

# **Madrasah – Focused Service – Learning, a Platform for Promoting Understanding, Tolerance and Peace: An Experiential Reflection of Selected Alumni Employed in the Middle East**

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## **Abstract**

A Madrasah is a school that inculcates Arabic values and culture. It is part and parcel of the educational system in Islamic states.

In the Philippines, which has a Muslim population of at least 10 percent of its nearly 110 million population, particularly in the southern part of the country, the Madrasah, or Islamic educational program, while it was started a lot earlier by Arab missionaries and Malay adventurer, has been institutionalized in the Philippine educational system through the Department of Education only in the early years of the 21st century. The program is no longer confined in Mindanao, the southern part of the country, but all across the Philippine archipelago where the Muslim population has spread.

The Department developed what it called as a “Road Map” designed to implement a comprehensive Muslim basic education program for the educational development of Filipino Muslims.

The road map has the following program thrusts, among others:

- Development and institutionalization of Madrasah education;
- Upgrading the quality of secular education in formal elementary and secondary schools serving Muslim students; and
- Development and implementation of alternative learning system for Filipino Muslim out-of-school youth.

In Bacolod City, where the researchers are based, the Madrasah educational system was introduced in 2006 in six public schools.

With the implementation of the Madrasah program, the community, located in central Philippines where a great majority of the population are Christians, eventually took roots.

The lead researcher, a former faculty of the Communication program of a Catholic university who has been exposed to Service-Learning through

participation in international conferences, introduced Service-Learning into his Communication-based classes, including Journalism, Community Communication and Media and Society.

Upon learning of the existence of the Madrasah program, the Communication students initiated a literacy and peace-building Service-Learning program for Madrasah schoolchildren. Of particular concern to the class was how the students can contribute to efforts to bridge the divide among Christians and Muslims in the light of the escalation of violence in southern Philippines involving Muslim secessionist groups that resulted in creating more divide between Muslims and Christians. Many of whom have started to stereotype the ethnic group, not the small segment of secessionist, as associated to the culture of violence. The students, having learned of the value of tolerance and diversity, wanted to contribute in their own way to the bridging of the gap and promote that the conflict is not rooted in faith but in political and social persuasions.

Thus, the Madrasah-focused Service-Learning program of Communication students of a Catholic university took the pioneering steps to help build the bridge of friendship and understanding between the academic community with Catholic values and orientation and what was once an almost-isolated group, and a Muslim and ethnic minority community in the city.

The Madrasah Service-Learning program of the Communication students lasted from 2010 to 2017. During this period, students provided tutorials to the schoolchildren and taught them also health and personality development topics. For them, education and information lead to better understanding and acceptance of others. Parents, mostly mothers, were also part of the audience of the university students.

Eventually, as the university students graduated, a number of them found employment overseas.

Interestingly, contacts with some of the graduates, led to their testimonial how their Service-Learning activities in the Madrasah classroom and the Muslim community have helped a number of those working in the Middle East and Muslim countries adjust well to their new social and work settings.

These testimonial inspired the researchers to look into the effects of Madrasah-focused Service-Learning on those who found employment in Muslim countries in the Middle East, like Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

The study, conducted using online resources, looks into how the Service-Learning experience has helped them in their professional pursuits.

Specifically, the study explores how the S-L program helped them adjust to:

- Culture
- Faith
- Domestic Practices
- Work Ethic

At the same time, it provides study participant an opportunity to synthesize their initial experience during their student days in the context of their adjustments and tolerance of other people and their beliefs and practices.

More than these effects, the study explores the perception and appreciation of the S-L alumni on how their civic engagement during their student days has ingrained in them the values of understanding, embracing diversity and tolerance, development of respect for others and peace building – values which are being promoted globally, particularly by the United Nations and other organizations committed to international harmony, peace and development.

Key words: Madrasah Education, S-L for Peace and Tolerance.