

# Teachers' Experiences in Implementing the Madrasah Education Program in Early Childhood Education

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the teachers' experiences in implementing the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) in early childhood education in La Union, focusing on their instructional practices, observed outcomes, challenges, and forms of support needed. A qualitative research design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences. The participants of this study were teachers implementing the Madrasah Education Program in various schools across La Union. A criterion-based sampling method was used to select the participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews guided by open-ended questions. The gathered data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework to identify recurring themes and patterns. The findings revealed that teachers implemented the MEP by integrating Islamic teachings and Arabic literacy through play-based and learner-centered approaches. The program fostered learners' confidence, moral values, and strong Muslim identity. However, challenges such as limited materials, lack of training, and scheduling difficulties hindered smooth implementation. The study highlights the need for continuous professional development, adequate instructional materials, and institutional support to strengthen the delivery of the Madrasah Education Program.

**Keywords:** challenges, implementation, early childhood education, madrasah education program, teachers' experiences

## INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most significant human resource development aspects because it involves cognitive, physical, emotional, social and spiritual development. Education has been credited with the acquisition of academic skills; in addition, it aids in preservation of cultures, which act as an intermediary in passing the knowledge and practices of a culture to students. This ensures that culture is sustained and strengthened for the future generation. Early childhood is the shaping period of an individual hence education is more valuable. Learning and development of a person takes place at a young age. During the developmental stages, the children should not be restricted to the intellectual abilities in order to internalize the values and beliefs. Children have to know their beliefs, values, and practices because they play a significant role in determining how they learn. The teachers play significant role during the formative years of a child. The teachers are dedicated not just to teach, but to touch the lives of various learners and make them more culturally responsive and responsible individual.

Madrasah education initiatives support SDG 4 by providing Muslim students, especially those from marginalized and vulnerable communities, with accessible, culturally relevant education. In order to promote moral and intellectual growth, they integrate religious instruction with formal education. Madrasahs continue to develop to guarantee fair access and high-quality education, promoting inclusive and lifelong learning for everyone, despite obstacles like resource constraints and balancing religious and secular demands (UNICEF, 2024).

In order to execute the Madrasah Education Program worldwide, teachers must adopt a curriculum that combines Islamic principles with formal academic courses while following to national education norms. Programs such as the Learning Assistance Programme in Islamic Schools (LAPIS) approved by UNESCO have helped it by

providing in-service teacher training to increase the ability of Madrasah teachers to embrace innovative, student-centered approaches that lead to better teaching practices (UNESCO, 2024).

For every student, it is necessary to be able to understand and appreciate their culture, beliefs and traditions. However, there were several factors that hinder the students in forming their moral values, cultural, and religious identity. Internationally and in the Philippines, Madrasah systems were adapting to incorporate early childhood development and formal curriculum but encounter challenges like teacher preparedness, shortage of resources, and policy support. In La Union and other non-majority Muslim places, further complications come from minority status, lack of community support, and sustaining educational quality.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Bangladesh Qawmi Madrasah system is a community-based Islamic education system, attempting to preserve traditional religious identity, but struggling with the modernization of their curricula to meet international standards of education (Momen, 2025). Similarly, A conflict has been observed in the modernized Islamic school system which are the Imam Hatip of Turkey and Insan Cendekia Islamic models of Indonesia, where balancing religious tradition and modernisation of Islamic schools is an ongoing challenge in modern Islamic education ( Sidik et al., 2024; Junaedi et al., 2023)

The Philippines has integrated Madrasah Education Program (MEP) into its education system to promote inclusivity for Muslim learners, blending Arabic language, Islamic values, and secular subjects through policies like DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2017, which includes an Early Childhood Care Development (ECCD) component through the ALIVE program (Department of Education, 2010). At the elementary level, public and private Madaris follow a Standard Curriculum from DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2004, updated by DO 40, s. 2011 into the Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum (REMC), aligning with national standards and easing student transfers between Madaris and public schools. MEP thrives in Muslim-majority areas like BARMM over 1,500 schools (Marasigan, 2019), Zamboanga Peninsula, Soccsksargen, and Davao (Mangadang, Ubayubay, & Comon, 2025).

Department of Education has increased inclusive offering such as Madrasah Education Program (MEP) and Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) to facilitate the inclusion of the Muslim learners even in the non-Muslim regions like La Union in the Ilocos Region (DepEd Regional Office 1, 2024). Such efforts, together with Indigenous Peoples Education Program in La Union, should help incorporate cultural and religious knowledge into the mainstream curriculum. Nevertheless, such difficulties as deficient teacher training and the deterioration of possessors of cultural knowledge exist (Ancheta and Casem, 2024). This study contributes to the thesis that although research on the Islamic values in education has focused on Muslim majority regions, there is a limited study about how Muslim teachers can incorporate the Islamic values in non-Muslim dominant contexts such as La Union (Philippines), as it is seen through the lives of teachers (Camral, 2025). There is need to fill this gap to enable more insight on how teachers deliver Arabic Language and Islamic Values education among young learners.

### Framework

The study was guided by the Sociocultural Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and the Teacher Efficacy Theory, allowing the researchers to examine how teachers in the Madrasah Education program work effectively to implement the program successfully in young Muslim learners.

The *Sociocultural Theory* of Vygotsky focuses on social interaction, culture and language in cognitive development through the use of such terms as scaffolding, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). The educators take learners beyond the individual abilities. This contextualizes the facilitation of early childhood classes by teachers in MEP to meet the needs of Muslim learners.

In addition, *Ecological Systems Theory* of Urie Bronfenbrenner describes several layers of systems, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem, that contribute to development. It determines the multifaceted environmental variables of teacher-student transmission in MEP. The theory also

emphasizes that child learning is based on systems that are interconnected. This is relevant in the context of the Madrasah Education Program to gain insights into the environment which learning takes place.

Furthermore, *Teacher efficacy Theory* has been defined by Albert Bandura (1977) as having belief in effective teaching to achieve positive learner outcomes. High-efficacy teachers find solutions in a tough manner. In MEP, they overcome language, resource, and curriculum obstacles using interventions, improving the confidence and motivation of the Muslim learners. This helps MEP to perform under difficulties.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This research was conducted using a qualitative study with a descriptive phenomenological method to understand teachers lived experiences in implementing the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) in early childhood in La Union. According to Creswell (2014), phenomenological research was to understand the common meaning of lived experiences among individuals about a phenomenon, emphasizing the participants own word and meaning. This approach is appropriate as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the complexity of specific context. The structure was aimed at recording MEP's natural, contextual realities, consistent with the study's objectives to aim profound insight into teachers' experiences in delivering the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education.

### Settings and Participants

The study was carried out in five public schools located in the province of La Union, which are implementing the Madrasah Education Program specifically on early childhood. There were eight (8) respondents from five (5) different schools in La Union participated in the study who are actively implementing the program. In selecting the respondents, the researchers utilized the criterion sampling as a non-probability sampling method. This method ensured that the chosen respondents had the attributes particularly for the study, such as (1) having experience in teaching the Madrasah Education Program, and (2) having classroom experience in teaching early childhood. In implementing these criteria, the researchers selected eight (8) respondents who could provide rich data regarding the program's implementation, challenges, and effectiveness.

### Instrument

The researchers conducted semi structured interviews to obtain detailed information on the implementation of the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) in early childhood classrooms within La Union by teachers. Before collecting data, the instrument was reviewed and validated by six school principals, ensuring the content of the instrument was valid and appropriate. Pilot testing was done to two participants who had the same qualifications with the actual respondents to determine whether the instrument is needed for adjustment.

### Data Analysis

In analyzing the collected data, the researchers employed thematic analysis to explain the outcome. Thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The six-steps process includes the following: 1.) Transcription, familiarization with the data, and selection of a quotation, 2.) selection of a keyword, 3.) coding, 4.) theming, 5.) conceptualization, 6.) the development of a conceptual model. With the help of thematic analysis, the collected data were summarized and evaluated by the researchers.

### Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, the researchers received the approval from the DMMMSU Research Ethics Committee. The researchers sent a letter to the respondents detailing the purpose, process, and benefits of the study. The researchers were professional during data collection, ensured that the participants felt at ease. All digital and printed data was placed in a safe and secured data storage. Subsequently, sharing of information was only done

on legitimate reasons and confidentiality was ensured by using pseudonyms and eliminating any identifiable information. To protect the rights of the participants and guarantee the integrity of the research, all the data were appropriately deleted and shredded after the study.

## RESULTS

There were three teaching strategies employed in the implementation of the Madrasah Education Program (MEP). Educators used the learner-centered approach and adjusted the instruction to the developmental needs and interests of learners with the help of play-based and interactive activities; one of the teachers responded, *“Teacher-centered to student-centered, to make it more interesting and oriented to their life experience”*. Teachers also utilized varied and contextualized material such as textbooks, modules, self-made materials, and the Quran to make some meaningful learning experiences as a teacher indicated, *“We used textbooks, modules, self-made materials, and even the Quran.”* In actual application, teachers incorporated the program in the everyday life of the learners including Arabic tracing, Quran recitation, memorizing hadith (prayer), school programs and Islamic arts and calligraphy, one participant mentioned, *“I involved the learners in Arabic tracing, writing, Quran recitation, memorizing hadith, school programs and Islamic arts and calligraphy.”*

Educators have shared three positive results of learners. The identity of the religion was strengthened and the learners were proud to be Muslim by following the Islamic traditions; one of the teachers clarified, *“they are now very proud to be Muslim, wear the hijab and know the do’s and don’ts of being a Muslim.”* Self-efficacy was enhanced because the learners were more active and confident in the classroom with one of the respondents shared that, *“Since they feel belong, they get confident.”* The positive behavioral and character development took place in the shape of discipline, honesty and respect; one of the teachers remarked, *“children accept polite greetings in their daily communication.”*

Although this had positive results, the respondents noted four challenges in implementing the program. Absence of facilities and learning resources slowed down teaching and one participant stated, *“The first problem is the lack of facilities and learning resources.”* The challenges that were encountered in the teaching of Arabic language were caused by lack of training and understanding of the language. The complexity of the curriculum was a problem to the early childhood learners where they needed to be adjusted to the developmental stages. Lastly, the participation was mitigated by low attendance and scheduling with one teacher saying, *“The amount of time available in classes, as well as optional scheduling, influenced the participation.”*

Educators outlined assistance in order to improve the implementation of MEP. Parental assistance was deemed necessary in enhancing attendance and participation where the participant pointed out that parent support is key because it is difficult to attract the attention of the Muslim parents. Professional growth and training was also requested to enhance the teaching skills and Arabic teaching, one of the respondents remarked that, *“it needs training on how to teach better.”* Integrating the program into the grading systems was proposed to legitimize the program and enhance participation of learners. Lastly, teachers emphasized on contextualized materials, including culturally relevant books, guides, and digital materials; one teacher commented, *“We should have more modern materials and teaching equipments like printers and laptops.”*

## DISCUSSION

The learner-centered approach, use of varied and contextualized materials, and practical implementation can be considered as constructivist and sociocultural theories, especially the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) created by Vygotsky, according to which scaffolding helps learners gradually attain Arabic literacy, Islamic values, and Quranic chanting (Vygotsky, 1978). Educators also used self-produced and multimedia resources, which aligns with the results presented by Ong and Ancheta (2024), who stated that it was teacher-created materials that would promote engagement and knowledge building. Similar to this, Flores et al. (2025) emphasize the fact that discovery learning and play-based approaches enhance the growth of skills, motivation, and engagement among early learners.

Increased self efficacy is an expression of the Bandura (1977) theory where learners gain confidence in mastery experiences. According to teachers, children became more active, happier, and confident, which is not only

supported by the Manzanero et al. (2024) study, but also by Flores et al. (2025) research, which concluded that discovery-based and differentiated instruction boost the motivation and engagement of Islamic learners. The results of the behavioral and character development, such as greater discipline, honesty, respect, and ethical awareness, correspond to the Islamic educational objectives and serve as examples of the microsystem interaction impact in the framework of Bronfenbrenner (Suprihatin, 2024; Rizqi and Setiawan, 2025). These results demonstrate the success of the program to support holistic development according to national and global practices of Islamic education (Sasmita, Fudhuli, and Zainuri, 2024; Ontok-Balah, 2023).

Despite the positive results of the Madrasah Education Program, teachers noticed that there were various barriers to the implementation process with the most preferable being the unavailability of facilities and teaching resources. In parallel, earlier research has also indicated that the lack of learning resources is a barrier to successful implementation of such programs as ALIVE (Pamposa, 2025; UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies, 2025). The also problematic issues were the difficulties of teaching Arabic because the quality of instruction was impaired due to a lack of training and professional growth (Islamudin, Mohammad, & Khandaken, 2025). Socioculturally, poor scaffolding limits development in the Zone of Proximal Development of the learners (Vygotsky, 1978). Complexity of the curriculum became another issue; despite standardised curricula intention to combine Islamic and national standards, they are usually too big and challenging the developmental abilities of young learners, so an adaptive approach by differentiated instruction is necessary (Sali, 2023; Manzanero et al., 2024). Lastly, the poor scheduling and attendance reflect mesosystem-level problems in the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner, as the school and ALIVE scheduling time do not coincide, which restricts the participation and engagement of the learners (Lamla, 2023; Sali and Marasigan, 2025).

The participation of parents in the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) is associated with the ecological theory according to which the family involvement directly affects the motivation and attendance of the learners (Calderon-Villarreal, 2025). Similar to this, continuous professional growth of teachers is a concept that portrays the concept of Teacher Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997) because the confidence and classroom performance of teachers are improved through mastery experiences and training (Pagalanan, 20k23). The fact that the educational institutions formally accept the program, in particular, by incorporating it into grades, adds credibility to it and encourages learners to become active (DepEd, 2017; Abdulmalik, 2024). Formal assessment can also be regarded as another factor proving the value of the program in the educational microsystem. Lastly, the focus on contextualized and culturally relevant materials shows the practical use of sociocultural theory, which involves the mediating process of learning by culturally situated tools and experiences (Maglantay, 2025; Pagalanan, 2023). Combined, the theoretical lenses can give a consistent viewpoint on how the program has affected both learners and teachers in linking empirical research to existing educational theory.

## CONCLUSIONS

**Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made:**

1. Implementing the Madrasah Education Program especially in early childhood education needs to be responsive to their age, needs, and interests. The cultural background of the children should also be taken into consideration by providing varied and contextualized materials for them. Lastly, the teachers should also apply the practices of Islamic education inside the classroom for better retention in early childhood education.
2. The Madrasah Education Program strengthened the religious identity of the early childhood learners by teaching them the practices, such as do's and don'ts of a Muslim. Learners gained self-efficacy, and with that, they became active in participating in various activities of the program and school. The program also enhances the behavior and character of early childhood. These positive outcomes in early childhood learners reflect the program's effectiveness.
3. These challenges indicate that the involvement of learners, curriculum development as well as resource provision play a major role in the success of program delivery. This is one of the reasons why schools and administrators must revisit curriculum requirements, offer language support, improve scheduling systems, and avail adequate learning materials. By covering these areas, the program implementation will become less problematic and the ability of the teachers to deliver quality instruction can be enhanced.
4. The findings show that to improve the process of the program implementation, teachers will need the support

of the institution, professional development, parental support, and contextualized materials. This implies that the success of the program requires collaboration, the continuous training, and adequate support. The sustainability of the program and its further development can be promoted by addressing these needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher makes the following recommendations based on the conclusions drawn and for the improvement of further studies.

1. For the teachers, they must receive continuous training for professional development. Workshops, seminars, mentoring program and peer collaboration must be included to strengthen their knowledge, and adapt more strategies that would help them teach young children.
2. For the program, learners must have continuous development in their religious identity, confidence, and moral values. This continuous growth helps them both academically and spiritually.
3. For the Department of Education, schools, and other local offices, they should ensure that teachers have enough facilities where they can conduct their lessons properly. Contextualized materials should also be given to support the teaching and learning process. They should also review and adjust the curriculum to suit the age and level of the students. And lastly, there must be multiple time slots, as learners may not have time conflicts when attending the ALIVE session.
4. For the parents, they should encourage their children to strengthen their religious identity by attending ALIVE sessions and actively participating in various activities of the program.
5. For the researchers, they must conduct more studies relevant to the Madrasah Education Program to continue improving the quality and effectiveness, especially in early childhood settings. For further research, they may assess the students' learning outcomes, moral behavior, and religious identity. With this, the Madrasah Education Program will continually to improve and give the best for young Muslim learners.

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