

ASSESSING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A SCHOOL-WIDE SECULAR AND ISLAMIC STUDIES PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY OF MADRASAH AL-MANARAH IN ISABELA CITY, BASILAN

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to assess the implementation of the school-wide secular and Islamic studies program of madrasah al-manarah in isabela city, basilan in a case study setting. A qualitative research design was used. Four (4) FGDs were conducted to gather the needed data. The first FGD was participated by three administrative personnel and two non-teaching personnel, the second FGD by ten selected teachers from different levels and class assignment: 1 kindergarten, 2 elementary, 3 high school, 2 qur- an teachers, 2 Islamic studies; the third FGD by ten selected students from different grade levels, 2 elementary, 4 junior high and 4 senior high, the 4th FGD by five selected parents. Guided by semi-structured open-ended questionnaire, narratives are drawn on the six (6) research problems of the study.

The madrasah, the last surviving deped - recognized Islamic institution in the city of isabela, offering integrated curriculum, fostered balance, respect, and holistic education, promoting tolerance, understanding, and continuous improvement. It adopted student-centered teaching approaches, a culturally sensitive environment and developed a comprehensive curriculum framework. Its administrators emphasized collaboration, adaptability, and inclusivity in curriculum development, teacher training, and parental involvement. Challenges included integration with deped curriculum, resource limitations, cultural inclusivity, and philosophical differences. Adaptations included continuous training, resource optimization, conflict resolution strategies, and respect for diversity. Conflict management strategies involved dialogue, transparency, and collaboration, addressing concerns while upholding Islamic values.

Keywords: integrated curriculum, Islamic studies, madrasah al-manarah, madrasah education, secular education.

I. INTRODUCTION

The literature on integrating secular and Islamic studies in educational settings reveals both challenges and opportunities in fostering holistic learning. Studies emphasize the importance of a balanced approach, where religious and secular knowledge are not seen as conflicting but rather as complementary. The integration of religious values with contemporary educational practices is crucial for developing critical thinking, global citizenship, and cultural awareness. In the case of madrasah al-manarah, the literature suggests that fostering collaboration among administrators, teachers, and stakeholders is key to successful implementation. Teachers' professional development, continuous adaptation of pedagogical strategies, and the creation of an inclusive curriculum are vital components identified in previous research. However, challenges such

as resource limitations, cultural sensitivity, and philosophical differences remain persistent in many similar educational contexts. Thus, ongoing support, evaluation, and conflict management strategies are necessary to address these issues effectively.

The primary problem addressed by this study is the assessment of how madrasah al-manarah in isabela city, basilan, implements its integrated curriculum of secular and Islamic studies. Despite its status as the last remaining deped-recognized Islamic institution in the city, the madrasah faces several challenges in integrating these two educational domains effectively. Issues such as limited resources, philosophical differences in curriculum design, and the need for cultural inclusivity pose significant barriers. This study seeks to explore these challenges, assess the effectiveness of the school's curriculum integration, and identify strategies for improvement, with the goal of fostering a more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and balanced educational environment that respects both secular and Islamic values.

The study employed a qualitative research design, using a case study approach to assess the implementation of the integrated secular and Islamic studies program at madrasah al-manarah. To gather comprehensive data, the researcher conducted four focus group discussions (FGDs) with different stakeholder groups, including administrative personnel, teachers, students, and parents. Each group was selected purposefully to provide diverse perspectives on the challenges and successes of the program.

- FGD 1: involved three administrative personnel and two non-teaching staff members.
- FGD 2: included ten selected teachers from various levels and specializations (kindergarten, elementary, high school, Qur'an, and Islamic studies).
- FGD 3: comprised ten students from different grade levels (elementary, junior high, and senior high).
- FGD 4: consisted of five parents, ensuring the inclusion of community insights into the curriculum's implementation.

Each FGD was guided by semi-structured, open-ended questionnaires, allowing participants to share their experiences, challenges, and suggestions freely. This approach enabled the researcher to explore the perceptions of different stakeholders regarding the curriculum's integration, resource allocation, teacher training, and the school's overall climate. The study aimed to draw narratives around six key research problems, focusing on the integration process, challenges, and strategies for improvement. This methodological approach facilitated an in-depth understanding of the contextual factors influencing the program's effectiveness and sustainability.

II. BODY OF ARTICLE

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping the worldview and intellectual development of students. In regions where religious and cultural practices are deeply embedded in daily life, such as basilan, integrating religious education with secular learning presents both challenges and opportunities. Madrasah al-manarah, located in isabela city, basilan, offers a unique case study of how an Islamic institution incorporates both secular and Islamic studies into its curriculum. This study aims to assess how well the institution has implemented an integrated school-wide program, combining these two domains of knowledge. The objective is to analyze the effectiveness of the school's approach, identify challenges, and propose recommendations for improving the integration process.

Problem statement

Madrasah al-manarah is the last remaining department of education (deped)-recognized Islamic school in isabela city, basilan, offering an integrated curriculum that blends secular and Islamic studies. While the school's efforts are commendable, the integration of secular and religious teachings is fraught with challenges. These challenges include limited resources, philosophical differences in curriculum design, the need for cultural inclusivity, and the effective training of teachers in interdisciplinary pedagogy. Furthermore, the school must balance traditional Islamic values with modern educational practices that emphasize critical thinking, global citizenship, and technological integration.

The key research problem of this study, therefore, is to assess how well madrasah al-manarah has implemented its integrated curriculum, focusing on its effectiveness in balancing secular and Islamic studies while addressing the barriers it faces in curriculum integration. The study also aims to explore strategies for improving this integration, ensuring that the program aligns with community values and prepares students for the complexities of a diverse and interconnected world.

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Research objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To assess the current state of implementation of the integrated secular and Islamic studies program at madrasah al-manarah.
2. To identify challenges faced by administrators, teachers, students, and parents in implementing this curriculum.
3. To propose strategies for improving the integration of secular and Islamic studies to create a more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and balanced educational environment.

Literature review

A review of existing literature on the integration of secular and Islamic studies reveals several key insights. Research on Islamic education systems highlights the importance of balancing religious teachings with contemporary academic subjects to foster a holistic education. According to al-farsi (2013), Islamic schools should not only focus on religious education but also on preparing students for global citizenship through critical thinking and engagement with the wider world. Similarly, educational scholars argue that integrating religious and secular education helps students develop both their spiritual and intellectual capacities, which is essential for navigating today's diverse and rapidly changing world (zainal et al., 2017).

However, integrating these two educational domains often presents challenges. As noted by hossain (2014), one of the primary barriers is the philosophical differences between religious and secular curricula. While secular education focuses on scientific reasoning and independent thought, Islamic education emphasizes faith, moral guidance, and obedience to religious principles. In contexts like madrasah al-manarah, where both systems are integrated, the tension between these educational philosophies can complicate curriculum development and teaching practices.

Another significant challenge highlighted in the literature is the lack of resources, particularly in Islamic schools in rural or underfunded areas. According to sadiq and sadiq (2016), many Islamic schools struggle to provide adequate teaching materials, technology, and professional development opportunities for teachers, all of which are crucial for successfully integrating secular and religious education. Madrasah al-manarah is no exception, and the study seeks to explore how the school navigates these resource limitations.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach to assess the implementation of the integrated secular and Islamic studies program at madrasah al-manarah. The case study method was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the specific context of the school and the experiences of different stakeholders. The study aims to understand the challenges faced by madrasah al-manarah in integrating secular and Islamic studies, as well as the strategies that have been developed to overcome these challenges.

IV. DATA COLLECTION

Data for this research were gathered through focus group discussions (FGDs) involving key stakeholders of the school. Four FGDs were conducted, with each group representing a different set of perspectives:

1. First FGD: three administrative personnel and two non-teaching staff members participated in this session. This group provided insights into the broader institutional strategies for curriculum development, teacher training, and resource management.
2. Second FGD: ten selected teachers from various levels (kindergarten, elementary, high school) and subjects (Islamic studies, Qur'an, and secular subjects) participated in this session. The purpose of this FGD was to gather information on the teachers' experiences in implementing the integrated curriculum, including the challenges they face in blending religious and secular teaching.
3. Third FGD: ten students from different grade levels (elementary, junior high, and senior high) were selected for this FGD. The students were asked to share their experiences with the integrated curriculum, including their perceptions of its effectiveness and any difficulties they encountered.

4. Fourth FGD: five parents were selected for the final FGD to provide their perspectives on the curriculum integration and their involvement in the process. Parent involvement is seen as a key component of the educational success of madrasah al-manarah.

Each FGD was guided by a semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire, allowing participants to discuss their views and experiences in detail. The discussions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that allows researchers to identify key themes and patterns in the data.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from the FGDs were analyzed by identifying recurring themes related to the six key research questions. These themes were categorized into broader themes such as:

- Challenges in curriculum integration: this theme covered the obstacles faced by the school in blending Islamic and secular studies, such as philosophical differences, lack of resources, and resistance to change.
- Pedagogical strategies: the analysis identified the various teaching strategies employed by teachers to integrate secular and Islamic studies, such as inquiry-based learning, comparative analysis, and the use of technology.
- Stakeholder engagement: this theme explored the involvement of teachers, parents, and students in the curriculum development process and how their perspectives influenced the implementation of the program.
- Institutional support: the analysis focused on the role of school administrators in providing resources, professional development, and ongoing support to teachers and students.

Proposed solutions to the identified problems

Based on the findings from the FGDs, several solutions were proposed to address the challenges faced by madrasah al-manarah in implementing its integrated curriculum.

1. Continuous professional development: one of the key challenges identified in the study was the lack of sufficient training for teachers in interdisciplinary pedagogy. To address this, the study recommends providing ongoing professional development opportunities that focus on effective strategies for integrating secular and Islamic studies. This could include workshops, seminars, and collaborative learning communities where teachers can share best practices and resources.
2. Enhanced stakeholder engagement: the study found that while teachers and administrators were engaged in curriculum development, there was a need for greater involvement of parents, community members, and religious leaders in the process. Regular communication, feedback mechanisms, and involvement in decision-making processes would ensure that the curriculum aligns with community values and needs.
3. Resource allocation and optimization: madrasah al-manarah faces significant resource constraints, which hinder the effective implementation of its integrated curriculum. The study suggests that the school explore partnerships with local educational institutions, publishers, and community organizations to access additional resources and leverage existing ones more effectively. Additionally, the school could optimize its use of available resources by incorporating low-cost technologies and digital tools into teaching practices.
4. Cultural sensitivity training: given the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students, the study recommends offering cultural sensitivity training for all stakeholders. This training would promote understanding, respect, and inclusivity within the learning environment, and help address biases and stereotypes that may arise in the classroom.
5. Regular assessment and evaluation: to ensure that the integrated curriculum is effectively meeting the needs of students, the study recommends implementing a comprehensive assessment and evaluation system. This system would include both formative and summative assessments, as well as qualitative methods such as student interviews and focus groups, to gather feedback on the curriculum's impact.
6. Conflict resolution mechanisms: the study found that philosophical differences between secular and Islamic education often led to conflicts among stakeholders. To address this, the study proposes the establishment of clear conflict resolution mechanisms, including open dialogue, transparency, and collaboration. These mechanisms would allow for the resolution of conflicts while upholding Islamic values of tolerance, respect, and understanding.

VI. CONCLUSION

The research on madrasah al-manarah's implementation of its integrated secular and Islamic studies program has provided valuable insights into the challenges and successes of blending these two domains of knowledge. Through collaboration, adaptability, and inclusivity, the school has made significant strides in developing a curriculum that promotes interdisciplinary learning and cultural sensitivity. However, challenges related to resource limitations, philosophical differences, and the need for professional development remain.

By addressing these challenges through the proposed solutions—such as continuous professional development, enhanced stakeholder engagement, resource optimization, and conflict resolution—the school can further enhance its efforts to create a more cohesive and inclusive learning environment. Ultimately, the integration of secular and Islamic studies at madrasah al-manarah represents an important step toward fostering a more balanced, empathetic, and globally aware generation of students, who are equipped to navigate both the religious and secular aspects of their lives.

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