

Challenges and Opportunities of Madrasah Graduates in the New Autonomous Region in the Philippines

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Abstract

Despite a long history of colonization and marginalization, madrasah education has continued to flourish in the Bangsamoro region. Graduates have been deprived of formal higher education, and the limited job opportunities widened the socio-economic gap and educational inequity. As new autonomy emerges, this study aims to examine the impact of the reform on government policy toward madrasah education, as well as the challenges and opportunities for graduates. The study involves four participants from a traditional madrasah. Investigating their lived experiences through narratives and semi-structured interviews captures their perspectives about previous and current programs. Thematic analysis found that the new government reform positively impacted both the madrasah system and graduates. Madrasah education was systematized through permits to operate and government recognition; graduates were provided opportunities through the ISAL program and career development. It also improves the economic status of madrasah graduates and widens employment opportunities. Although traditional madrasahs face challenges in providing quality education, obtaining government recognition, government reforms have changed perceptions of their capacity to produce graduates who contribute to society. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate current program policies governing the recognition of madrasahs to access government funds.

Keywords: barmm, employment opportunities, educational reform, islamic education, graduate employability

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INTRODUCTION

Muslim Filipinos are known for their historical resistance to colonialism, firmly against the colonial and post-colonial education system. This marked them as committed to preserving Islamic education, which was identified as a crucial marker of their identity during the Spanish and American governments' rule. Their resistance is due to fear of deculturalization and policies implemented that marginalized Muslim communities' identity in the Catholic state. Madrasah education has been key in preserving Islamic identity in the Philippines since pre-Hispanic times. Despite efforts to unify education, colonial and post-colonial policies often marginalized Muslims, exacerbating socio-political and ethnoreligious conflicts (Putra 2023). This system is

an early form of Islamic education, designed for a community that emphasizes teaching and learning the Quran (Samid 2022). Therefore, there is a need for effective reform to integrate religious subjects towards an integrated approach that balances spiritual and intellectual development (Sammy 2026). Examples include Malaysia's integrated curricula and Indonesia's vocational training alongside religious studies. These reforms emphasize critical thinking, problem-solving, and relevance to the job market (Hashim and Jemali 2017).

Education is crucial for resolving the conflict in the Bangsamoro region and integrating Muslim communities into the broader national framework. The initiative should strengthen madrasah education that aligns with efforts to foster peace and unity in the Philippines (Rido, Halimah, and Mubarok 2022). Madrasah education emphasizes education as a divine obligation, where both secular and religious knowledge are valued, as strongly emphasized in the Quran and the practices and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who advocated education (Sulaiman 2016). Madrasah education in the Philippines is a traditional community-driven initiative deeply embedded in Bangsamoro society. Therefore, financial and non-financial community participation is crucial in supporting madrasah education. Parental involvement and local stakeholders' participation have supported and strengthened the educational system, making it more relevant to the community's needs. Traditional madrasahs operate independently, often managed by families or private organizations that implement curricula influenced by Arab countries and are not accredited or recognized by the national education system. However, reliance on donations and voluntary contributions limits the financial stability of traditional madrasahs (Institute for Autonomy and Governance 2019). Traditional madrasahs operate on a weekend schedule, providing Islamic religious education for students involved in a dual education system, but primarily Muslim, with a strong preference for Islamic knowledge over secular knowledge (Rido, Halimah, and Mubarok 2022).

Education plays a vital role as a potential bridge to fostering understanding and reducing prejudice. Hence, there is a persistent bias against Muslim Filipinos, and these attitudes affect educational equity (Gomez et al. 2019). This is evident in the regional crisis in education delivery, with only 1 out of 10 students from public schools completing junior high school on time. The dropout rates are incredibly high, leaving 45% of its 16-30-year-old population as out-of-school youth and adults (OSYA), doubling the national average (World Bank 2019). To address the issue, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) offers a chance to return to the educational path. This government program provides basic literacy and Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) to help learners earn certificates equivalent to formal education diplomas.

Public formal education systems in the region have historically been indifferent or hostile to Islamic identity, forcing Muslim families to balance secular and Islamic education (Milligan

2008). This leads to the implementation of the Madrasah Education Program (MEP). MEP is designed to bridge gaps in access to formal education for Muslim students, promoting equity and fostering an inclusive learning environment that respects cultural and religious diversity (Abubakar, Canda, and Rodriguez 2024). It promotes cultural preservation and understanding, encourages respect for diversity in schools and communities, and equips students with international opportunities. Furthermore, it fosters inclusivity and awareness of Islamic values in predominantly catholic schools. Significantly, it contributes to students' holistic development and integration into society, prepares them for diverse societal roles, and fosters global citizenship and leadership skills that align with contemporary global challenges (Abubakar, Canda, and Rodriguez 2024).

Traditional madrasahs were established as private, community-funded Islamic schools that focused on providing Islamic knowledge for Moro children (Institute for Autonomy and Governance 2019). This is why many madrasahs focus primarily on religious instruction, lacking integration with secular subjects such as STEM. Their resistance to modernization stems from fear of diluting religious education, even though reforms and the incorporation of this field have prepared students for broader opportunities.(Rozi and Siregar 2024) Education in madrasah should integrate religious and worldly knowledge to produce balanced individuals who can serve as caliphs of God and contribute to society (Lubis 2015). Madrasah stakeholders support integrating secular and religious curricula and government subsidies to make madrasah education more inclusive and competitive.

Furthermore, the curriculum integrates Islamic values across all subjects, emphasizes co-curricular activities to develop holistic learners, and promotes Islamization in the education system. The concept of Islamization seeks to balance revealed and acquired knowledge, making education more relevant and meaningful for Muslim communities (Milligan 2020). Islamization is a complex and evolving process that requires a balance between religious identity and practical skills for global competitiveness. It includes inculcating Islamic subjects into public schools' curricula and modernizing madrasahs' curricula and systems to align with national and global standards. Enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of madrasah education in the region, integrating Islamic studies with modern subjects, improving teacher training, and upgrading facilities are essential (Mohammad et al. 2018).

The imposed curriculum focuses heavily on producing Islamic knowledge, leading graduates to typically be employed as Islamic teachers or in religious roles, but with limited career opportunities in other fields (Institute for Autonomy and Governance 2019). Despite decades of efforts, significant gaps exist, particularly in aligning madrasah education with national standards—the issue of marginalizing Muslim learners and alienating them from their

cultural foundations and religious identity. Moreover, limited studies exist on how MEP contributes to reducing extremism and fostering higher education/employment pathways for madrasah graduates (Arriola and Sattar 2020). Therefore, there is a need to evaluate MEP's long-term impact on educational equity and employment. In 2019, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) ended its governance and was replaced by the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The new government redesigned the MEP and replaced it with a more inclusive integration of Islamic education (Sammy 2026). As the new autonomy took over the previous administration, the new system opened, and opportunities for madrasah graduates widened, while challenges persisted. This study aims to fill gaps in the research literature as the new government reshapes the madrasah system.

The national and regional governments have been working collaboratively to address the educational needs of Muslim communities in the autonomous region. Several efforts have been made to ensure that madrasah education aligns with the demands of the globalizing world and community development. However, studies have proven that these efforts face significant challenges. As the new autonomy emerged, a new education code was proposed to reshape the madrasah education system. With that, this study will determine the challenges madrasah graduates face in accessing higher education and job opportunities under the new government, as well as the opportunities and support mechanisms introduced by the BARMM for madrasah graduates.

Aligning with the research questions, the study aims to contribute significantly to policymakers by addressing gaps in the recognition and integration of madrasah education into the mainstream education system, thereby fostering educational equity and societal development. Highlighting the barriers and opportunities that madrasah institutions and graduates face, this research provides actionable insights to inform policies that promote inclusivity and access to higher education and employment. Ultimately, the study is a roadmap for creating a more equitable and sustainable educational landscape. Moreover, the study focuses on a specific region, which, while providing depth, limits generalizability. Thus, the study provides significant insights into the Bangsamoro's efforts to advance Islamic education in the region.

This study is anchored in the Capability Approach and Critical Pedagogy, which offer complementary lenses for examining the complex realities of traditional madrasah education in the Bangsamoro Region. The capability approach serves as a robust framework for understanding the challenges faced by traditional madrasah graduates. Meanwhile, critical pedagogy provides a transformative lens to analyze the role of education in challenging social inequalities and empowering marginalized groups. These theories are instrumental in understanding the intersection of educational access, recognition, empowerment, and social

justice, especially as the region transitions.

RESEARCH METHOD

Aligning the research design with the research problems and purpose is crucial (Creswell 2012). Since this is a qualitative study, the design focuses on exploring and understanding participants lived experiences. Qualitative data collection involves immersion in the research setting. Specifically, a phenomenological case study design is a comprehensive research strategy for in-depth analysis of a unit within its natural setting. It is suitable for exploring, describing, or explaining phenomena (Priya 2021). Given the purpose of this study, the qualitative approach is appropriate, as it is designed to yield in-depth data through interviews and document analysis. Specifically, a phenomenological case study design is chosen to capture the essence of participants' experiences while accounting for contextual factors drawn from policy documents.

This study employs purposeful sampling for a qualitative design to select participants who can provide rich, relevant data (Leavy 2017). Participants in this study are selected to best address the research questions and to represent typical, extreme, or contrasting examples. Accessibility and data richness are key considerations (Yin 2018). The criteria for selecting participants were carefully designed to accommodate the diverse backgrounds of respondents, who offer different perspectives and lived experiences. This diversity allows triangulation of perspectives: from student experience, graduate outcomes, and policy implementation. Participants are purposely chosen to provide vast information about the study. Respondents are as follows

Table 1. Respondents profile

Respondent Acronym	Gender	Educational background		Status
		Secular	Madrasah	
R1	M	College Graduate	MA degree graduate	Employed (CoS) ISAL Division office
R2	M	High School Graduate	MA (Candidate for Graduation)	ISAL Teacher (CoS)
R3	M	College Level	MA student	Seeking a government Job, traditional madrasah teacher
R4	M	Elementary Level	Undergraduate Student	Student at Mu'tah University, Jordan

These respondents offer a wide range of knowledge and serve as knowledgeable others regarding the study's purpose. Furthermore, this study ensures ethical considerations by obtaining informed consent for reflexivity and the representation of participants. This protects participant confidentiality and ensures fairness in data interpretation (Gay, Mills, and Airasian 2012; Leavy 2017).

Diverse data collection methods in qualitative research are vital, including interviews, observation, Focus Group discussions, and document analysis (Creswell 2012). A phenomenological case study emphasizes the use of multiple data sources to achieve triangulation, thereby enhancing validity and reliability (Priya 2021). This leads the study to rely on multiple data sources, including interviews with madrasah graduates with diverse roles and experiences and documents, to ensure data triangulation and robust findings (Yin 2018). The document to be analyzed includes archival journals, articles, reports, educational records, memoranda, and policy guidelines, as well as social media posts and updates, to provide historical and contextual insights (Gay, Mills, and Airasian 2012; Creswell and Creswell 2017). Combining these methods enhances understanding of complex educational phenomena (Mertler 2018). To ensure data collected is recalled, audio and video recording interviews for transcription are provided to ensure accurate data capture. Due to the distance, the interview was conducted online via Zoom, as respondents were from different locations while the researcher was based in Indonesia.

The study employs thematic analysis, which involves coding and identifying patterns that align with the research questions (Leavy 2017). This process builds an understanding of participant perspectives and the broader context (Creswell and Creswell 2017). Interview results from diverse respondents are compared to document analysis to assess the alignment between policy intentions and lived experiences. This includes data source triangulation and compares data across participants. Meanwhile, methodological triangulation combines interviews and document analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Positive Impacts of BARMM Reforms on Madrasah Education

Establishing the MEP serves as a stepping stone to recognizing the importance of Muslim education by providing ALIVE and Integrated madrasahs (Abubakar, Canda, and Rodriguez 2024). The ALIVE (Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education) program aims to mainstream Islamic education by integrating it into public schools (Sali and Marasigan 2020). Respondents expressed overwhelming appreciation for BARMM's initiatives, which have significantly improved the status and opportunities for madrasah graduates. Programs such as ISAL (Islamic Studies and Arabic Language) teaching, which allows traditional madrasah graduates to teach in public schools and receive government compensation of 16,200 a month; PTO subsidies that allocate funds to traditional madrasahs; and Project Tabang, which assists low-income families, were frequently mentioned as transformative. For instance:

"The BARMM government has brought huge improvements to madrasah education. Programs like ISAL and subsidies have created more opportunities for us, especially for madrasah graduates."R3

"The Barmm government has strong support for developing madrasah education in our region. One relevant project is the establishment of a public madrasah." R2

Including ISAL teachers in public schools was particularly impactful, providing madrasah graduates with stable employment and recognition within the broader education system. The respondents unanimously acknowledged the significant contributions of the BARMM reforms in enhancing the recognition and opportunities for madrasah graduates. Programs like ISAL, PTO, and Project Tabang were seen as transformative:

"At the time of ARMM, only a few admired madrasah education due to stereotyping. Now, Asatidz are able to teach in public secular schools because they are acknowledged by the government." R3

These reforms reflect efforts to empower marginalized communities and integrate them into the broader education system. Integrating Islamic education into the mainstream and promoting the government's equity and inclusion programs reflect a shift toward a more diverse, inclusive education (Sammy 2026). The expanding opportunities for marginalized groups are evident in providing and uplifting the economic status-enhancing social value of madrasah education. The reforms made by the new government foster a sense of pride and identity among graduates. This integration enables them to obtain government accreditation and receive financial assistance and funding (Samid 2022). Despite challenges, Islamization efforts aim to address historical marginalization and foster equity for Muslim learners in Mindanao (Milligan 2008).

The ISAL program has profoundly impacted teachers and students. In terms of economic benefit, ISAL teachers now earn better salaries, allowing them to improve their living standards, as respondents noted:

"Now, the ISAL has a 16,200 salary a month and is in a contract of service." R1

"ISAL teacher; we can now teach and have a regular salary from the government." R2

It also promoted cultural integration, with students and teachers practicing Islamic teachings, such as wearing veils and observing prayer times, which have become more visible in public schools. It further influences non-muslim teachers as noted:

"Some of them, due to the influence of the program, are even wearing their veil in respect to the muslim students and teachers." R1

Opportunities to develop professionally in teaching have also broadened for Asatidz. Participation in regular seminars and training programs has enhanced ISAL teachers' teaching capabilities.

"Now, ISAL teachers have at least twice a year seminar to participate in to improve their teaching skills", R1

"Now, because of the seminar training that the madrasah teacher can join, the teaching approach and style have at least changed and improved." R2

These changes illustrate the transformative potential of integrating Islamic education into public systems. The integration shapes learners' educational experience, bringing holistic development (Kulidtod 2017) and intellectual, spiritual, and professional personalities (Hashim and Jemali 2017). The ISAL program represents a significant step toward integrating Islamic

education into public schools. The program bridges gaps between secular and Islamic educational systems by elevating the status of madrasah graduates and fostering respect for Islamic practices (Sammy 2026). This is similar to MEP's aspiration to provide students with high-quality education in Arabic and Islamic principles, thereby helping them close gaps in both their religious and secular studies and expand their job prospects (Kawangit et al. 2015).

Opportunities and Career Development for Madrasah Graduates

Respondents highlighted improved career opportunities for madrasah graduates under BARMM's programs. The government has introduced positions such as community research team roles and additional teaching roles in madrasahs. The new government provides job opportunities for traditional madrasah graduates as integrated teachers in public schools. The integration of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language opens opportunities for them to teach in public schools. These teachers are contractual and known as ISAL teachers. This is according to the testimony of respondents, as they stated:

“They hired madrasah graduates doing research about the problems in their community...They can have at least 10,000 a month,” R2.

“New job opportunities were announced, community research, I applied for the job, and I am waiting for the result of our application.” R3.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Religious Affairs tries to provide community researchers to provide jobs for unemployed madrasah graduates. This program aims to collect community problems monitored and will be monitored by the Bangsamoro Darul Ifta (BDI) office.

There is also expanded access to education for madrasah learners. The Values Transformation Training (VTT) Program under TESDA and the ALS program serve as a bridge for madrasah students to pursue secular education.:

“Programs like TESDA and ALS now offer pathways for madrasah graduates to gain skills and certifications”, R2

The new government's recognition also brought international recognition. This further widens students' access to international education. Several countries are directly cooperating with the Directorate General for Madaris Education (DGME) under the MBHTE to provide international scholarships, as shown on the Directorate Office's page. This is further supported by the current student studying in Jordan, who said he is benefiting from this opportunity.

“Madrasah graduates can now pursue higher education abroad, leveraging their Islamic credentials” R4

Compared with previous initiatives, madrasah graduates are marginalized from accessing employment as traditional madrasah teachers or in religious programs due to limited economic support (Milligan 2020; Hefner 2008). Therefore, the ALS program supports individuals in their pathway back to education. This initiative focuses on basic literacy and provides certificates, allowing learners to earn credentials comparable to formal education diplomas (World Bank

2019). These initiatives reflect a shift toward greater inclusivity and professionalization for madrasah graduates. The advantage of the BARMM government's programs in expanding career pathways for madrasah graduates exemplifies the emphasis on enabling individuals to achieve their full potential. It provides students with opportunities to learn Islamic values and Arabic, while addressing issues of religious and cultural sensitivity (Kawangit et al. 2015; Sali and Marasigan 2020; Abubakar, Canda, and Rodriguez 2024). However, the limited recognition of madrasah qualifications in the broader Philippine job market highlights ongoing disparities that must be addressed.

Employment Challenges for Madrasah Graduates

The lack of government recognition of traditional Madrasahs limits opportunities for their graduates in higher education and employment. Poor educational infrastructure due to dependence on community funding or political support, often temporary and inconsistent, and a lack of qualified teachers, hinders the effectiveness of madrasah education quality (Mohammad et al. 2018). This limits students' learning experience and educational outcomes, hindering better career opportunities (Solaiman 2021). The inconsistent and non-standardized curricula limit the scope of learning to religious studies, impacting employability, and perceptions of radicalism further hinder integration and development (Institute for Autonomy and Governance 2019). Madrasah education often emphasizes rote learning and religious studies, which limits innovation and critical thinking—essential skills for modern economies (Kuran 2018).

While respondents acknowledged the increased employment opportunities under BARMM, challenges remain, particularly for those unable to secure positions in programs like ISAL, one respondent shared:

“I applied for ISAL multiple times but was not accepted. It seems it was not my destiny. Now I remain in traditional madrasah teaching with a low salary.” R3

Respondents also noted the limited applicability of madrasah education in private sectors and non-religious institutions:

“So far, aside from religious institutions or government programs, we cannot apply for a job in private companies.” R3

These challenges highlight the need to diversify career pathways further for madrasah graduates. The government's programs expand to recognize and utilize their skills by providing community research initiatives or vocational training that serve as bridges to build their knowledge and enhance their employability and integration across sectors. As madrasahs lack national accreditation, their students are prevented from pursuing higher education or accessing formal employment. Their opposition to modern subjects in the curriculum and their focus on religious subjects further contributes to their academic future and to the hindrance to the job market (Institute for Autonomy and Governance 2019). The strict admission policies and standardized tests make it difficult for students to pursue higher education (Mohammad et al.

2018).

BARMM's reforms, such as subsidies, community research, and ISAL, equip madrasah graduates with new capabilities, enabling them to pursue meaningful careers and contribute to society. Through the lens of the Critical Pedagogy framework, the reforms highlight the role of education in empowering marginalized communities. The inclusion of modern skills, such as technology-based training and improved curricula, in madrasahs reflects efforts to transform traditional systems into more inclusive and empowering educational environments (Kawangit et al. 2015).

Challenges Faced by Traditional Madrasahs

Despite progress, respondents identified persistent challenges, particularly in traditional madrasahs. These institutions face sustainability issues, including financial constraints, enrolment fluctuations, inadequate educational resources, and socio-cultural factors, while financial struggles remain the most significant obstacle, affecting teacher salaries, facilities, and curriculum delivery. Most of these madrasahs are self-sustained, with limited to no government support (Solaiman 2021). According to the Policy Guidelines, substantial compliance with the requirements is important to secure and renew PTO for traditional and private madrasahs issued by the DGME office in 2023. The list of documentary requirements and application processes is written in Annex H. Due to the imposed regulations, traditional madrasah faced challenges in:

Administrative Barriers:

“Traditional madrasahs struggle to secure PTO due to complex requirements and lack of guidance.” R1

Communication Issues:

“Many administrators face difficulty understanding memos written in English.” R3

Recognition Challenges:

“In my knowledge, the reason why the secular schools reject the traditional madrasah graduates to their institution is that they do not have a Learners Reference Number (LRN) to serve as the identity of the students.” R1

The lack of standardized curricula impedes the recognition of traditional madrasah education within the mainstream education system. Without government recognition and accreditation, madrasahs are excluded from public funding and face challenges aligning with mainstream educational systems.

“Graduates of traditional madrasahs are not recognized by secular schools, limiting their opportunities for higher education and employment.” R2

The secular state's education system limits government support for Islamic institutions (Mohammad et al. 2018). Many madrasahs remain unintegrated due to administrative delays, lack of government support, and resistance from traditional madrasah operators. Some see integration as a form of assimilation that compromises Islamic identity and further complicates implementation. Additionally, Islamic educators face barriers to gaining official recognition for their qualifications (Gamon and Tagoranao 2022).

These challenges hinder the full integration and acceptance of traditional madrasah graduates in mainstream educational and professional settings. The repetition of topics and lack of curriculum standardization align with broader findings in the literature, as highlighted by the IAG (Institute for Autonomy and Governance 2019). Therefore, it underscores the need for structured, progressive curricula in traditional madrasah systems. The lack of integrated skills and diverse general knowledge further contributes to economic disparities by limiting students' ability to realize their potential. Despite advancements, the barriers faced by traditional madrasahs underscore the need for further intervention. These challenges reflect systemic inequities that marginalize traditional madrasah communities. Therefore, there is a need to simplify administrative processes and ensure administrators' accessibility.

Curriculum and Instructional Gaps in Traditional Madrasahs

Evaluating the program's implementation, there is insufficient instructional aides, including textbooks and digital tools, with limited qualified teachers.(Harad and Arriola 2022) There is also a lack of professional training and development opportunities, and of permanent infrastructure for class sessions (Gamon and Tagoranao 2022). The lack of standardized, modern curricula in traditional madrasahs emerged as a recurring concern. Madrasahs' curricula are strongly influenced by other countries, particularly those sponsored by organizations not accredited by the national government (Samid 2022). Furthermore, the firm's reliance on providing Islamic knowledge to preserve Islamic identity affects the implemented curriculum (Institute for Autonomy and Governance 2019). Unstructured curricula lead to poor management and the dissemination of knowledge to learners. Respondents noted repetitive topics, inadequate coverage of subjects, and limited incorporation of secular knowledge. One respondent shared:

“In one subject, from grades 10 to 12, we almost repeated the same content and lessons. There is also a lack of access to learning materials like libraries.” R4

“Lessons often repeat across levels, leading to insufficient academic progression.” R3

The absence of practical skills training, such as computer literacy, was another key issue, as emphasized by the respondents in their statements:

“It is advantageous for a student to have a strong foundation in mathematics and science.” R4

“There is a need for revision of the curriculum to include science and skills, like computer literacy”, R2

“Modern skills like computer literacy and science should be incorporated into the curriculum.” R3

“Learning how to use computers, laptops, and even printing is important. Unfortunately, I never experienced it in my school days in the madrasah.” R4

Respondents strongly emphasize that their admiration for learning this during their madrasah education was strong. However, their madrasah could not provide it. These gaps align with findings from the literature on the need for holistic education in traditional madrasahs. Including technology and other learning areas prepares learners for a more diverse society and provides holistic development (Abubakar, Canda, and Rodriguez 2024; Rozi and Siregar 2024). Furthermore, this aligns with the principles of Critical Pedagogy, which emphasize the role of

education in equipping learners with the tools to navigate and transform their realities. Critical Pedagogy underscores the importance of empowering students through relevant and inclusive curricula. Addressing these gaps would require integrating secular subjects like science, mathematics, and technology into madrasah education, enabling graduates to navigate modern challenges while maintaining their Islamic identity. Modernization should focus on integrating critical thinking, STEM subjects, and technical skills into madrasah curricula (Kuran 2018).

The repetition of lessons across grade levels results from a lack of curriculum standardization, which aligns with broader findings in the literature. It emphasizes the need for structured, progressive curricula in traditional madrasah systems. A madrasah is needed to improve the quality of education by providing a standardized, skills-based curriculum. The lack of a standardized curriculum in traditional madrasahs underscores the need for reform. It is vital to equip students for contemporary education and employment demands by incorporating modern skills, such as technology and mathematics, into their learning.(Rozi and Siregar 2024) This integration aligns with providing diverse knowledge while acknowledging students' limitations in fully realizing their potential. Moreover, professional development for teachers can ensure effective curriculum delivery and align teaching practices with national and international standards.

Summary of key findings

The thematic analysis provides clear findings that the transition and reform of the new autonomous regions deliver a positive impact on the development of madrasah education in the region. This provides new opportunities and career development for madrasah graduates who have been denied employment, thereby addressing the long-standing employment challenges they face. It also provides gateways for madrasahs to access government funds. However, the madrasahs are still struggling to comply due to administrative barriers, communication skills, and recognition challenges. The regulation for madrasah recognition further reveals the problem of traditional madrasahs in providing a standardized curriculum, resulting in curriculum and institutional gaps. Despite new programs, madrasah graduates still have difficulty accessing a wide range of job opportunities due to their educational backgrounds, limited skills, and the government's limited program offerings.

CONCLUSION

The result shows that although madrasah education in BARMM faces significant challenges, including economic barriers and curriculum gaps, the newly established government has brought transformative changes and reforms. Madrasahs are now seen not just as hubs of

religious knowledge but also as investments for future careers. The efforts have significantly improved the state of madrasah education and the quality of graduates. The implementation of the ISAL program in secular public schools offers opportunities to cultivate knowledge and skills, contribute to society, and bridge the economic gap. This study underscores the importance of sustained government support and innovative reforms to ensure the long-term success of madrasah graduates in a globalizing world. Despite efforts, traditional madrasahs continue to struggle with curriculum gaps, administrative barriers, and limited resources. Collaborative efforts by the government to provide support, stakeholder collaboration, and a commitment to integrating modern skills and standardized curricula are key to addressing these issues in madrasah education.

Therefore, this study also calls for policymakers to review policies to streamline administrative requirements and provide multilingual guidance for traditional madrasah administrators. Develop a comprehensive curriculum that includes modern skills such as computer literacy, science, and mathematics. Offer seminars and workshops to equip madrasah teachers with effective teaching strategies and curriculum delivery methods. Moreover, the government can examine Indonesia's madrasah system to reform its policies. Programs such as the Joint Madrasah Community's work-oriented education program address the rising unemployment among madrasah graduates (Reflianto et al. 2018). This effort provides practical skills training in public speaking and calligraphy in collaboration between madrasahs, local government, and industries. However, the study deliberately excludes specific types of madrasahs or regions outside BARMM. This ensures a focused, context-specific exploration of the issues pertinent to this area and its stakeholders.

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