A SUCCESS STORY: The Development of Islamic Studies Curriculum in South East Asia

Synopsis of the Presentation
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The aspiration to build a generation of future Ulama and Asatizah who are active participants and positive contributors to the Muslim society, the nation of Singapore, South East Asia and the whole world has been a concern of the Muslim community. As a result of a series of efforts towards this vision, Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS) and the Madrasah Community eventually initiated the Curriculum Development Project (CDP) in June 2001.

IQRA’ International Educational Foundation was appointed to develop a comprehensive, systematic and integrated curriculum package for Singapore Madrasah Community. This is a six-year project, which will be implemented in stages. Currently IQRA’ is monitoring the implementation of Primary three grade.

This paper introduces the framework that supports the vision of MUIS and Madrasah community. It is developed based on the Historical Background of Madrasah in Singapore as well as the Challenges Of The 21st Century. The processes and issues involved in the development of the required Islamic curriculum will be shared in this paper.

IQRA’ started the initial fact finding of the existing madrasah systems in Singapore. The unique context of the Madrasah is one of the main factors that are taken into consideration. The understanding of the current unique background of the different Madrasah in Singapore was derived from the several meetings held with the management and teachers of different madaris (plural of Madrasah) in Singapore. The processes and issues involved in the development of the required Islamic curriculum Based on this detailed study, IQRA’ proposed a Conceptual Design for the Curriculum Development Project of Singapore that constitutes the following 7 elements as shown in Figure 1, the Conceptual Design of Madrasah Curriculum (CDMC):

1 Philosophy
IQRA proposed that the educational philosophy of the Madrasah Education be based on the three principles. The following principles are recommended:

- An integrated effort to impart and acquire knowledge, skills and an internalisation of Islam based on the Quran and Sunnah in order to create a spiritually, intellectually and physically vibrant Muslim community with a clear understanding of Islamic worldview.
An integrated effort to impart an understanding of the modern world, and life’s skills needed to be ahead in this new competitive environment.

An integrated curriculum designed to impart awareness of the students’ responsibility as future religious leaders striving for excellence for one’s own self and society for the attainment of the best of this world and the life Hereafter.

Figure 1: CDMC Model

2 Goals (Desired Outcomes)
IQRA recommended the adoption of the four goals (desired outcomes). The outcomes outlined the qualities of the Asatizah and Ulama envisioned by the Muslim community. The qualities are as follows:

- Possess comprehensive religious knowledge.
- Be knowledgeable and cognizant in both religious and worldly matters.
- Contribute to the betterment of the community.
- Be employable.
3 Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes state the observable behavioural change that will take place at the end of the schooling. The learning outcomes are:

- To bring about a positive behavioural change and inspire students to become firm believers and imbibe the spirit of Taqwa in every day life.
- To be active and responsible partners in human endeavours participating in community, national and international life.
- To be able to communicate with other human beings the message of Islam in an informed and logical manner.
- To strive for excellence in every educational activity.
- To develop the ability to think critically.
- To develop a love for learning and knowledge.
- To develop a good practicing Muslim who is a committed citizen yet global in his endeavours and contributions.

4 Subject/Course Structure

The subject/course structure refers to the selected subjects or course offerings based upon the framework of the curriculum. The subjects/course structure are designed to be integrated so that students are given opportunities to acquire knowledge of Din of Allah (Religious Knowledge), knowledge of the things created by Allah (Academic Subjects) with emphasis on language acquisition at each grade level (Figure 2). It is inclusive and flexible so that each Madrasah can adopt the curriculum according to its needs and resources.

![Figure 2: The Subject/Course Structure Design](image-url)

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5 Adaptive Methodological Approach (ADAM)

ADAM is a model that is developed to ensure the translation of the conceptual design into practical realities at the classroom level. It explains the interplay of four important components that take place in delivering the subjects/courses outlined in the syllabus. The approach provides a guideline for the delivery of quality teaching and ensuring that all aspects of learning are considered. It is characterized by a flexible yet focused approach towards teaching and learning to ensure optimum results.

The Student
The student determines the extent of adaptation to be made. Since he or she is the central focus in the overall education goal, all aspects or domain of his or her development, styles of learning, level of interest should be considered in the development and implementation of the lesson.

The Teacher
Teachers play an important role in ADAM. They will use a variety of instructional strategies from discovery learning to direct instructions in planning and executing the lessons each day. The result of such teaching-learning environment is true learning experience, which manifests in the development of thinking skills in the students. This approach will help students develop the ability to use the transferred knowledge in new situations.

The Constant Component
The Constant Components are those aspects of the curriculum, which give focus and direction to the planning, development, and implementation of the curriculum. This includes development of the core values or 3 I’s (Iman, Islam & Ihsan) and the transference of core content areas to be taught to the students at each grade level.

The Variable Component
The Variable Components include the subjects, concepts and skills included in the instructions. It also refers to the teaching and learning strategies (coined as Instructional Strategies). The Instructional Strategies include both the product and process oriented learning and teaching. These instructional strategies are subject matter bound and should be selected accordingly. Various instructional strategies are recommended throughout the curriculum. Apart from the Instructional Strategies the variable component also includes the entire learning environment in the classroom.

Figure 3 represents the interplay of above components in the teaching and learning situations.
6 Evaluation
Evaluation includes the formal and informal assessment tools.

7 Implementation issues
i. The following are recommendations for effective implementation of the curriculum:

1. Medium of Instruction
   English is proposed to be the Medium of Instruction for Primary level and Arabic is proposed to be the Medium of instruction for Secondary level. However, the Madrasah have the choice to opt for another language depending on its context and needs.
2. **Streaming Issues**
Streaming is proposed for the students at the secondary level in order to cater to the different needs of the different group of students.

3. **Curriculum Time**
It is recommended that the schooling hours be extended and standardized. This is to give students additional learning inputs to help them in their overall character development.

4. **Educational Progression**
Educational Pathway for the Madrasah students to the higher institutions and universities is introduced. But in this project three levels of educational progression should be maintained. These are:

   - Primary School - P1 – P6
   - Secondary School - S1 – S4/S5
   - Pre University - PU1 – PU2

   i. Strategies for the incorporation of English, Maths & Science (EMS) and Mother Tongue subject (MT) into the Madrasah curriculum are also highlighted.

   ii. Total adoption further implies the need to use the following recommended strategies:

This Conceptual Design provided IQRA’ the guidelines to start the actual design and development work for the required curriculum. There are three phases for the design and development of the curriculum for each level or grade. These are as follows:-

- Curriculum Design
- Production of the Materials
- Human Resource Development

**Phase one: Curriculum Design**
Based on the Conceptual Design, IQRA’ has to produce the Syllabus for four religious subjects proposed by IQRA’ (Qur’anic Studies, Sirah and Hadith, Aqidah, Fiqh and Akhlaq and Islamic Social Studies) and Arabic Language with the consultation of the Singapore Madrasah Community and MUIS.

**Phase two: Production of the Materials**
Based on the syllabus IQRA’ has to produce the textbook, workbook and teachers manual for each recommended subject (Qur’anic Studies, Sirah and Hadith, Aqidah, Fiqh and Akhlaq and Islamic Social Studies and Arabic Language) with the consultation of the Singapore Madrasah Community and MUIS.
Phase three: Human Resource Development

IQRA’ believes that the quality of teachers is a critical factor in the future of the Madrasah; the training and professional development of the Asatizah is one of the determining factors in the successful implementation of the revised curriculum. Therefore IQRA’ has to prepare the Training Need Analysis, Competency Gap Analysis and the Training Road Map for the respected Astizah. IQRA’ designed and conducted special courses for the teachers to develop them in order to carry on the successful implementation of the new Curriculum.

Alhamdulillah, the project has already reached to the implementation stage. Madrash are using the curriculum for their Primary one, two and three cohort. Teachers and pupils are excited using this new curriculum, textbooks and workbooks in their classrooms. There is overwhelmed response from the madrasah community. The developments of the Curriculum for remaining levels/grades are in the process. This whole project will be completed in 2007, Insha Allah.

Many South East Asian Nations Philippine, Malaysia and Brunei have shown their interest in the similar projects. I firmly believe that the community in USA can also be benefited from this success story.

May Allah swt accept our efforts, grant us the courage to do more and grant us the best rewards. Aameen.

Acknowledgement: