

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The inclusion of Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) in public elementary schools in the Philippines is a major decision on the part of the Christian-dominated government. There had been clamors from Muslim Filipinos in the past to integrate Madrasah education in public education but it took a while before the government finally acceded to the request for several reasons. First and the most significant is the tendency of the Christian ruling elites to impose their political and cultural hegemony over the Muslims manifested in the different policies detrimental to the economic welfare and status of the Muslims. Attempts to impose Christian/Catholic cultural hegemony was overtly shown in the unapologetic development and implementation of the previous curricula which aimed to deculturize the Muslims, hide them, and relegate their culture to an inferior level in the same ways Spanish and American colonizers did before them. Second, after the Christian governments' attempts to obscure Muslims and their culture, the government still refused to recognize the distinct educational needs of the Muslims, one that combines secular and religious learning into one educational system. And finally, as a secular state, the Philippines adheres to the separation of church and state and this has been used to quell calls for the inclusion of ALIVE-related education in the public schools. The Philippine constitution strictly prohibits government funding for religious undertaking to which program such as ALIVE was initially perceived as an example. The separation of church and state was in a way used to refuse to meet the distinct educational needs of the Muslims. As education is vital to human development, the same view held by Muslim Filipinos, education has been the most sought after social service from the government. Even the Muslim rebels themselves recognized the undisputed role of education in human lives and in the development of

Mindanao.

For Muslim Filipinos, the ideal educational system is that of madrasah education as this kind (particularly the contemporary kind) combines the secular and religious knowledge. A late comer in Mindanao, arriving only in the 1950s, madrasah brings the Muslims closer to their faith. Here, they are taught about the teachings of Islam and Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. As the language of revelation, knowledge of Arabic is very important for Muslims. It is only by learning Arabic they could read and recite the Qur'an, an activity that has a special place among them.

The birth of ALIVE across the Philippines is a good step for bringing peace to Muslims. Its coming symbolizes a couple of things. First, the government has finally recognized the distinct educational needs of Muslims. Second, this recognition also came with acceptance when the government decided to bring this kind of education to the fold of public education system. This acceptance may not be complete yet especially in the grass root level such as schools but a very good step nonetheless.

The implementation of ALIVE in the five elementary schools studied is affected in varying degrees by the historical-political and social contexts from which the Christian-Muslim relations in the school area have evolved. In areas where the Muslims have been positively accepted and respected, the ALIVE program is treated the same. If the principal has considerable knowledge of Islam, he or she tends to be accepting and respecting of the Muslims and spill it over in the way the program is implemented in the school. Meanwhile, in areas where Muslims are treated otherwise or have been perceived in a negative light, their view affects the program too. Although these contexts may affect the program, the transformative leadership of the principal can mitigate or solve these challenges. The success of ALIVE does

not rest on the Asatidz alone. A big factor in the fate of the program is the leadership ability of the principal in implementing the program. Aside from the leadership ability, the principal to be effective must have embraced the program at a more personal level and not just at a professional level. The principal's knowledge and acceptance of the program needs to be relay to the school community as well. As a special program for the minority, it does not mean that the program is only for a specific group of people and the rest of the school community is excluded from the undertaking. Being one with the program, increases the success rate of the program and more importantly, provides an opportunity for more Christian-Muslim interactions and cooperation that can result to better understanding between the two groups. ALIVE needs the mobilized support from the community to be successful.

The ALIVE program operates within an instructional system and a context-based learning milieu. The study looked into the instructional system of ALIVE focused on the curricular framework, lessons, and instructional materials used in the delivery of the program. In the curricular framework of the program, ALIVE is expected not only to provide religious instruction to the young Muslims. The program is also expected to mold them as nationalistic Muslim Filipinos maybe as a way to address one criticism hurled against Madrasah institution as apathetic to contribute to the national development goals. This is where complexity comes in.

The intention may be good but religious class such as ALIVE may not be ready to handle this additional or extended task. First, the DepEd itself has not provided ways to teach national identity discourse at least from the context of Muslims. Since the DepEd has no ready means, the responsibility falls under the shoulder of the Ustadz who handles ALIVE. When it comes

to knowledge of ALIVE subject matter there is no problem. They are all able. It is the matter concerning their self-identification with Filipino identity the one that is disconcerting.

Knowing that almost all of them grew up in Mindanao where Muslims are known to have solid religious and ethnic identities relegating the national identity at the third spot can they be counted to impart Filipino identity to the young Muslim learners? If ordinary teachers who are Christians and have more or less no serious problem with the government or being Filipinos find it hard to integrate the teaching of nationalism to the young what more in the case of Muslims who probably need more processing to finally come up with their own answer.

The instructional materials could have helped the Ustadz teach national identity to the Muslim pupils, but sadly, the ALIVE textbook is very silent about Filipino identity concepts. Much of the content of the book deals on Islamic faith and teachings, something to be expected from an Islamic Values education textbook. On the other hand, on second thought, Islamic values need not contradict love for one's country so including ideas on Filipino identity is not bad at all but failed to be part of the textbook.

The Asatidz no doubt are committed to their tasks as teachers. However, much more have to be done to improve the program. The twice or thrice a year trainings are not enough to make them effective teachers. The instructional materials are not adequate and most of the time absent, a terrible situation that puts the burden of crafting lessons and activities and teaching upon the shoulders of the Asatidz. These two tasks may be easy for true-blooded teachers but not for the Asatidz who still need further training in the two areas.

The vision of the “ideal madrasah learner” equipped with national core values of the Filipinos through ALIVE has a fifty-fifty chance of happening. It is not because it is not a worthy goal it is in fact a beautiful and lofty aspiration. But before it happens a mammoth set of actions has to be made not only in matters concerning education but also at a more holistic level, specifically political ones. It would be unfair for the education system to be entrusted with such a huge responsibility of identity formation when in fact its realization is dependent on many factors; socialization through education is only one. Moreover, ALIVE as a platform where Filipino identity can be built up although envisioned to be such was not geared for it. But the question is, it is possible, the answer is yes but only if the program will be equipped to do that.

In ALIVE, the two most important stakeholders are the Ustadz and the school principal. The two, play equally huge roles in the implementation of the program with the principal paves the way for a positive learning milieu for the program. The Ustadz, as the teacher of Arabic language and Islamic values is the main person in the conduct of the program. Aside from being a teacher, he or she is also the biggest supporter of the program. Moreover, his or her additional effort to campaign the program to his or her respective community is very crucial. Likewise, as the leader of the school that hosts ALIVE, the principal is also the biggest supporter of the program and at the same time a major implementer acting as the internal monitor and supervisor of the program. As the other biggest supporter, the principal does not support the program alone, as the leader of the school community he or she mobilizes school support to the program. Although almost all teachers and staff are non-Muslims, it is important that the principal is able to explain the beauty and challenges of the program to the school community and solicit their support for the sake of their Muslim learners. Since the Muslim learners are first and foremost pupils of the regular DepEd classes, their teachers can offer an additional boost to pupils attending ALIVE.

The principal's support for the program comes from any or all three motivating factors. First, support to ALIVE is mandated by his or her job. Second, the principal sees the importance of the program for his or her diverse learners and school. And third, the principal accepts, respects, and supports the Muslims as a group of Filipinos with diverse characteristics and needs. These three factors if all present in the principal could lead to successful hosting of ALIVE but in the study, not all principals are motivated by the three.

The principals' support given to the program is hugely affected by the principals' understanding of ALIVE in their respective schools. If ALIVE is seen only as one of the DepEd programs that must be implemented, the principal runs the program for compliance. If the principal sees the benefit of ALIVE to the pupils attending it, the principal gladly implements and supports the program. The ideal is for the principal to be motivated by the three factors mentioned earlier. The last factor, the principal "accepts, respects, and supports the Muslims as a group of Filipinos with diverse characteristics and needs" increases the successful implementation of ALIVE in any given school. The principals' "acceptance, respect, and support" for the Muslims is not easy but is not hard as well. School principals especially the relatively older ones are most likely products of society with inherent biases favourable to Christians/Catholics and these biases are carried out in everyday lives including in their professional lives as school administrators.

The principal also plays a huge role in enhancing the teaching ability of the Ustadz but unfortunately not all school heads see their important role in the endeavour since some principals see the program as a "special program" that must be implemented for compliance to the DepEd. With this kind of mentality, the program definitely runs and survives but failed to

achieve much as a special program. Better if the program is treated a “special program” that deserves “special attention” from the school community or much better if this special program be considered as real part of the school and should therefore be given the same amount of attention given to all the rest.

Though the principal plays a major role in ALIVE implementation, another determining factor to its success is the school or community support it gives to the program. This school support is always has to be mobilized first by the principal. The author argues that this support can be the framework or basis from which the ALIVE program should be evaluated. The ALIVE as a program operates in an environment replete with historical and political considerations. Aside from the usual leadership and logistics concerns that affect any program, the implementation of ALIVE is also influenced by preconditioned biases of the school community that adds up to the already complex nature of implementing a program. Without looking at the community support rendered for the program, the tendency of the evaluators to look at results or outcomes is at hand. That is why the author highly considers the conduct of illuminative evaluation of ALIVE before conducting a program evaluation that measures or quantify the success of the program. Since illuminative study describes and interpret the contexts, ALIVE as a program for the minority is understood in the manner that is not detached and judgmental.

Aside from the Asatidz effective teaching of ALIVE class, the principals’ genuine support and the mobilized support the program gets are major factors that could be considered in evaluating the program. In the case of the four Asatidz who agreed to be observed in class, two Asatidz showed relative ease in handling and teaching the class effectively. The case of the other two Asatidz clearly reflects the pedagogical issue surrounding the Asatidz as mentioned by all the principals interviewed in the study. The pedagogical problems among the Asatidz is not a

hopeless case. With proper support from the principal and school community, the Asatidz can be mentored towards effective teaching as shown by the case of one Ustadz who were patiently mentored and nurtured by her own school.

When the Asatidz were hired by the DepEd, the department knew that they do not have the adequate ability to teach pupils. But it does not mean that the department does not expect them to teach their pupils well. The fact that the DepEd regularly provides pre-service and inservice trainings for them means that the department expects that they will eventually become effective teachers. However, those trainings are not enough. That is why the principal should do something to remedy the problem on hand. The principal, bombarded with tons of task already in the school level can optimize the support he or she had earlier mobilized.

Being a dedicated Ustadz running the ALIVE program in a non-Muslim populated school is not easy. True, the workload is not so much compared to ordinary teachers but what makes it difficult is the learning environment where the program is situated. Two of the five ALIVE classes have no ALIVE classrooms yet. Having a permanent classroom can help settle things for both teachers and pupils as well as the instructional materials helpful for teaching the class. Though absent now, the rooms are underway as part of the DepEd comprehensive plans to provide adequate classrooms for everyone. Aside from the lack of classrooms, the Ustadz especially in Manila, in the beginning of their presence in the area had to deal with the politics of majority-minority and Christian-Muslim relations a tumultuous adjustment that was luckily, least prominent in the two provincial cities part of the study.

Recommendations

ALIVE, Islam, and Islamic Culture Orientation at ALIVE-participating School Must be Conducted

Islam is arguably the most misunderstood religion in the Philippines long before it is associated with violence and terrorism. Like what was discussed in the previous chapter, the colonial policies implemented in the past were the main culprit for this misunderstanding. Now almost 70 years after the last colonial power left the country, these misunderstanding and prejudices still afflict (although in a lesser degree) Christian-Muslim social relations that more or less spills over to the schools that host ALIVE. If this is the case, it is best that an orientation about the significance of ALIVE be held first in the school so everyone, including the teachers, principal, and staff can have considerable knowledge about the program. In this orientation, the historical context of the program must be explained to the participants and the current situation of Muslim learners who need the program. Aside from the historical contexts, it is necessary to also discuss the philosophy, theory, and legal mandates that support the program so the participants will know that having ALIVE is not just a product of political accommodation but actually a pursuit of human rights among Muslims. In the said orientation, of equal importance is the lecture of the basics of Islam. Islam and its basic teachings have to be introduced to the stakeholders so that their knowledge of it can help them become more understanding, tolerant, and hopefully respectful of Muslims' distinct characteristics. This orientation will be beneficial too as the teachers also have to deal with Muslim pupils inside their respective classes. In the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers, the definer of teacher quality in the Philippines, quality teachers are described as able "to establish learning environments that are responsive to learner diversity". Moreover, they "respect learners' diverse characteristics and experiences as inputs to the planning and design of learning opportunities" and they "encourage the celebration of diversity in the classroom and the need for teaching practices that are differentiated to encourage all learners to be successful citizens in a changing local and global

environment”. This orientation offers only a little but will be a good step towards introducing the concept of learners’ diversity in schools. From this orientation, further trainings which are more focused on classroom setting can be designed as part of the school’s learning Action Cell (LAC) that was also discussed in the previous chapter.

Attendance of Principals to ALIVE Seminars and Trainings Must Be Required

The school principals as discussed in the previous chapter play crucial role in ensuring the smooth and successful run of the program. But in order to do so, the principals’ support to the program must be present. Also in the previous chapter, it was discussed that all principals in the study support the program but this support does not automatically translate into success as their support varies considerably. A principal becomes supportive to the program if he or she at the personal level tolerates and respects the reality of diversity and not just giving the support out of compliance to DepEd. When do tolerance and respect likely to come in? The seed of tolerance and respect can come with sufficient knowledge that comes from knowing about the program. Although not intended for school principals, ALIVE-related trainings deepen not only the knowledge of the principals about the program but also enhance their knowledge about Muslims and how they should be approached as stakeholders of the school. In addition, the seminars and trainings can also capacitate them as administrators of an “unfamiliar” program whose unfamiliarity to the principals affect the performance of their tasks.

ALIVE(with a little twist) can be opened to non-Muslim pupils

ALIVE is originally intended for Muslim pupils in the school, however, the DepEd and the Ustadz do not prohibit non-Muslim pupils from attending the class. The same is true with other religious education classes that are able to enter the public school system.

Predominantly Christian Catholic, the public school system in the past has witnessed the presence of a few Catholic religious education classes being conducted in the campus subject to rules and regulations. The DepEd and the Constitution have clear guidelines on how these religious classes are to be conducted. First and foremost, the main concern of the state is not to spend a single cent on it. Second, that the class must be voluntary and therefore must not force non-Catholic Christian pupils to attend. A written permission from the parents or guardian of the pupils who wish to attend the class must be secured. And third, religious class should not affect the original class schedule set by the teacher or by the school. As these Catholic religious education classes are handled by young student-volunteers who are like their older sisters and brothers, the classes are often viewed as fun and exciting therefore attract the presence of even non-Catholic pupils to the class. In the class, both Catholic and non-Catholic pupils enjoy the storytelling, games, and activities provided by the student volunteers. Although the teaching of ALIVE is to be taught along confessional line as this originally caters to Muslim pupils, the program can be promoted and offered to non-Muslim pupils as well provided that the children are allowed by their parents.

The same case has been the practice at the Geronimo Santiago Elementary School, one of the schools that is part of the study. Both Muslim and non-Muslim pupils attend the ALIVE class with permission from their parents. Since ALIVE focuses on two major topics, Arabic and Islamic Values whom non-Muslim parents consider as a form of foreign language learning and a good exposure to other people's culture respectively, they allow their children to attend the class. The teacher and the principal interviewed for the study noticed how non-Muslim pupils are more knowledgeable now about Muslim culture and are respectful of Muslims' traditions. However, one area of concern that may pop up is that the ALIVE is supposed to be taught along confessional line as it is clearly intended for Muslims and therefore is favorably biased towards

Islam. Along confessional line the pupils are also expected to learn or be educated “**in**” the religion of Islam. A disconnect in the two situations cited above comes in when we look at the intention of non-Muslim parents for sending their children to ALIVE classes. Based on their intention as mentioned by the teacher and school principal, parents who send their children to ALIVE classes see the program as an opportunity to learn “**about**”

Islam. The two situations “**to learn in Islam**” and “**to learn about Islam**” are two different things that may be difficult to execute in the class originally and primarily tasked to impart to the learners their Islamic spiritual and cultural heritage. The disconnect between the two leads to another recommendation: that is to also offer Islamic Values to non-Muslim pupils, this time to learn more about the religion and the people.

In a country where Muslims’ minoritization and marginalization is also attributed to Christians’ misunderstanding or lack of understanding of the faith and culture they embraced long time ago, it will be a huge help if not only the teachers and principals who host and implement ALIVE know about Islam. Adequate knowledge of the young generation about Islam and Muslims can help promote tolerance and respect and secure peace in Philippine society. Just like what the case of GSES non-Muslim pupils showed, the prejudiced views towards Muslims is still reparable and the school, as a socializing agent can play a huge role.

Demonstration teaching for ALIVE Ustadz applicant

The hiring of Asatidz with effective teaching abilities is a huge factor for the success of ALIVE’s instructional system. Without their effective teaching the program will be useless as their teaching is the core of Islamic education the Muslims aspire for. In the previous chapter, the author argues that since most of them are not teachers by profession, their lack of effective pedagogy should not define the success or failure of the program instead their success or failure

should be based or quantified based on the support rendered to the program by the school community as a whole. But since ALIVE teachers do play a huge role, their teaching skills remain important. For future applicants, the DepEd should include demonstration teaching as one of the bases for hiring. The demonstration teaching can show if the applicant has the potential to be an effective teacher that can be a plus factor for hiring the applicant. Another importance of including demonstration teaching is that that it can be a form of needs assessment or identification as to what teacher training should be provided for the newly-hired Asatidz. The usual practice is the DepEd gives a Language Enhancement and Pedagogy training which is usually generic. It is fine but a more specific training based on the demonstration teachings showed by the applicants can help the DepEd design a training program that can help the Asatidz. Moreover, aside from the training, what is more important is that the principal or the DepEd Division Office can have a more definite idea of the newlyhired current strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. Knowledge of this can inform them of the kind of mentoring or guidance they can give to them once they become part of the school.

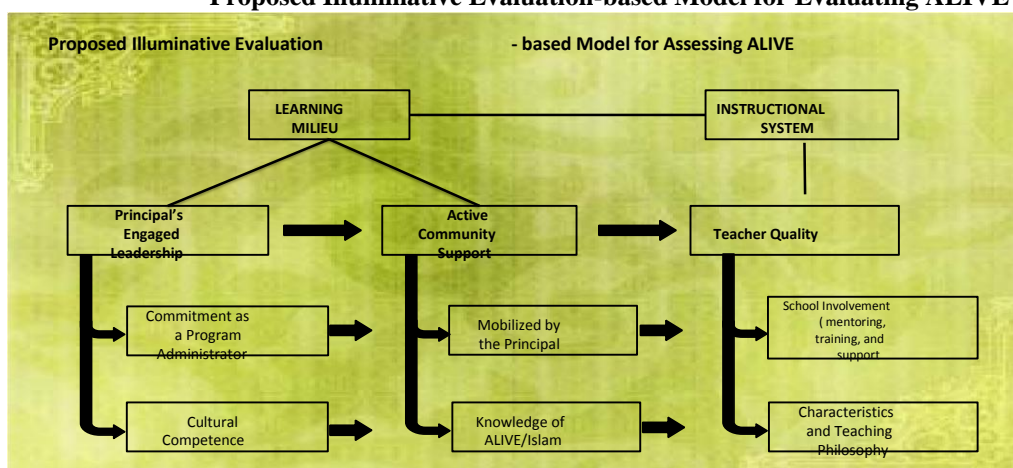
School mentoring program for ALIVE Ustadz

This author argues that the evaluation of ALIVE should be looked at in terms of community support it receives. In relation to this, the author also believes that teacher quality is highly dependent on the quality and amount of support the Asatidz get from their respective schools most especially their principals. As non-professional teachers with limited or no background in teaching, the Asatidz need strong mentoring from their host schools to implement the program very effectively. At present, all DepEd schools have Learning Action Cell (LAC) that serves as the schools' mini professional development platform. The LAC session acts as a community of practice where best practices and experiences are shared with the members of the teaching community for consideration and replication. As proven by the case of the female

Ustadz shortlisted as Most Outstanding Ustadz, mentoring new or inexperienced teachers is such a big help not only for the teachers themselves but for everyone in the school. The pupils benefit most especially and the principal is able to make sure that the school is doing its responsibility to the public. The principal need not to be the mentor, an experienced or highly proficient teacher can be assigned as the mentor of the Ustadz who can help him or her with appropriate teaching strategies, classroom management, and preparation of instructional materials. Interactions between the teacher mentor and Ustadz may open up new opportunities for better understanding and harmonious relations. The principal when he or she involves the other teachers to the program creates a feeling that ordinary teachers are part of the program too, in fact not only a part, but play a significant role to improve the program. This set up may create a better sense of ownership among the members of the school community, where not only the principal and the Ustadz play the part.

It is along this line, when all factors mentioned above are considered that this author recommends the use of illuminative evaluation in evaluating ALIVE programs in each host school.

Proposed Illuminative Evaluation-based Model for Evaluating ALIVE



In this evaluation model, the two major elements in the implementation of ALIVE, the learning milieu and instructional system and the factors that affect them are all considered.

The former is heavily influenced by the principal's engaged leadership and active community support while the latter is primarily influenced by teacher quality. If ALIVE is evaluated based on this model, this author believes that a lot of factors will be looked at and considered just right for a program that is meant to address decades of prejudices and irrelevant educational policies.

Modification of Arabic language textbook

Students of foreign language know that foreign language teaching and learning involves the use of the students' mother tongue and the foreign language being studied. In teaching the new language, the teacher always uses the mother tongue or first language of the learners so the learners can understand the teaching itself. In Chapter IV, the author wrote about the absence of a single Filipino or English word in the Arabic language textbook for Grade 1-3.

The author understands the textbook writers' passion to teach Arabic to Muslim children but not to the point of not using Filipino or English words in the textbook because these languages serve as media of instruction for non-Arabic speakers like Muslim Filipino children. Considering that Arabic is the most difficult language to learn, it can help if Filipino or English is present in the text. The lack of English words in the textbook once again puts the full responsibility of teaching to the Asatidz handling the class, depriving the pupils the opportunity to explore the textbook on their own. If there are English explanations in the book, at least pupils can read them and try for themselves if they could get about it. In the review conducted by the DepEd about the relevance of the Arabic textbook used in ALIVE classes, the Asatidz have favourable feedback with regard the relevance of the textbook' contents. That is fine.

Anyway it is the Asatidz who know what must be the lessons for the children. What the author

wants to emphasize here is aside from the relevant content of the textbook, the manner these lessons should be taught to the children must be given attention as well.