

Private Islamic Schools in the Philippines as a Source for Balanced Education: The Case of Wisdom Islamic School, Davao City Inc.

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ABSTRACT

Young Muslim students in the majority-Christian country of the Philippines face the perplexing challenge of selecting the type of institution that best provides the kind of education they pursue – a quandary of preferring secular education over religious education and vice versa. Private Islamic integrated schools seek to deliver that balanced education to address their concerns; and “Wisdom Islamic School, Davao City Inc.” is one such example, as it implements the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) K-12 Curriculum in addition to its own Islamic curriculum. This qualitative research sought to find out the extent to which a private Islamic school can offer such education, studying the case of Wisdom Islamic School through interviews and focus groups, garnering feedback from fourteen parents of students, those current and former. Through thematic analysis, the participants did perceive this institution to be balanced in its approach. This study has the potential limitation of unintentional bias from the respondents, as it gathered perspectives from those who have already made the decision to enroll their children at Wisdom Islamic School, with the aim to provide an insight to future researchers and educators as to what can be expected from such institution.

Keywords: Islamic education, private school, private *madrasah*, balanced education, DepEd

INTRODUCTION

For Muslims residing in a majority Roman Catholic country, the case for Islamic education in the Philippines is quite challenging, especially considering the various factors that could affect the Islamic knowledge of young Muslim Filipino learners (Latif, 2014).

According to Adarlo and Jackson (2016), schools in the Philippines are either run by the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd), known as “public schools”, or administrated by private entities, known as “private schools”. Public schools, of course, would implement the DepEd curriculum; private schools, on the other hand, should still comply with the national curriculum, particularly if they so choose to be permitted/recognized by the DepEd, with the discretion to align each private school’s curriculum maps to their respective philosophy, mission, vision, goals and objectives (PVMGO). Each private school strives to improve their standards in various areas, with guidelines from the Private Education Assistance Committee (PEAC) as their basis. Understandably, the majority of the excelling private schools hail from Christian backgrounds (Edarabia.com, 2024).

Adebayo (2020) found that Filipino parents and guardians typically prefer sending their children to the top Christian private schools due to the perceived superior quality of education being offered, for as long as they are financially capable. In the predominantly Christian-populated city of Davao, parents are willing to send their children to schools such as Ateneo de Davao, University of the Immaculate Conception, Holy Cross of Davao College and Davao Doctors College, despite the high tuition fees they charge. This applies, not only to Christian families, but to Muslims as well. It is not uncommon to find young Muslim girls, for instance, wearing the headscarf, going through their elementary and high school years in such Christian schools (Deporos, 2022).

Whilst there are institutions in Muslim communities that offer *madrasah* [Islamic] education on weekends, the case for young Muslim students to enroll in private Islamic integrated schools should be more favorable for those seeking formal education without falling behind on Islamic teachings. These private Islamic schools, likewise, conform to the DepEd curriculum and standards; the difference being in the alignment of subjects to Islamic-based PVMGOs as well as additional subjects dedicated to Islamic curricula (Rido et al., 2022). At the time of this research, in Davao City, there are only two private Islamic schools that are recognized by the DepEd, one of them being, ‘Wisdom Islamic School, Davao City Inc.’

Wisdom Islamic School has attained permanent government recognition, offering education to kindergarten students up to the Senior High School (SHS) level, based on the DepEd K-12 Curriculum as well as its own Islamic curriculum. Students are taught, among a variety of subjects, the English language, mathematics, science, in addition to Islamic studies, Qur’an and the Arabic language. The problem that numerous private Islamic schools in the Philippines face is the perceived weakness in

secular subjects. Hence, the transferring out of students from such institutions to their Christian counterparts.

Ideally, a Wisdom Islamic School SHS graduate should be one who has fundamentally sound knowledge of his/her religion, based on teachings from the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad in accordance with the understanding of the righteous Muslim predecessors, along with skills that better prepare him/her for the future, whether it be employment, entrepreneurship, further technical-vocational training or higher education. According to the Department of Education (2024), the MATATAG curriculum, which is expected to be implemented in school year 2024-2025, envisages school graduates who are "competent, job-ready, active, and responsible citizens". The positive implications for Muslim graduates who meet the DepEd's objectives coupled with the correct Islamic understanding are immeasurable (Lantong, 2018). This is of great importance to a private Islamic integrated school because this is what clearly distinguishes Wisdom Islamic School from other private schools, not only locally in Davao City, but in the Philippines as a whole. It is what gives private Islamic schools an edge over their competitors, which are not restricted to schools offering similar curricula, but the large, well-established and reputable Christian schools, such as Ateneo de Davao, Mapúa Malayan Colleges and others. The challenge to Wisdom Islamic School is in convincing the students' parents or guardians that the school does, in fact, possess that competitive advantage – that their children can get the best of both worlds.

The question this research seeks to answer is: how balanced is the education being offered in Wisdom Islamic School, as perceived by the parents and guardians? Balanced education, as per the teaching of the early Muslim scholar Imam Al-Zarnuji, is one that leads to a holistic life – one that aims for benefits in the life of this world and the Hereafter (Badri, 2022).

The research of Guleng et al. (2017) cited the emergence of private Islamic schools as a part of the nation's efforts to fill in the need to integrate two distinct education systems (i.e. Islamic and secular). The introduction of the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) program by the Department of Education in 2004 was a milestone in the history of Islamic education in the Philippines, as it paved way for Muslim students in public schools to learn the language of the Qur'an, Islamic values alongside their regular education. This, still, did not dissuade many Muslim parents from sending their children to private Christian schools, leaving the Islamic option open for research. Available studies have yet to focus on private Islamic schools as tried and tested solutions to this problem. The document analysis conducted by Samid (2022) presented a backstory to Islamic integrated schools. However, to date, the extent to which such institutions live up to expectations remains largely unexplored.

Therefore, positive responses to the research question would rule out the argument that parents and guardians enroll their children at private Christian schools because the Islamic alternatives do not offer balanced education. Negative responses, on the other hand, could hint at other reasons. The findings may, thereafter, serve as a

basis for Muslim school administrators to revise the current educational system, aligning the curriculum maps towards both worldly educational and Islamic objectives, or investigate other solutions. Should Muslim parents not view private Islamic integrated schools as viable providers of balanced education, then the stakeholders must take measures to address this matter. This study can help Muslim educators, school administrators and researchers to look further into the dilemma between focusing on one particular curriculum over the other, if it is indeed a factor for students to complete their basic education in such institutions or not.

METHOD

This research is qualitative, which, according to Aspers and Corte (2021), is an iterative process seeking to improve understanding through the discovery of significant distinctions, as study of the phenomenon is undertaken. The study explored the extent to which a private Islamic school in the Philippines can offer what is perceived to be a moderate balance between secular and Islamic education. As such, semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion was conducted at Wisdom Islamic School to gather insights on the matter in hand. Semi-structured interviews allow the exploration of pertinent ideas, combining structure with flexibility for in-depth understanding (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Focus group discussions involve group interaction and discussion, facilitated by a moderator, to gather insights on specific topics (Khan & Abedin, 2022).

The study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine in-depth the case within its real-life context (Elliott et al., 2023). This methodology is in line with the study's objective of understanding just how balanced the educational system in Wisdom Islamic School is. Is the education leaning more towards Islamic teachings or more towards the Philippine DepEd K-12 Curriculum?

Students' parents or guardians were the participants for this study, and they were selected through purposive sampling, which is when individuals or groups of individuals are identified and selected based on their knowledge about or experience with a phenomenon or interest (Palinkas, 2015). According to Sandy (1989), when it comes to who decides where young learners enroll, the family is the decision-maker; and, of course, the heads of families are typically the parents. As such, parents of elementary and high school students, both currently and formerly enrolled at Wisdom Islamic School, made up the sample for both the interviews and the focus group. Former parents were included to garner as much unbiased insights as possible, as it was assumed that current parents would provide feedback that is more favorable to the school. Details of the respondents are summarized below in Table 1:

Table 1: Participants

Participant	Interview		Focus Group		Total
	Current	Former	Current	Former	
Male	6	2	0	0	8

Female	0	1	5	0	6
Total	6	3	5	0	14

The following questions were asked during both the interview and the focus group discussion:

1. What in your opinion is an ideal school for your child?
2. What did you expect from Wisdom Islamic School before enrolling your child there?
3. How much has Wisdom Islamic School met your expectations for your child?
4. How does Wisdom Islamic School prepare students for worldly challenges?
5. How does Wisdom Islamic School prepare students to become potential Islamic scholars/leaders/influencers?
6. Do you feel that education at Wisdom Islamic School is more Islamic-oriented or secular-oriented? Why?
7. Do you think other private Islamic schools are similar to Wisdom Islamic School? Why or why not?

Data was analyzed through inductive thematic analysis, which, according to Dawadi (2020), involves the identification of patterns of themes without preconceived categories from data collected. Feedback from the parents is first familiarized, followed by generating initial codes, then themes were searched, which were then reviewed, then defined and named before a report was written. This data analysis was chosen on the basis of its accessibility, transparency, and flexibility, meeting the very aim of this research.

It goes without saying that ethical guidelines were in place to ensure anonymity of the parents and guardians who participated. Consent was obtained from all the interviews and the focus group with the assurance that pseudonyms would be used upon reporting and dissemination of the research findings.

While the larger picture of the study revolves around private Islamic schools in the Philippines, the generalizability of the topic is questionable due to the focus on a single institution. Likewise, the fact that the respondents were all either current or former parents of Wisdom Islamic School students limits the scope of perspectives. It is hoped, however, that careful data analysis should curb such reasons for concern.

Nevertheless, shedding some light to this matter through this case study can be a steppingstone for further research in the context of balanced education for Muslims in the Philippines.

RESULTS

Adhering to the steps laid out by Dawadi (2020), which were originally proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), the following table was constructed to list down the initial points of interest collected from the transcribed interviews and the focus group

discussion, corresponding to the questions and the codes that were consequently derived.

Table 2: Phase one: Familiarization of Data

Questions	Codes	Initial points of interest
1. What in your opinion is an ideal school for your child?	Balanced education, Islamic environment, Religious education, Academic excellence	6
2. What did you expect from Wisdom Islamic School before enrolling your child there?	Memorization of the Qur'an, Islamic awareness, Academic knowledge, Moral development	11
3. How much has Wisdom Islamic School met your expectations for your child?	Meeting expectations, High satisfaction, Areas for improvement, Academic and religious balance	15
4. How does Wisdom Islamic School prepare students for worldly challenges?	Islamic values, Academic skills, Moral development, Preparation for future	12
5. How does Wisdom Islamic School prepare students to become potential Islamic scholars/leaders/influencers?	Islamic values Academic skills Religious knowledge Leadership skills	10
6. Do you feel that education at Wisdom Islamic School is more Islamic-oriented or secular-oriented? Why?	Balanced education, More academically oriented, Islamic-oriented, Secular-oriented	6
7. Do you think other private Islamic schools are similar to Wisdom Islamic School? Why or why not?	Unique approach, Limited comparable schools, Differences in curriculum, Specific focus on Islamic values	10

The second phase involved the generation of initial codes, having familiarized oneself with the data and reviewing the transcripts. Table 3 presents an example of applying the codes to extracts from the sixth question, which is essentially the most relevant to the research question.

Table 3: Data Extracts and Codes

Data extracts	Coded for
"Wisdom Islamic School has a balanced education."	Balanced education
"Wisdom Islamic School is more academically oriented because everything we learned was taught in English."	More academically oriented
"I would say that Wisdom Islamic School is Islamic-oriented because the majority of the subjects are focused on Islamic teachings."	Islamic-oriented

"Secular-oriented because they are being taught the regular curriculum like any other school, with only a few additional Islamic subjects."

Secular-oriented

Phase three was the search for themes that were highlighted based on the patterns identified. With the help of the tool at whimsical.com, the following thematic map represents the initial themes developed, as well as the sub-themes and how they relate to the codes from the data collected.

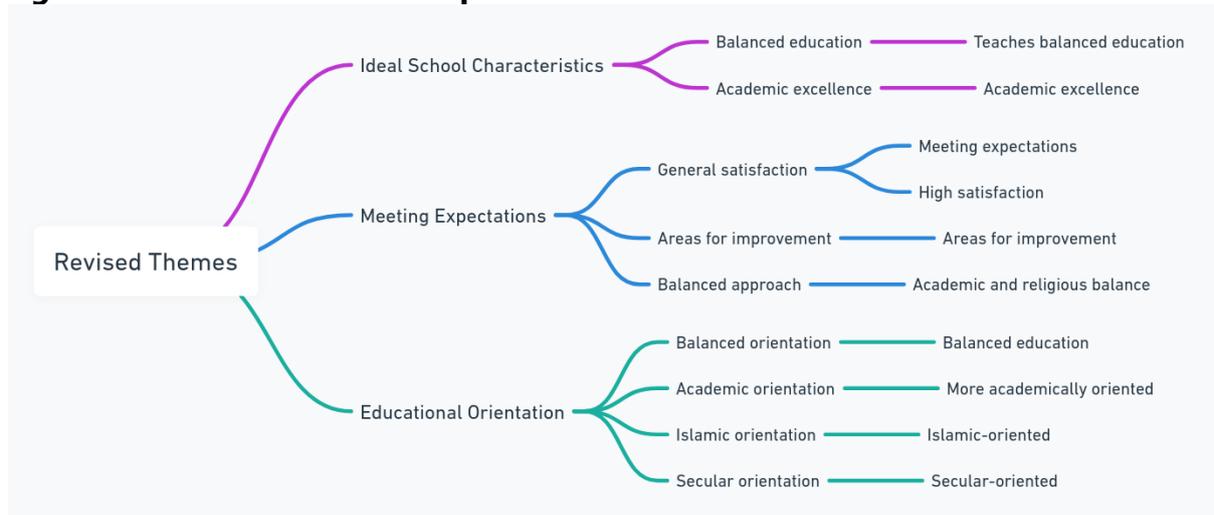
Figure 1: Initial thematic map



Reviewing the themes was the fourth stage. The coded extracts relevant to each initial theme were cross-referenced, checking for meaningful patterns. Next, the individual themes in relation to the data were considered for validity.

Fifth, the themes were finally defined and named for the sixth and last phase, which is writing the report by way of interpreting the qualitative findings. The revised thematic was then produced as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Revised thematic map



The holistic themes developed from the study were:

1. Ideal school characteristics
2. Meeting expectations
3. Educational orientation

Muslim parents' expectations for an ideal school are in line with their beliefs and principles, as evinced in eight out of the fourteen answers for the first question, four being good teaching/values/discipline while two advocated for "balanced education". One respondent stated, "As a Muslim, an ideal school for my children, of course, it should be an Islamic school to learn Qur'an and the Sunnah (i.e. Prophet Muhammad's tradition) and the Arabic language... and also secular knowledge."

Coming into Wisdom Islamic School, the parents and guardians expressed their desire for good, balanced Islamic education. A parent of former high school students mentioned, "I expected that, before enrolling my child here, balanced education – between Islamic and secular education."

As for the perceived educational orientation: four parents viewed Wisdom Islamic School to be more Islamic; four, more secular; the rest, balanced. Two comments from the focus group discussion can be highlighted. One mother shared,

"Half because when my child was in elementary, he would share about academics and share about Islamic, about *Hadith* (i.e. report from Prophet Muhammad). And the one in kinder would share, 'Mommy such-and-such thing is actually *Haram* (i.e. prohibited in Islam).'" Another said, "I would say 50:50... *Alhamdulillah* (praise be to Allah), my child would question about Islamic... He would even teach me about Islam."

DISCUSSION

Muslim scholars have explained Islam as the way of life wherein followers are ordained “to submit to Allah by worshipping Him alone; and to surrender to Him in obedience; and to keep away from idolatry” (Abdul-Wahid, 2015). Muslims go about their lives knowing their purpose in life is to worship Allah without any partner, as per Verse 56 of Chapter 51 in the Qur’an, “And I (i.e. Allah) did not create the *jinn*s and humans except to worship Me” (*The Noble Qur’ān*, 1999). That being said, the life of a Muslim is not restricted to what many refer to as “religious duties”. Rather, Verse 201 of the 2nd Chapter in the Noble Qur’ān (1999) relays the all-embracing supplication, “Our Lord! Give us in this world that which is good and in the Hereafter that which is good, and save us from the torment of the Fire!” That sought-after goodness can be achieved with the proper knowledge that directs one to the correct speech and action. Muslims have been provided a plethora of religious proofs indicating the virtue of knowledge, among them is Verse 9 of Chapter 39 in the Noble Qur’ān (1999), “Say: ‘Are those who know equal to those who know not?’ It is only men of understanding who will remember (i.e. get a lesson from Allah's Signs and Verses).”

It is no wonder then, that many Muslim parents and guardians feel the immensity of their responsibility towards their children in ensuring the right learning environment, explaining the findings in this study with regard to the concept of an ideal school. Sending their offsprings to Wisdom Islam School, parents hoped for an institution that can help equip young Muslim learners with knowledge that can lead them to success in this worldly life and in the Hereafter. One parent put it nicely,

“My expectation was that Wisdom Islamic School would be an excellent learning institution for Muslim students, where authentic Islamic knowledge is taught in accordance with the Qur’an and the Sunnah; and very good, if not excellent, secular knowledge is taught.”

Compare it with the Vision of Wisdom Islamic School (2017):

“Our vision is to see a learned and prosperous society that adheres to the authentic teachings of Islam where members are ideal individuals and groups who please Allah wholeheartedly, live a pure Islamic life in this world, and aspire to attain eternal peace and success in the Hereafter.”

It is apparent that Muslim parents intrinsically would look for a school that give the best of both worlds, Wisdom Islamic School being an example of one that can meet parents’ expectations based on the results. Even for the fourth question asked during data collection, the feedback was more from an Islamic point of view to address preparations for worldly challenges. A mother replied during the focus group discussion,

“This question depends on the age of the child, especially for us, we have young ones. Of course, when they go out of their homes they see – for example in Christmas times – they see the Christmas decorations outside and they would say, ‘I want that,’ right? As a parent, that's where you'll stand upon what is right and how would you explain to your child. And also, the school as well: the

explanation for the teachings of the school would also help the students set their minds that I cannot do that, I cannot partake in that.”

The use of the English language as the medium of instruction for most of the subjects at Wisdom Islamic School was viewed positively by several respondents. One parent remarked,

“First of all, we use the international language, like English, as our mother tongue in school and especially in our religion. And we have also connections with other countries where we can send our students, God-willing, when they finish their Senior High.”

As a private Islamic integrated school, Wisdom Islamic School gave the impression that students are being nurtured with both Islamic and secular knowledge. There is, therefore, an indication that private Islamic schools in the Philippines can be a source for balanced education. How important is this? This requires briefly going back in history for a clearer picture of the context.

Latif (2014) reported how the Muslim Filipinos addressed education concerns throughout the archipelago’s past, until the five classifications of Madrasah institutions: weekend Madrasah, formal private Madrasah, standard private Madrasah, special Qur’an memorization Madrasah, and *Toril* (i.e. boarding school) Madrasah. Despite the secularist nature of the Republic of the Philippines, there are initiatives from the government to tackle issues related to Islamic education. According to another study (Lantong, 2018), there exists a dichotomy in the educational system in the Philippines – the distinction between the western secular education and the Islamic “*madrassa*” system – one that has produced Muslim intellectuals varying in their degree of Islamic adeptness and identity. Relative weaknesses stem from public and private sector endeavors to address the educational needs of Muslims in the Philippines. With the perceived underlying problems of inadequate government support, poor management and curriculum, Lantong pointed to the review of the relevance of Islamic epistemology. Acknowledging the theory of knowledge in Islam, based on the divine revelation, he examined its implication on Islamic education in the Philippines, with suggestions to Muslim educators and school administrators to revise their PVMGO. Lantong further suggested re-examining curricula to ensure inclusiveness of Islamic principles that in actuality advocate the betterment of Muslims from a worldly perspective as well as the spiritual standpoint, a convincing recommendation to those in charge of Islamic education. It is private Islamic schools like Wisdom Islamic School that strive to answer the call to go back to the roots. This is consistent with the narration of Prophet Muhammad where he said, “Indeed Allāh has prescribed proficiency and benevolence in every thing.” This Hadith was related by Imam Muslim (Abū ‘Iyād, 2019).

A school giving the impression of balanced education, yet experiencing transferring out of students, especially after Junior High School (JHS) completion (i.e. Grade 10), may denote other reasons and factors – another study in itself. It may be that students entering into the Senior High School (SHS) level prefer other strands within the Academic track not being offered at Wisdom Islamic School, such as the

Accountancy, Business and Management (ABM) Strand, or Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Strand, or Humanities and Social Science (HUMSS) Strand. Or, perhaps, some students prefer a different track altogether: Arts and Design; Sports; and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood. Wisdom Islamic School currently offers only the General Academic Strand (GAS) with the contention that its Senior High School graduates should acquire a broad array of skills and competencies whilst possessing knowledge of fundamental Islamic principles. This unique selling point might require more aggressive marketing techniques to captivate the interest of parents as well as their children. Another possible reason for this occurrence is the lack of students' resilience to complete their SHS years at Wisdom Islamic School, particularly with the DepEd SHS Voucher Program that subsidizes qualified SHS learners. Perhaps they wish to try another learning environment, where there are fewer religious restrictions or where the facilities and faculty are superior. Perhaps the thought of graduating at an esteemed school outweighs the value they attach to Islamic knowledge.

For the school administrators, the abovementioned explanations need thorough investigations. The findings are positive in that the parents' impression of the school as balanced can be circulated to attract others prioritizing a promising mix between Islamic and secular teachings. However, it leaves the question of why there are few SHS students very much unanswered. The lowest rating recorded during the interviews with regard to meeting expectations was, "Seven [out of ten] because my child did not meet what I expected him to be." Another said, "Seven [out of ten]. Of course, they teach about Islam, they learn Arabic. *Alhamdulillah* (praise be to Allah), they can read Qur'an but not that much [fluently]." These sentiments might be shared by more parents and guardians but, owing to the relatively small sample size, the whole depiction cannot be retrieved.

Implications towards educational policies in the Philippines are more towards the reinforcement of long-established government initiatives. Samid (2022) cited DepEd Order (DO) No. 51, s. 2004, entitled "Standards Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private *MADARIS*", later amended by DO 40, s. 2011, laying the foundation for private Islamic schools to respond to the needs of Muslim Filipino students. DO 49, s. 2021 documents among the latest show of support from the Philippine government with the title, "Revised Guidelines on the Grant of Financial Assistance to Private Madaris Adopting the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum". Additionally, there are regular exertions from the Private Education Assistance Committee (2017) to train and orient the administrative and teaching staff on policies, standards, strategies, and various other topics valuable to any attendee. These are already in place for private Islamic schools to capitalize on. What might be more pressing is the need to clarify to ill-informed *madrasah* school heads and community members the benefits of integrating Islamic education through the DepEd (Samid, 2022). Wisdom Islamic School may stand as a testament to the concept of balanced

education – education that is safe from the implicit “de-Islamization” feared by many Muslims.

As this is a case study on one institution, balanced education might not be prevalent in other private Islamic schools in the country. For just one workshop held in Cebu City from the 27th to the 29th of November 2023, seventeen school administrators were invited from seven regions of the Philippines, each administrator representing his/her private *Madrasah* (Department of Education, 2023). The activity was under the theme, “Workshop on the Evaluation of Application Documents of Private *Madaris* for Financial Assistance for SY 2023-2024”, which is a manifestation of the government’s support to Islamic schools that comply with DepEd standards. There are, in fact, schools that are not included in this program, either due to their adoption of curricula unsanctioned by the government or their inclusion in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), which has its own regional executive department, the Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education (MBHTE). To elaborate, each institution can vary in educational orientation, some more Islamic or secular than others. This orientation is driven by a school’s PVMGO in addition to the stakeholders’ enforcement of these ideals. From the article of Abdul-Wahid (2016), when it comes to Islamic methodologies, Muslim groups conduct themselves according to their beliefs and understanding of the Qur’an and the Sunnah, as indicated in Prophet Muhammad’s statement, “My ummah (i.e. nation) will divide into 73 sects,” the “Saved Sect” being those who are upon that which the Prophet and his Companions were upon. This explains why some Islamic schools would uphold certain Islamic legislations as opposed to others. The mission statement of Wisdom Islamic School (2017) is:

“Wisdom Islamic School aspires to be a leading institution for providing quality education and authentic Islamic teachings based on the Qur’an and the Sunnah, upon the understanding of the Righteous Predecessors, as well as other relevant curricula for a well-balanced life, development and success.”

Six answers from parents acknowledge this distinction in the use of words like *‘Aqidah* (i.e. creed), authentic Islamic knowledge, and methodology. One answered the last interview question saying, “There are differences because what Wisdom Islamic School always teaches is about the methodology of Islam. They really help the children to learn Islam.”

Adebayo (2020) relayed a germane observation, underscoring how the Philippine educational system compels parents to decide between schools, be it private or public, passing the accountability of educational quality to the chosen school. This is to a greater degree among Muslim parents who prioritize teachings that coincide with the correct interpretation of the Qur’an and the Sunnah. Abū ‘Iyād (2019) reported the impactful sermon wherein Prophet Muhammad advised his Companions, as narrated by Abū Najīh al-‘Irbād bin Sāriyah, who said that the Prophet said,

“I counsel you to fear Allah and to give absolute obedience even if a slave becomes your leader. Verily he among you who lives [long] will see great

controversy, so you must keep to my sunnah and to the sunnah of the rightly-guided Khalifahs [i.e. caliphs] - bite onto it with your molars. Beware of newly invented matters, for every invented matter is an innovation and every innovation is a going astray, and every going astray is in Hell-fire."

An answer from the focus group discussion reiterates this. When asked if other private Islamic schools are similar to this case, the participant replied, "No, because in another Islamic school, they participate in events that Wisdom Islamic School does not, which are impermissible." The administrators abide by trusted scholars' verdicts on the permissibility or impermissibility of things. Despite the enforcement of Islamic legislations, that same parent described the educational orientation as "half," meaning half-Islamic and half-secular.

The Private Education Assistance Committee (2017) has been at the forefront of orienting private school administrators, whether Christian or Muslim, to align curriculum maps to their individual PVMGO. In doing so, teachers conduct their lessons, taking into consideration religious and cultural values. As one interviewee mentioned, "Even secular subjects, we integrate Islamic teachings also." Evidently, future researchers should study the case of multiple private Islamic schools across several regions for richer data.

Expanding the diversity of the sample is, likewise, recommended. Parents and guardians are the primary decision-makers of children's basic schooling, so their say in this regard was deemed most relevant. In the Noble Qur'an (1999), Verse 6 of Chapter "At-Tahrīm" states, "O you who believe! Ward off from yourselves and your families a Fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stones..." Insights from teachers can also be helpful, noting the possibility of bias if the research participants are from the subject school, thus suggesting the inclusion of former teachers. Muslim community leaders, such as Imams of mosques, may also be considered; while Muslim professionals, such as doctors and engineers, can present thought-provoking views.

Gathering longitudinal data, whereby the impact on students' educational orientation in such schools is observed over a period, can be beneficial for additional research. Definitely, this would necessitate lengthy, exhaustive studies, diving into current approaches and may even invite quantitative data analysis. Aspers and Corte (2021) noted the testability on larger samples compared with qualitative research, plus the arguably more "scientific" procedures employed.

It is also recommended to analyze curriculum maps, among other documents not just the curriculum, because curriculum maps are derived from the curriculum, unpacked using Kto12 standards and competencies and aligned with the school PVMGO (Private Education Assistance Committee, 2017). Teachers then design their lesson plans in accordance with those curriculum maps. Studying these curriculum maps can portray how integrative a teacher can, for instance, explain English comprehension using Islamic texts, paving the way for schools to formulate strategies towards balanced education.

CONCLUSION

The role of private Islamic schools in the Philippines in helping shape the future of young Muslims Filipinos simply cannot be ignored. Muslim communities are obliged to be the best of peoples through enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong – an injunction requiring knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge precedes speech and action. Knowledge distinguishes light from darkness, truth from falsehood. Knowledge sets individuals and communities apart, elevating them by Allah’s Permission. Wisdom Islamic School in Davao City, Philippines, can be an exemplar in spreading beneficial knowledge. The findings of this case study reveal positive perceptions from parents and guardians of both current and former students, who voiced their views on their assessment of an ideal school, how Wisdom Islamic School meets expectations, and how it offers balanced education. The vision of aligning secular subjects to Islamic values and principles is a foreseeable one, demanding collaborative efforts from Islamic school stakeholders. Whereas other studies delved into Islamic education on the national and regional levels, or focused on traditional *madrasahs* and their respective programs or offerings in public schools, research on private Islamic schools in the Philippines remains scarce. This masks the documented initiatives from the government over the years, working with Muslim educators and experts to ensure Muslim children are given quality education in private institutions. Researchers, policymakers, school administrators and teachers seeking to uplift Islamic education in the country can take inspiration and guidance from this study with respect to school systems that cater to religious and worldly aims, setting measures to mitigate the limitations mentioned. Overall, in this research, the perception from the participants supports Wisdom Islamic School as a source of balanced education – one of the numerous private Islamic institutions that can assist in rectifying the condition of Muslim communities.

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