early stimulation, and positive social and emotional interactions with the caregivers, learning opportunities, and protection against violence.

They added that the holistic development and learning includes all the development areas and supports the perspective that a child is developed as a whole being in the context of family, house, school and community.

In so doing, the five thematic areas of this curriculum strengthen the learning and development of children in a more appropriate way for young children. As shown in the newly designed Kindergarten Madrasah curriculum, the content and performance standards, learning competencies, experiences and assessment cover the seven curricular domains across the five curricular themes to warrant a balance and holistic development of the young Muslim learners.

2. It instills basic knowledge and faith in Islam reflective of the teaching in Quran

Most of the principals agreed that the curriculum could unfold the real spirit of Islamic values among young children which were evident in the expected learning competencies and learning experiences reflected in the learning guide. This was emphasized by the principal participant. She narrated:

“When our Kindergarten were able to show awareness about the five basic duties of Islam and were able to demonstrate Islamic manners when they eat and perform simple bathroom etiquettes, this means a lot to the children’s growth as Muslim individuals.”

The principals agreed that inculcating the Islamic cultural and religious belief can be more advantageous to Muslim Kindergartens as early as five years old, incorporating these to their classroom lessons and thereby applying them to daily life practice. As participant 5 described:

“Young children as we know are easy to believe and follow whatever you teach them. Thus, if they will learn about Islam as young as they are, then, it could be expected that in the years to come, they could become Muslim practicing individuals with strong moral fiber. By then, the lawless elements or extremists in the region could have a hard time

exploiting and indoctrinating negative teachings to these young children.”

Further, the principals affirmed that the current Madrasah curriculum adopt the nature and principles of Islamic Values reflective of the teaching in Qur-an. As participant 3 shared his observations:

“I totally agree that these curricula adhere to Islamic principles reflective of the teaching in Qur-an as these were evident in their Listening Comprehension Skills, wherein learners ought to watch videos of Prophet Stories in Islam and most specifically when they are being taught with Arabic letters and numbers, Qur’anic verses and prayers. These lessons are authentic from Qur’an. They were taught in age-appropriate ways.”

When children learn Islam at early age, they will love their religion and they could develop a positive self-image and a strong Islamic identity. Thus, as they grow, they would become sentient participants in a Muslim community and a productive individual in the society.

3. It integrates lessons related to the life and practices of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and other prophets mentioned in the holy Qur-an?

Finally, the principals realized that the Kindergarten Madrasah curriculum integrate lessons related to the life and practices of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and other prophets mentioned in the holy Qur-an. The principal participant spoke about the benefits when these are taught in the class:

“Prophet stories are important to all Muslims especially to the young children as they serve as an inspiration. Those experiences of the prophets would be our guide to live a successful life here on earth. These stories contribute to the development of various skills such as moral/values/ spiritual, language literacy and communication, and understanding of the physical nature & environment.”

This statement was supported by another participant who said:

“It is not a question anymore if the traditions and lives of Muslim prophets should really be integrated in class lessons, but how to make this meaningful to our young kids. By this learning guide or module, we are provided with activities that were very much useful for the learners and teachers.”

Consequently, the principals were very much supportive and appreciative of the newly designed Kindergarten Madrasah curriculum. They claimed that said curriculum could help improve the learning competencies of Muslim Kindergarten learners and could serve as a guide to Asatidz providing useful teaching strategies that highlight the Islamic beliefs, values, behavior, feelings, and attitudes reflective of the teachings in Qur’an (Holy Book) and Hadith (sayings of the prophet).

The Impression of the Teachers

4. The Kindergarten Madrasah curriculum provides engaging and interactive curriculum content

While teachers found the newly crafted curriculum very much engaging, interactive, learner-centered, age appropriate and contextualized, they enumerated some concerns that could contribute to its development and effective implementation. One participant noted that:

“I believe the Arabic letters and numbers could be introduced in quarter 2 where our young kids have already established the writing of the Alphabet letters. In that way, we could introduce the Arabic sounds during the first quarter and then it could be followed by slowly introducing Arabic letters and numbers one by one.” I am definitely impressed with the Islamic videos and Islamic prayers and poems you included. The kids would love them surely. They are amazing.”

This assertion was echoed by the succeeding participant who said:

“During the first quarter, it could be more helpful to the kindergarten learners if we

established first the teachings of alphabet letters and numbers, which is the foundation of all the subject areas, then moved to Arabic literacy by quarter two or three. It would be nicer to introduce Arabic letters and number songs. I am amazed to have watched those videos. And I'm sure when children sung them every day, they could easily learn and retain them."

For many young children, kindergarten could be their first experience in a formal classroom. Kindergarten learners typically have short attention spans and need to move around on a regular basis. They thrive in an interactive learning environment.

Experiential learning could make the lesson fun, reduce behavior problems, and would be an effective way of promoting engagement in the classroom. When young children have an empowering experience in kindergarten, it helps them feel positive about school and socially and intellectually confident.

Many researches have proven that engaging learners in the learning process could increase their attention and focus, motivate them to develop higher-level critical thinking skills and promote meaningful learning experiences. Teachers who adopted a child-centered approach to instruction increased opportunities for learner engagement, which could help everyone in the class more successful.

Consequently, Fredricks. et.al (2004) mentioned that when learners were engaged in lessons, they demonstrated more effort, paid more attention and exhibited positive emotions compared to less engaged peers. These learners who were motivated and engaged in learning tend to perform considerably higher academically and are better behaved than unmotivated and un-engaged peers.

5. The curriculum guide equips not only the Asatidz but also the regular Kindergarten teachers

Upon scrutinizing the curriculum, the kindergarten teachers were thrilled because they feel that as Muslims and with the use of the

created CG, they can teach Kindergarten Madrasah even if they were not trained in Madrasah education. Teacher participant claimed in her statement below:

"What I really like most about this CG is that it provides various learning experiences; easy to understand and can be readily taught even if you are non-Asatidz. Since we are Muslims, we can actually share our personal knowledge about Islam using this CG as an aid."

It is of advantage for many reasons when the curriculum was comprehensible and ready to use. First, the implementers saved time as the content standards and learning materials were readily available, which they can use and adapt as they see where it could fit. Second, it is helpful for new Asatidz as they could be more equipped with the content provided rather than preparing a lesson from scratch. Teaching a ready-made lesson would be a less daunting task for a neophyte teacher than coming up with a forty-five minutes worth of content themselves. It would be easier for most new teachers to learn the contents of a lesson than to create them. Thus, provision of curriculum can be a helpful tool for training new Asatidz. Finally, curriculum can generate more interest if it is well articulated and consistent to its guiding principle. The provision of varied strategies and activities through each topic would encourage a sustained opportunity for the Asatidz to make each class more enjoyable and engaging.

6. DepEd authorities may reconsider strategies that ensure quality assurance through monitoring and evaluation of the program.

The teachers pointed also the accessibility of the learning materials mentioned in the curriculum as these were not available at hand and requested that they will be provided. Some teachers made use of the locally available instructional materials. The teacher participant described it as follows:

"I am not a Madrasah teacher but I am teaching Kindergarten Madrasah using some materials from Private Madaris school. Your Islamic prophet story videos

and Islamic songs for kids are so enticing for kids but can you possibly provide cd copies of those? including, the reference book you mentioned 'Islam for Younger People.'

A number of Asatidz asserted that the lack of instructional materials of Madrasah curriculum implementation required immediate attention from the DepEd region. They mentioned there seemed to be minimal monitoring and evaluating for the Asatidz performances and Madrasah learning competencies of the young Muslim learners except for the research that has been conducted at present. This was explained by participant 4 who mentioned:

"We are really impressed with what you did for the Muslim education. All the learning activities here are very much effective for Kindergarten Madrasah, however, as much as we all want these things to be implemented for classroom learning, would there be equal support from the higher ups, in terms of the instructional materials mentioned here and how about the monitoring and evaluation? The implementation as I observed is even seldom being checked."

In the report of Saada, N. (2017), she claimed that while DepEd was already offering ALIVE Kindergarten and Elementary, the remaining challenge was expanding access to Muslim children in public schools not yet covered by these offerings specifically in the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao. DepEd ARMM, admitted, however, that the production of the Kindergarten learning guide and materials for Madrasah Education is still currently being worked on.

It surfaced therefore, the DepEd authorities assigned to implement Madrasah education need to heighten their monitoring and assessment mechanism on the implementation. Cognizant to this, a quality education for the young Muslim learners is upheld.

Insights of the Parents

7. The Kindergarten Madrasah curriculum delivers inclusive education for all learners.

Muslim parents have expressed positive thoughts and feelings toward the newly designed curriculum. They appreciated it much that their young children need in terms of religious education can now be provided by the DepEd so they need not to send them to private Madrasah classes during weekend. As the diverse needs of the learners were addressed with the new approaches reflected in the curriculum guide, parents noted:

"Masasabi ko na itong ginawa mo ay kumpleto na para sa kabuuang paglinang sa mga mag-aaral na Muslim. Binigyang kasagutan yung mgakailangan matutunan ng mgakabataang Muslim kaya talagang masaya kami malaman ito." ("I can say that this CG is truly a complete package for the total development of a Muslim learner. We are so glad to know about this because this paves a way for a Muslim child to learn what he/she is supposed to learn".

This statement was supported by added participant:

"Maganda kasi na yung mga kabataang Muslim kung anong religion nila natutunan sa bahay, tinuturo na rin sa paaralan para ma feel nila na tama yung turo ng mga magulang at family nila at paniniwala nila." (It is nice when the religious teachings at home is being taught also at school so children will feel good about their beliefs and that their parents are teaching them right").

In a real sense, a Kindergarten inclusive curriculum guarantees for young learners to feel safe and would have a sense of belonging. Children and their parents would be able to participate in setting learning goals and took part in decisions that affect them. School staff had training, support, flexibility, and resources to nurture, encourage, and respond to the needs of all the learners. Thus, inclusive education values diversity and the unique contributions each learner brings to the classroom. It means different and diverse learners learning side by

side in the same classroom. In fact, the Open Society Foundations (2015) echoed those inclusive systems provide a better-quality education for all children and are instrumental in changing discriminatory attitudes. Schools which provided the context of a child's first relationship with the world outside their families could promote the development of social relationships and interactions. Respect and understanding grow when learners of diverse abilities and backgrounds play, socialize, and learn together.

8. It provides social awareness among Muslim parents and children.

Finally, Muslim parents noted that the CG provided social awareness among Muslim parents and children. As they shared their insights, they conferred that when Muslim communities have a solid background from the life and ways of Prophet Muhammad (Swt.) and other prophets in Islam, they could be inspired to follow their practices and do good deeds. Thus, teaching their kids about Prophet stories allow them to become socially aware of their environment, including the social challenges in the society, and be responsible in how they should interact considering the feelings of other people. Parent 10 narrated her views:

“Kapag tayo mga Muslim alam natin ung mga experiences, ways ng pamumuhay ni Propeta Muhammad at iba pang mga propeta sa Islam, malaking bagay yun kasin are remind tayo sa mga gawin atin. Ganun din yung mga anak natin, nagiging aware din sila na ganun pala ang mga sinaunang tao at nare realize nila nay ung mga tamang ginawa noon ng mga propeta ay dapat palasundin. Tsaka importante na man talaga kasi marunong sila makisalamuha sa kapwa nila, Muslim man o Kristiyano.” (When we as Muslims are aware of the experiences and ways of the life of Prophet Muhammad and other Prophets in Islam, we are reminded of the things that we do. In the same manner, our kids became aware of the people in the past generation, they realized that the

good deeds of the prophets were worth to be emulated. What really matters, was for our kids to learn how to interact and deal with other people whether Muslims or Christians.”)

Developing the core skills on social awareness is valuable for the social and emotional well-being of the young children. This development is most successful at young age through the intertwined of the regular school-based education and curriculum-aligned programs designed to supplement the learning of children through various activities and learning experiences.

As Life Skills Group (2018) would define social awareness, they emphasized that it is an aspect of emotional intelligence which encompasses key life skills such as empathy, compassion and understanding of relationships. A strong sense of social awareness means one can effectively use these skills to accurately assess situations and profile people because they are able to understand and empathize with others.

Thus, it is beneficial when our curriculum would develop social awareness among Kindergarten learners; as this would serve not only a key for emotional intelligence, but a foundation for human interactions. It is of paramount importance that such life skills are learned when children were young so that the overall opportunity for social, emotional and physical well-being are maximized.

The perceptions, impressions and insights of the trifocal data were taken consideration to the final development of the Kindergarten Madrasah Curriculum Model. Based from the result of the focus group

discussion, the newly crafted curriculum had obtained acceptability and suitability to the diverse needs of the Muslim learners and community.

IV. CONCLUSION

At the onset of the study, results revealed that the Asatidz may extend considerable effort to meet the standards as defined in the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers. As a result, such status creates an avalanche of performance among the young Muslim learners in

Kindergarten Madrasah across the seven domains of development.

The output of the study intends to address the current needs of the Asatidz in terms of curriculum and learning guide which could be of help in the implementation of the Kindergarten Madrasah education in the province as well as the Bangsamoro region as a whole. It primarily aims to provide detailed teaching-learning experiences in a Kindergarten Madrasah class highlighting the principles of ALIVE across the seven curricular domains. Each curricular theme is laid out in such a way that results of the study are used to support the learning needs of the Muslim young children through a holistic and play-based approach.

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