

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST: ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN THE MIDST OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BENZAR A. SABANG

Teacher I, Manaulanan Elementary School, Manaulanan, Pikit Cotabato, Philippines

ABSTRACT

The madrasah has been an important educational institution for Muslim in providing young children with religious instructions. It has been responsible for transmitting Islamic knowledge, value and culture. This qualitative study employing phenomenology aimed to determine the survival of the fittest: Islamic schools in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic in the municipality of Kabacan, Cotabato. Results showed that deals with the identification of the issues that the pandemic has brought to Islamic schools the azatids were afraid that the learners would be infected with the virus. There were a lot of concerned that made them hesitant to go schools for face to face. One of which was that there were a lot of learners who opted to stop because of the fear to be contaminated by the virus. Hence, Azatids took an action to provide stringent in Madaris Education along with the partnership of Local Government Units, parents, relatives, and school community towards the problem on how it maneuvers the face to face class while having virus is still spreading and alive.

However, if there was a good plan, there was good an execution. Meeting began with a composed of stakeholders, such as azatids, parents, learners, and security lobbied on gearing towards continuity studies of Madaris Education. The exchanged collective ideas from them brought up the needs, intervention, and support manpower of the Madaris gave impactful to rise again in polarizing of Muslim learner community.

KEYWORDS: Survival of the Fittest, Covid-19 Pandemic, Madrasah, Azatids & Madaris

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

When lockdowns were imposed because of the threat of the contagion of the Corona Virus-19 which originated in Wuhan, China, all schools and other establishments were closed. This is to allow for the government to contain the virus and to stop spreading it. In this regard, a new modality of teaching was introduced. For example, the Department of Education embraced the online teaching as well as the modular distance learning. The latter are the instructional materials are distributed to every learner into the designated areas.

Looking into contexts of Islam, some Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia incorporated the religious education into their public-school systems. This is also true with the case of Malaysia, Thailand, and in the Philippines (Milligan, 2018). Through the institutionalization of the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education program which is the result of the dedicated efforts of the Department of Education, Regional and Division officials and Asatidz (teachers) who believed in the worth and development potential of every Muslim child in multi-cultural and diverse environment (Muhamat, Kawangit, & Aini, 2015).

However, there were many private Madrasah (Islamic Schools) that operate in the country especially in Southern

Philippines. The implementation of the Madrasah Educational Program (MEP) reiterated that schools delivered some program goals through institutional support, pedagogical and instructional development, and enrichment of cultural diversity in the school community. However, it was identified that lack of permanent infrastructure, limited instructional resources, learners' absenteeism, low and delayed Asatidz allowance, and cultural variances among Muslim Filipinos (Sali & Marasigan, 2020).

In addition, there is no uniform or standardized curriculum. Yet in spite of these flaws or weaknesses the madrasah system continues to thrive, which is indicative of the Muslim community's strong desire to ensure that their children receive an Islamic education. Because of their alleged links to extremism the madrasahs have come to be perceived by some in Philippine government circles to be a security threat. Madrasahs have become a target of raids and their credibility as educational institutions has been on the line. An additional effect has been to incriminate Islam and implicate Muslims generally in international terrorism in the public eye (Bakar, 2011; Evans, 2008).

Furthermore, the researcher wanted to determine the present condition of these Islamic Schools (Madrasah) amidst the threat of the pandemic. Researches focused only among the Indonesian contexts (Ritonga, Sartika, & Kustali, 2021; Listiana, 2020; Mujib, & Yunita, 2020). None of the literatures geared toward the Philippines and the local contexts. Hence, these justifications have motivated the researcher to pursue this endeavor.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the strategies and methodologies of the Islamic Schools as well as the challenges that they experienced in this time of the pandemic. As such, a training program was designed to help them in their predicaments. At this stage in the research study was generally defined as the experiences of the Islamic Schools more specially by the Asatidz.

1.3 Research Questions

- What were the strategies and methodologies that Islamic Schools used to adhere with the teaching-learning process in the new normal setting?
- What issues and concerns that Islamic Schools faced in the new normal setting?
- What interventions do they employ to combat the challenges?
- What training program can be designed based on the findings of the study?

1.4 Limitation and Delimitation of the Study

This qualitative study employing phenomenology aimed to determine the strategies and methodologies that Islamic Schools utilized to ensure quality Islamic education in spite of the ongoing threat of the COVID-19. Also, it delts with the identification of the issues and concerns that they are presently facing and their own interventions to combat the challenges. This was conducted in Maahad Darul Ahlie Al-Ijtimaie Al-Arabie Al-Islamie in Pedtad, Kabacan, Cotabato and Maahad Kabacan Al-Islamie in Kayaga, Kabacan, Cotabato. Excluded in this study were smaller Islamic Schools in the municipality. This was conducted during the Second Semester of School Year 2020-2021.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, data collection, locale of the study, research participants, data analysis, role of the researcher, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

2.1 Research Design

This study employed the qualitative-phenomenology as a research design. Qualitative research aimed to build a holistic, primarily the narrative, description to inform the researcher's understanding of the occurrence of the phenomenon in a social and cultural context (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020; Jordan & Franklin, 2020; Kawamura, 2020). In addition, it was a combination of observations, interviews, and the review of documents. Hence, it gave the significance of finding at the variables in its natural setting in which they are found. The gathering of the data is made through the utilization of an open-ended questions that provided direct quotations coming from. Here, the interviewer was important part of the research (Silverman, 2020).

Meanwhile, phenomenology intended to focus on detailed description of the phenomenon being explored before the researcher could reach at interpreting the descriptions or interpretation (Gallagher, 2020). It was a fundamental to do the summary of findings, discussion of findings, recommendations, or future implications to give readers the panoramic perspectives of the study. The purpose of phenomenology was to look closely at the phenomenon under study in order to give an in-depth meaning to the lived experiences of the participants.

Moreover, this study was qualitative phenomenology since it dealt with the experiences of the Asatidz in teaching in the Arabic Schools (Madrasah) in these trying times. More so, this was to determine their teaching strategies and methodologies, their interventions, as well as their coping mechanisms to helping the learners.

2.2 Data Collection

This study was followed the following protocols. The identification of Islamic Schools (Madrasah) was first done. This would be followed by the writing of letter to the head asking permission for the conduct of the study. After which, the identification of the informants and participants based on the criteria set. Meanwhile, the interview guide would be prepared and was underwent validation by the panel of experts. On the other hand, the Consent-to-participate (Cameron & Murphy, 2007) form was also be prepared which would be given individually to the participants where they were affix their signature. However, its contents would be explained to them comprehensively to ensure their total participation without any skepticism on its purpose.

During the conduct of the interview, the informants was interviewed individually. This was followed by the interview of the focus group. A token was given to them as a sign of gratitude for the time and effort they were gave. After the interview, I transcribed their responses from Maguindanaon to Filipino and into English. This would gave the universality of the paper. The data analyst was do the thematic analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Consequently, the peer debriefer checked the correctness of the process as well as the findings based on the contexts of the research questions (Richards & Memphill, 2018). Moreover, the results of the study were returned to the informants for member check (Harper & Cole, 2012). They were confirmed about the veracity of their responses. Each theme were discussed profoundly. Lastly, the editor was checked the grammatical and lexical contents of the study.

2.3 Locale of the Study

I was conducted this study in the Municipality of Kabacan. In particular, this includes the following Islamic Schools, namely the Maahad Darul Ahlie Al-Ijtimaie Al-Arabie Al-Islamie Pedtad, Kabacan, Cotabato and Maahad Kabacan Al-Islamie Kayaga, Kabacan, Cotabato

These were chosen based on the number of population as well as on the number of ustadz and asatidz.

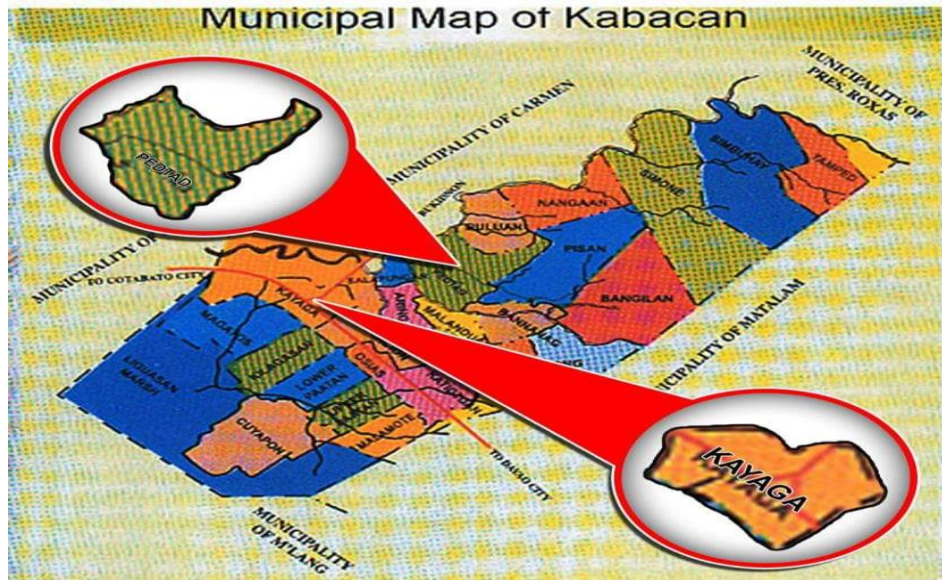


Figure 1: Map of the Locale of the Study

<http://blog-imgs-45.fc2.com/j/p/e/jpeaceunion/201204281800409b3.jpg>

2.4 Research Participants

The participants of this study involved 10 Key Informants and 5 Participants for the Focus Group Discussion. In qualitative research, Polkinghorne (1986) mentioned that it only needed 5-25 persons. To select them, I used the purposive sampling specifically the criterion-based sampling. They were chosen using the criteria as stated below:

- An Asatid in the selected Islamic Schools (Mahad) in the Municipality of Kabacan; and
- Presently teaching in the selected Islamic Schools (Mahad).

2.5 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was based on the context of Creswell (2013). It identified the themes from the responses of the Key Informants. The frequency of response as well as the core ideas were drawn. The framework of the NVIVO on thematic analysis was utilized as shown below:

General-50% and above of the informants shared the same theme of their responses

Typical-25-49% of the informants shared the same theme of their responses

Variant-24% and below of the informants shared the same theme of their responses

2.6 Role of the Researcher

I had the most crucial role in the success of the conduct of this endeavor. It was my duty to write a letter to the heads of the Islamic Schools (Mahad) in the Municipality of Kabacan. In the same vein, I was assigned to do the interviewing and recording of the responses of the informants and participants. It was also my task to do the transcription and translation from their mother tongue to Filipino and to English.

2.7 Trustworthiness

In this study, I adhered to the criteria of trustworthiness by Lincoln and Guba (1985) of credibility, confirmability,

transferability, and dependability. One of the key criteria addressed by positivist researchers was that of internal validity, in which they seek to ensure that their study measures or tests what was actually intended.

To address credibility, I adopted the well-established research method and develop the early familiarity with the culture of the informants and participants. In the same vein, I applied triangulation by applying the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (Flick, 2004). It was also essential in this regard that I had to ensure honesty with the informants in order that I could win their trust and total participation. To see to it that the process and findings are followed, I asked the help of debriefers who was in charge the review.

Informants were asked to read any transcripts of dialogues in which they have participated. Here the emphasis should be on whether the informants consider that their words match what they were actually intended, since, if a tape recorder has been used, the articulations themselves should at least have been accurately captured. Another element of member checking should involve verification of the investigator's emerging theories and inferences as these were formed during the dialogues. Detailed description in this area could be an important provision for promoting credibility as it helped conveys the actual situations that have been investigated and, to an extent, the contexts that surround them. In this respect, reports of previous studies staged in the same or a similar organization and addressing comparable issues may be invaluable sources (Koelsch, 2013).

The concept of conformability was the qualitative investigators comparable concerned to objectivity. Hence, the role of triangulation in promoting such confirmability must again be emphasized, in this context to reduce the effect of investigator bias (Cope, 2014). In terms of results, preliminary theories that ultimately were not borne out by the data should also be discussed. Once more, detailed methodological description enables the reader to determine how far the data and constructs emerging from it may be accepted. Critical to this process was the audit trail, which allows any observer to trace the course of the research step-by-step via the decisions made and procedures described.

Since the findings of a qualitative project were specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals, it was impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions were applicable to other situations and populations. Thus, it was a must to build the sense of transferability (Finfgeld-Connett, 2010). After perusing the description within the research report of the context in which the work was undertaken, readers must determine how far they can be confident in transferring to other situations the results and conclusions presented. It was also important that sufficient thick description of the phenomenon under investigation was provided to allow readers to have a proper understanding of it, thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in their situations.

In addressing the issue of reliability, the positivist employs techniques to show that, if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained. In order to address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results (Guest, Macqueen, & Namey, 2012). Such in-depth coverage also allows the reader to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The ethical principles in this study were anchored on the premise of informed consent and voluntary participation and anonymity and confidentiality by Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2001). In obtaining the consent, I ensured that it was

voluntary, and understand the contexts of the questions to be asked to them. This means that they were adequately informed about the research, comprehend the information, and have a power of freedom of choice to allow them make decisions whether to participate or decline. I had explained to them thoroughly the agreement to participation and the research process. In this manner, they were provided a written informed-consent.

Similarly, all the informants and participants were approached individually and be given an explanation of the purpose of the study and data collection process. They were given an appropriate time to ask questions and address any concerns. I explained to them that their participation would voluntary, refusing to participate or withdraw from the study while it was in progress would not affect their care or job in any way. They were given appropriate time to read the information sheet and decide whether or not they want to get involved in the study. More so, they were required to sign the informed-consent-to-participate form before the interview to indicate their permission to be part of the study and their signature were confirm prior to the interview session.

To observe the ethical principle of anonymity and confidentiality of the informants and participants, I did reveal their names and identity in the data collection, analysis, and reporting of the study. Hence, I would assigned code or aliases for each of them. Privacy and confidentiality of the interview was managed carefully during communication, interview session, data analysis, and dissemination of the findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the results of thematic analysis of the responses of the informants using the Colaizzi method and presets the in-depth analysis of the themes.

3.1 The Pedagogical Approaches during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In the midst of the pandemic, not everyone is excused. This predicament was faced by the Islamic Schools or the Madrasahs in the Municipality of Kabacan. However, even at the height of the uncertainties they managed to continue with their instructions by following the protocols as well as partnerships with the community and stakeholders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a gargantuan change in the teaching approaches of the Azatidz. They have to observe the protocols in dealing with the learners who came to the Madrasahs. These have made a difference in thinking for better solutions to improve instructions in these trying times.

3.2 Heeding on Health Protocol

Inside the Madrasahs, the Azatidz and its administrations see to it that everyone who enters the school premises must have to follow the minimum health protocols. As it was mandated by the IATF, no learner or individual would be allowed to enter unless they wear their masks and face shields. As mentioned during the interview that:

“Ang pinag utos sa amin ni kapitan para hindi mahinto ang aming pagtuturo noong una, kapag pumasok ang mga bata dito sa madrasah kailangan muna ng sumunod sila protocol na pinag-uutos ng munispyo kailangan nila maghugas ng kamay at mag sout ng mask at kapag umaabot ang bilang ng mga bata sa dalawampo o tatlombo na kailangan hatiin namin halimbawa ako grade 5 ustads ako at may dalawampo ako na mga mulit kailangan hatiin ko ito ng sabado at linggo para mayroon silang distansiya para masunod din namin ang protocol na pinag-utos ng munisipyo na sinabi ni kapitan” (We were told by the Barangay Captain that we need to follow the health protocols. When students exceeded to 30 we need to divide them into two classes and in two sessions so that the social distancing will be observed. Informant 1).

In addition:

“Ang sinabi ko sa mga studyante ko palagi kayung magsout ng mask at wag tanggalin at ang mga bangko dapat parating may distansiya tapos dahil ako yang grade 1 teacher hinati namin ang mga bata at kianausap ko ang aming supervisor at sinabi ko na kailangan natin ng ibang mga ustads/ustadsa para mahati natin ang grade 1 dahil sa subrang dami nila kaya hinati naming ang kanilang klase dahil mahirap na magdikit-dikit ang mga bata at sinabihan ko lagi ang mga bata na magdala kayo lagi ng rubbing alcohol pagkatapos mayroon din kaming ginawang hugasan ng kamay bago pagpasok sa madrasah.” (I told my students that they need to wear that mask and observe social distancing. We also divided the class into two and asked for the help of other Azatidz. I even told them to always bring with them an alcohol. Informant 2)

Indeed, in this time of the pandemic the Arabic Schools faced a lot of challenges. In order to stop the spread of the virus, the Azatidz were also obliged to follow the maximum health protocols and these were implemented within the school perimeters. They needed to participate and take part in ending the pandemic to make sure that children who learn Arabic language and values would return and create a difference in the Islamic community.

Schools were mandated to follow the health protocols to stop the local transmission. One of which was that they have to cancel any community events/meetings that usually took place on school premises. Also, they have to make it sure that they have handwashing stations with soap and water as well as alcohol-based hand rub in each room, entrances, exits, and in other important parts of the school (Sarmiento, Sarmiento, & Tolentino, 2021).

3.3 Bridging Ties with the Community and Stakeholders

For the smooth operation of the school as it transitioned to the new normal of instructions, they see to it that they coordinated with the local government units. This shows that they have the participation to stopping the spread of the virus. Of course, their main concern was the safety of the learners. As such, it was stated by the informant that:

“Ang una naming ginawa ay nakipag-ugnayan muna kami kay kapitan kasama ng mga community parents kung anu ba ang magandang gawin ng hindi maputol ang pag-aaral ng mga bata at maipagpatuloy ang kanilang pag-aaral ng dalawang bases sa isang linggo sabado at linggo, nag usap ang mga kinauukulan ng aming baragay kasama ng mga magulang at ang mga guro ng madrasah at napagpasayahan na ipagpatuloy ang pag aaral ng mga bata basta kinakailangan masunod ang protocol health ang pagsusuot ng face mask, face shield, pagdadala ng alcohol, palagiang paghuhugas ng kamay at pag maintain ang 1 meter distancing ng mga bata.” (First, we coordinated with the Barangay Captain as well as the parents of the children on the best thing to do so that the education of their children will not be hampered by the pandemic. We came up with a consensus that their learnings will continue as long as they have to follow the health protocols. Informant 5)

Also:

“Sa pakikipagtulungan ng aming punong baraggay, mga magulang ng mga bata, community member at ng madrasah ay agad naming pinaalam ang aming mga plano at mga paraan sa pagpapatuloy ng pag-aaral ng mga bata kaagad naman sinang-ayon ng aming kapitan kasama ng mga magulang para maipagpatuloy ang pag-aaral ng mga bata ay gumawa kami ng mga paraan unang una ay dapat masunod ang health protocol na pinapatupad ng munisipyo, maglagay ng hadwashing area, may thermal scanner, face mask, face shield at alcohol sa gate pa lang ng aming madsarah, hinati din namin ang bilang ng mga bata sa papasok, sinigurado din naming ang isang metrong distansiya ng mga upuan ng mga bata.” (Through the help of our Barangay Captain and the members of the community we informed them our plans for the continuity of the operations of the Madrasah for the benefit of the children. We implemented the health protocols as implemented by the Local Government

Unit by placing handwashing area, thermal scanner, face mask, face shield and the observance of the social distancing. Informant 10)

In order to provide the necessary bodies of knowledge to the learners, the Azatidz claimed that they communicated with the parents of the children as well as the stakeholders especially the members of the barangay council relative to the new normal delivery of the lessons. As different forms of modalities were embraced by the Department of Education, yet these Islamic Schools found new and better ways which could help Muslim children to continue with their quest for a higher Islamic teaching. Nonetheless, this strategy which was employed by the Azatidz was a manifestation of their desire to work together with the community especially in teaching their children at home.

School as a basic institution for the younger generation's education has the responsibility to develop, educate and raise the values in all spheres of life of the society. Partnership and cooperation between the school and the family was crucial for the progress of the process of teaching and learning as well as children's development. The parents' involvement improves the students' results and increases the parents' contentment (Epstain, 2008). It must be considered that many scholars indicate that the partnership between school and family induce positive results in students' sustainable learning and school was the place where the students, parents, teachers, directors and community come together, and the place where children get grown, get developed and get prepared for life. Parents trust teachers for their children's academic, emotional and social advancement; they also think that cooperation and partnership have a huge importance and it is unavoidable to achieve positive results in life (Matheis & Mehmeti, 2017)

3.4 Talking Point of the Islamic Schools in the Newfangled Educational Milieu

The Madrasahs faced the wrath brought by the pandemic. There were a lot of concerns that made them hesitant to open the school for the face-to-face instruction. One of which if that there are a lot of learners who opted to stop because of the fear to be contaminated by the virus. In addition, they cannot assure that they could control the movement of the learners especially of the younger ones.

There were many issues that the pandemic has brought to Islamic Schools. Of course, the Azatidz was afraid that the learners would be infected with the virus. With the adjustments to the new learning environment, they found it very challenging especially that lockdowns were implemented. Movements were limited and that people cannot easily go out from their houses because of the strict implementation of the orders from the government (Chircop, 2020).

3.5 Continuity of Learners' Quest for Learning

Islamic Schools or the Madrasahs found it difficult to face the realities of the pandemic. There were many students who stopped because of the fear of the unseen enemy that looms in the horizon. During the interview, the informant agreed that:

“Ang mga isyo at alalahanin ng madsarah nong kasagsagan ng pandemiya na aming kinaharap ay kung paanu may pagpapatuloy ng mga bata ang ang kanilang pag aaral, at kung may magpapatuloy paba nmin ang pagtuturo sa kanila at ang mga magulang may alinlangan at takot sa kanilang mga anak sa kanilang kalusogan, natatakot sila kung sakaling magkasakit ang kanilang mga anak.” (In this time of the pandemic we have the difficulties on the continuity of the studies of the learners, and if we can still continue to teach them. More than that, parents are also skeptical on the security of their children that they might get infected by the virus. Informant 1)

It was supported by one of the informants who verbalized that:

“Ang problema ko dati noong nakaraang taon ay yung mga bata ay hindi sila bumabalik kapag hapon hinati ko sabi sila sa dalawang bali meron sa sabado sa boung araw at meron din sa lingo boung araw din ngayon yun talaga ang naging problema ko ay hindi sila bumabalik.” (The problem is that none of them came back to school. Informant 3)

As molders of the innocent minds, the Azatidz were very particular on the continuity of the learning process. The absence of the face-to-face instructions made a big impact into the lives of the learners. As a matter of fact, there were many learners who dropped from schooling because of the fear of their parents that they too might be infected by the virus. Fighting with the unknown enemy, the Arabic schools were concerned that learnings are in the midst of the perilous situation. More so, this pandemic hampered the learners to come to school and continue with their studies.

As confirmed, it was reiterated that a face-to-face class is integral in development of the learners. Indeed, it has a good attendance because they could immediately have the responses of their teachers in the class. Unlike the offline and other modalities that were being used in this time of the pandemic, the presence of the teacher increases participation from the students (Dhawan, 2020).

3.6 Overseeing Innocuous Learners

The movements of the young learners would be arduous for the Azatidz to deal with. Controlling them would be ineffective for them since they could not provide total control knowing that these children still have less understanding of the pandemic and its major threat to health. As stated by one of the informants:

“Unang isyo ng mga magulang ay natatakot sila sa kaligtasan ng mga bata, pangalawa ay nagaalala ang mga magulang kung maipagpapatuloy paba ang pag-aaral ng mga bata at kundi naman paanu ang pag-aaral ng mga bata, pangatlo ay natatakot sila sa kung sinu sinu makakasalamuha ng kanilang mga anak.” (First, some parents are afraid of the security of their children. Second, they are worried whether their children may still continue with their studies. Third, they are afraid of their children’s contact within the school’s premise. Informant 10)

If Arabic schools would have to allow learners to go back to school, one concern was on dealing with the learners. Basically, they cannot provide the security as well as enforcing the social distancing considering that majority of the learners were children. The fear that the virus could be transmitted was looming in the horizon. Through this, it could be a challenging for them to impose the IATFs regulations and thus, classes cannot be done without the government’s clearance.

Indeed, it was a challenge for teachers to handle the young learners during this time of the pandemic. As such, it was also prohibited by the government that children 15 years old below are not allowed to go out. In addition, if face-to-face classes will be done this could be of great problem since teachers cannot have the control of all the children’s activities in the school (Schwab-Reese, Drury, Allan, & Matz, 2020).

3.7 Blueprint in Confronting the Tests of the Virus

To confront the tests brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Azatidz partnered with the Local Government Units as well as the parents relative to the best solutions to the problems that they were presently facing.

Arabic schools also find ways so that they could overcome the tests of time brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. They thought for better answers to the problems so that they could continue to provide quality Arabic education among the Muslim learners of the community.

3.8 Convening the Stakeholders

Meeting with the stakeholders provides the wider perspectives for the Azatidz and the administration of the Madaris as they voiced out their concerns for the continuity of the studies of every Muslim learner in the community. Indeed, the informant revealed during the interview that:

“Ang paraan nmin para labanan ang mga hamon o problem na dumarating sa amin kaagad kaming magpapatawag ng pulong sa mga azatidz para sabihin na mayroon problema para maiwasanan ang di pagkakaunawan, at yun nga dinadaan nmin sa pulong.” (We called a meeting to tell them the problem so that disagreements will be avoided. Informant 1)

The Azatidz found it necessary that they need to cooperate with the stakeholders as well as with the Local Government Units in accordance to the delivery of instruction in the new normal setting. Having the conversation with the locales would help them to widen their perspectives with the view of the parents especially on sending their children to the Madrasahs. In the same manner, they could be able to express their plans which in the long run these could be the bases for making decisions for the betterment of the school and the learners as well.

The partnership between parents, stakeholders, and teachers could made a difference in making everyone safe in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through usual communication, they can provide better solutions especially on the continuity of the learnings of the children. More importantly, this partnership can foster greater responsibilities and it could lessen the burdens on the part of the teachers especially in teaching the learners at home (Lee, Ward, Chang, & Downing, 2021).

3.9 Anchoring Faith to the Almighty Allah

It was the very nature of every Muslim to have a strong foundation of their faith to the Almighty Allah. They seek for guidance as well as knowledge in order that they would be guided properly on the things that they need to do for the operation of the Madrasahs in the midst of the pandemic.

“Isa lang po yung paraan ko para makayanan ang mga problema yung palahing panalangin kasi lahat po ng problema ay may lunas po yan kasi kapag palagi po tayung manalangin kay Allah (sws) walang problemang hindi makakayanan dahil lahat ng problema binibigay ni allah (sws) ay makakya nating mga tao.” (We all need to pray to Allah in order to overcome all the challenges. Informant 9)

A strong faith can remove the barriers of impossibilities. Through this, they were strengthened to continue with their quest to educate the young individuals to learn more of the Arabic language and Islamic Values. As they fight the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic they were still positive that this too shall pass and that they could begin a new chapter of their noblest profession. Furthermore, this connotes that having faith to the Almighty manifests that indeed they were positive in this negative situation.

In Islam, every faithful anchors their faith to the Almighty Allah. They believed that a supreme being holds and controls everyone in this abode. In the same vein, this predicament that was being experienced could soon end through supplications and by surrendering themselves to the Creator (Alyanak, 2020).

4.1 Implications for Practice

The pandemic has brought an enormous impact on the lives of the people. It shuttered the doors of the schools that even the Madrasahs were no escape. As a public-school teacher, it opened my horizon and sharpened my perspectives that indeed

education was an important tool that frees us from the bondage of ignorance. The efforts being made by the Azatidz are beyond measure. With the meager amount of salary that they received yet still they have shown their greatest love for educating the minds of the young citizens.

In the same vein, they have looked forward that they could make the learners to have the skills in Arabic reading and writing as well as the essentialities of the Islamic values that they need to live with. This also reminds me that there were no boundaries in teaching. As they looked forward for the better days to come, they also expect that their learners would be able to continue with their studies through their tutelage.

In terms of the pedagogical practices, they have to embrace the new trends in teaching. To ensure the continuity of instruction, the Azatidz may resort to new modalities like for example they could use the online or blended learnings so that the new they could also experience how these work in the new breed of learners. However, this study also considered their capabilities thus, they need to be trained in order to be the modern versions of the Azatidz.

Furthermore, this study opens my horizons that even a non-government funded schools like the Madrasahs were able to withstand and continue battling the pandemic. In the hearts of the Azatidz were the learners who were willing to pursue with their studies so that they could be able to fulfill their duties as Muslim children who were dignified with values. This also manifests that perceptions against them will change.

More importantly, heeding to the health protocols and orders of the Local Government Units as well as the IATF will be the solution to the on-going problem that we were facing with the pandemic. Only discipline could eradicate and end this pandemic. Hence, Madrasahs could make a difference as they cooperate since the virus lures to snap its next victim.

4.2 Implications for Future Research

This qualitative-phenomenology study anchors its views on the lived experiences of the Azatidz relative to their pedagogical practices at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to give new doors of opportunities, this study sees to it that future researchers could utilize the findings of this study as well as the themes as the basis for developing with a questionnaire for a quantitative study.

To make this into reality, they were used the responses of the informants to make some generalizations on the themes and group them together. Consequently, another thing that they could do was to interview other Azatidz from other Madrasahs in the Province of Cotabato so that they could see different perspectives and could also listen to their stories especially in areas where there were low number of cases of the virus.

A comparative analysis of the big Madrasahs' experiences could be grouped and try to determine the similarities and differences. Through this, wider perspectives of the experiences could be drawn. Conversely, future researchers could find some innovative strategies that were employed by the Azatidz in dealing with their learners.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

This research study caught my interest on investigation thoroughly the gaps of Astidz teaching between Normal Education with the learners. With these, to the highest concerned towards my parallel work gave me in the brink of almost giving-up because I cannot really fathom the discourse of qualitative research related on my study. However, in the midst of uncertainties I realized that I must have to follow the will of my heart and that is to finish this graduate studies. As a former learner of the Madrasah, I saw the disparities in terms of the pedagogical practices of teachers and those by the Azatidz.

When the pandemic hit the local communities, I saw the dire need to conduct and explore this study. I was not mistaken in choosing this topic because as a Muslim I saw that the Azatidz were struggling in dealing with the new normal of learning especially that they need to adhere to the protocols set by the national and local governments. To contain the spread of the virus, they made it clear that every learner has to wear their face masks and face shields. The Madrasah itself practiced the minimum health protocols which is a good manifestation that they helped the government in combating the virus.

Lastly, this study could be an eye opener to the government that they may be supported as well. In fact, they helped the children to become value-laden individuals and not producing radical learners. Islamic schools were good examples that teaching could be made easy when teachers were focused with the subject matter and they allowed the memorization and the verses from the Qur'an. These implied only that Muslim children were involved in addressing the need of the Filipino people to be the source of inspiration towards peace and prosperity.

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