

Madrasah Development and Governance in Ma'had Tawi-Tawi: Institutional Policies and Governmental Transitions Over Time

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Abstract

Research on Islamic education in the Philippines has primarily focused on conflict resolution and curriculum integration. At the same time, limited attention has been given to the evolution of institutional governance amid political transitions, particularly in peripheral *Muslim*-majority regions such as Tawi-Tawi. This study addresses this gap by examining the historical development and governance of *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi, the first Islamic educational institution in the province, within the broader framework of national education policy and political transformation. Employing a Systematic Review and Bibliometric Analysis, this research maps global scholarly discourse on madrasa development, governance, and policy alignment. From 600 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2015 and 2025, 90 relevant studies were selected based on peer-review status, English language, and thematic relevance, and analyzed using VOSviewer. The analysis identified four dominant thematic clusters: policy impact, historical development, governance transitions, and leadership dynamics. The findings indicate that *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi's sustainability is closely linked to adaptive leadership and its ability to integrate Islamic educational traditions with national curriculum standards. Nevertheless, constitutional constraints related to the separation of church and state continue to limit direct government funding for religious schools. The Bangsamoro Organic Law, however, provides greater institutional resilience through regional autonomy and legal recognition. Policy recommendations include strengthening intergovernmental coordination, enhancing teacher capacity, and formalizing the integration of curriculum. Future studies should explore comparative governance models across the Bangsamoro region to inform sustainable Islamic education policies.

Keywords

Institutional Policies; Madrasa Development; Madrasa; Philippines Government

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1. INTRODUCTION

The word madrasa (Arabic: *مدرسة*) means school or place of study (Brooks, 2017; Martinez-Vazquez et al., 2021). It usually refers to Islamic schools where students learn Arabic, the Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh (Islamic Law), and other religious subjects (Samud, 2022a; Sali & Marasigan, 2020). In some countries, madrasa also teach secular subjects like math, science, and history. Meanwhile, the word *Ma'had* (Arabic: *مآهد*) refers to an academy or institute. A *Ma'had* is akin to an Islamic college or seminary that



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offers advanced religious education. These institutions focus on deeper learning in subjects such as Qur'anic sciences, Hadith, Islamic Law, and the Arabic language, and they serve as centers of advanced Islamic knowledge (Lantong, 2018; Milligan, 2020).

Islamic education has long been part of the cultural and religious life of *Muslim* communities in the Philippines, particularly in the southern regions of the country (Othman & Yaakub, 2025) (Din, 2025) (Purmini, 2024). Nationally, the Philippine government has made efforts to recognize and support madrasah education through policies such as the DepEd's Madrasa Education Program, which integrates Islamic teachings into the national education framework while respecting religious freedom (Ekawati, 2019) (Umbar & Ridlo, 2020). These initiatives aim to promote inclusive education and cultural sensitivity, especially in areas with significant *Muslim* populations. A more localized and empowered approach to Islamic education is evident in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in *Muslim* Mindanao (BARMM), where the regional government has greater authority to shape educational policies that reflect the needs and values of its people (Endress, 2016). Within BARMM, the province of Tawi-Tawi stands out as a key area with a deep-rooted Islamic identity. As one of the earliest centers of Islam in the Philippines and home to various madaris and Islamic institutions, Tawi-Tawi plays a crucial role in the ongoing development of Islamic education in the Bangsamoro region (Sagut, 2022) (Samid, 2022b).

The word Bangsamoro comes from two words: "*bangsa*," which means nation or people, and "*Moro*," a name given by the Spanish to *Muslim* Filipinos (Sattar, 2023). The Bangsamoro people are native *Muslims* living in Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan (Halmai, 2017). During Spanish rule, the Moros bravely resisted colonization to protect their land, culture, and especially their Islamic religion (Khamis, 2022). They did not accept Spanish control and kept their faith strong despite many battles. For them, Islamic education was very important because it taught the beliefs, values, and way of life of Islam. Madaris (Islamic schools) were built to teach children how to read the Qur'an and learn how to live as good *Muslims* (Tana, 2023) (Yusoph & Ali, 2022) (FERRER, 2018). Even when most of the Philippines was colonized, Islamic education stayed strong and continued until the country became independent in 1946 (Lindsey & Steiner, 2025).

Over time, the Philippine government's relationship with the Moro *Muslims* changed, especially in recognizing and supporting madaris in Mindanao. During President Marcos Sr.'s term, the Tripoli Agreement was signed in 1976 with the help of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). This agreement recognized the rights of the Moro people, including their religious and cultural practices, and supported Islamic education (Bayot, 2018). Then, when President Corazon Aquino took office, she continued the peace efforts and signed the Jeddah Accord in 1987 (Candelaria, 2021), again demonstrating her support for Islamic education. In 1989, her administration established the Autonomous Region in *Muslim* Mindanao (ARMM), granting the region autonomy over its own schools, including madaris (PEACE et al., n.d.).

Next, under President Fidel Ramos, the 1996 Final Peace Agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) gave ARMM even more power, which helped madaris grow further (Galeriana & Ragandang, 2018). However, during the Presidency of Joseph Estrada, conflict returned. In 2000, he declared an "all-out war" against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which harmed peace talks and also affected schools, including madaris (Perez, 2021) (Samid, 2022c). After that, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo tried to restore peace. She supported talks that led to the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain in 2008. Although the Supreme Court stopped it, the agreement still showed the government's support for Moro identity and Islamic education (Shahab, 2021).

Later, when President Benigno Aquino III took office, peace talks made significant progress. He helped sign the Framework Agreement in 2012 and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in 2014 (Abdulkarim & Suud, 2020) (Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2024). These agreements prepared

the way for creating the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in *Muslim* Mindanao (BARMM), which gave Moro people full control over their education system, including madaris (Boquet, 2017) (Anwar, 2017). Finally, under President Rodrigo Duterte, the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was passed in 2018, officially creating BARMM (Jakhrani & Sultana, 2024). This law gave the region full authority to manage its own education, making madaris an even stronger part of Bangsamoro's future (Jakhrani & Sultana, 2024).

The Philippine government recognizes madrasa as a vital institution for *Muslim* education in Mindanao while maintaining the constitutional separation of church and state (Samud, 2022d). Through legal frameworks, integration programs, and financial assistance, the state ensures that madrasas can function effectively without violating secular policies (Atisa et al., 2021).

The Philippine Constitution plays a crucial role in the operation of *Ma'had* institutions in Mindanao, which are Islamic higher learning centers that focus on advanced education and leadership training. The constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and upholds the separation of church and state, which influences how these institutions function. (Atisa et al., 2021) (Ahmed, 2025)," and Article III, Section 5 affirms that "No law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. "These provisions ensure that while the government cannot establish or fund religious institutions, including *Ma'had*, it also cannot prevent their existence as part of religious freedom. Thus, *Ma'had* institutions must operate independently or under private Islamic organizations, although they can align with government education standards(M. H. Syafii & Gusti, 2025) (H. Syafii, Alaldaya, et al., 2025).

Additionally, government policies, such as DepEd Order No. 51 (2004), have enabled Islamic educational institutions to integrate secular subjects, including math, science, and English, into their curricula to meet national education standards. This helps students from *Ma'had* institutions pursue higher education in recognized universities. Some *Ma'had* institutions even seek accreditation from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to offer formal degrees in Islamic Studies and Arabic. An Example is Mindanao State University, which collaborates with local *Ma'had* institutions to offer Islamic Studies programs.

While the Philippine government cannot directly fund *Ma'had* institutions, it continues to support Islamic education by recognizing these institutions, encouraging the integration of secular subjects, allowing CHED accreditation, and permitting foreign and private funding to support their operations. The Bangsamoro Education Code (2021) further strengthens the position of *Ma'had* institutions under the BARMM education system, supporting their development through private funding while the BARMM government helps with curriculum development.

In this way, the Philippine government ensures that *Ma'had* institutions in Mindanao can thrive, balancing the principles of church-state separation with the need for religious education in the region⁴¹. In this context, *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi is known as the first Islamic higher education institution in the province. It stands as a symbol of religious scholarship and leadership development in the southern Philippines. Founded in 1980, the *Ma'had* was established by *Ustadz* Ibrahim Tiblani Khairal, a respected Islamic teacher from Jolo, Sulu, and was inspired by his goal of providing advanced Islamic education to the youth of Tawi-Tawi. *Ustadz* Khairal built the institution to prepare future *Muslim* scholars, teachers, and religious leaders.

At a time when access to Islamic education was limited in the area, *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi filled a very important need. It offered Qur'anic studies, Hadith, Arabic, and Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) as the foundation of its curriculum. The school used traditional Islamic teaching methods, but it also slowly began to include lessons that would help students meet the needs of modern *Muslim* communities⁴⁸. The founding of *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi was part of a larger effort to strengthen Islamic education in the Bangsamoro region, making sure that religious identity was preserved while also promoting learning and critical thinking.

Although *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi operates privately and is not funded by the government, it is still recognized under the legal and educational frameworks of the Philippine government and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in *Muslim* Mindanao (BARMM). These frameworks enable religious schools to operate under private or Islamic organizations, in accordance with the Philippine Constitution's rule on the separation of church and state (1987 Philippine Constitution, Article II, Sec. 6. At the same time, national law such as Presidential Decree No.1083 and Republic Act No.11054 show that the government respect the value of Islamic education in areas where most people are *Muslim*.

Today, *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi continues to grow and influence many Islamic teachers and leaders in the province. It remains not only a place of learning but also a lasting reminder of *Ustadz* Ibrahim Tiblani Khairal's efforts to provide Filipino *Muslims* with the religious and intellectual tools they need in life, especially in the Sulu Archipelago.

This study aims to examine the development and governance of madrasahs at *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi by focusing on institutional policies and the influence of governmental transitions over time. It explores how Philippine government policies have affected the development and formal recognition of madrasah and *Ma'had* institutions, particularly in Mindanao. The study also examines the impact of political transitions, including changes in national leadership, on the governance structure and policy environment of Islamic education in the Bangsamoro region. Additionally, it identifies the key institutional policies that have shaped the educational structure and curriculum of *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi throughout its historical development. Furthermore, this research investigates the role of local authorities and stakeholders in participating in and influencing governance processes and decision-making at *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi.

The education policy of *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi follows a structured Islamic curriculum that is carefully tailored to meet the needs of *Muslim* learners in the region. The institution offers elementary education from Grade 1 to Grade 6, with two graduation points—one after Grade 4 and another upon completion of Grade 6—to mark the students' progress in their foundational Islamic learning. After the elementary level, students continue to the *Thanawiya* stage (Islamic high school) for two years, followed by the *Mutawassita* level (intermediate level) for another two years of advanced Islamic studies. To accommodate students who may be enrolled in public schools during weekdays, *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi holds its regular classes exclusively on Saturdays and Sundays. This weekend-based schedule allows learners to receive consistent Islamic education without conflict with their formal secular schooling, reflecting the institution's flexible and inclusive approach to religious learning.

Islamic education has historically played a crucial role in the cultural and spiritual life of *Muslim* communities in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Nevertheless, prior research has infrequently examined the adaptation of institutional governance in Islamic schools to political transitions and decentralization reforms. This study addresses the gap by analyzing the establishment and administration of *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi—the first Islamic educational institution in the province—within the context of Philippine education policy and governmental transformation.

The role of Islamic education has historically evolved in tandem with national political developments, including the Tripoli Agreement, the establishment of ARMM, and the enactment of the Bangsamoro Organic Law. These milestones incrementally enhanced the autonomy of *Muslim*-majority regions in administering their educational institutions while preserving the constitutional separation of church and state. In this setting, *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi demonstrates institutional adaptation by integrating religious and secular education while maintaining its independence from direct government sponsorship.

This study utilizes Institutional Theory and Hybrid Governance Theory as its theoretical framework to analyze these dynamics. These frameworks elucidate how Islamic educational institutions maintain legitimacy and sustainability by harmonizing traditional values with national policy frameworks, thereby ensuring resilience during periods of political and institutional transition.

2. METHODS

This study used a systematic Review and Bibliometric Analysis (SRL Bibliometric) method to understand how madrasah development, institutional policies, and government transitions are discussed in global academic research (Asari et al., 2024; Zafrullah et al., 2024). This study utilized a Systematic Review and Bibliometric Analysis (SRL Bibliometric) methodology to examine the governance and advancement of Islamic educational institutions, specifically *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi, within the wider academic and policy context. This method was selected for its ability to provide a comprehensive and impartial mapping of global research trends, while simultaneously integrating theoretical and empirical data from diverse contexts. The bibliometric method offers quantitative visualization of research clusters, highlighting prevailing themes, emerging issues, and intellectual connections. At the same time, the systematic review facilitates qualitative interpretation that links these global insights to the localized context of *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi. Integrating both guarantees methodological rigor and reduces researcher bias by merging quantifiable data with critical analysis.

Data were sourced from the Scopus database, chosen for its esteemed credibility and extensive coverage of peer-reviewed papers. Search terms included "Government Transition," "Institutional Policies," and "Madrasa Development." From an initial pool of 600 papers (2015–2025), inclusion criteria were applied: (1) relevance to education, governance, or Islamic institutional policy; (2) publication in English; (3) journal-level peer review; and (4) availability of full text. Ninety pivotal publications were selected for comprehensive qualitative analysis and bibliometric visualization using VOSviewer, following an examination of their titles and abstracts.

A quality assessment method was conducted on the 90 selected studies to ensure the reliability of the findings. Each publication was assessed according to three criteria: (1) methodological rigor (clarity of design and data analysis), (2) contextual pertinence to Islamic education governance, and (3) citation impact within the study domain. Studies with inadequate methodological transparency or thematic relevance were removed. This procedure guaranteed that the final dataset embodied both academic rigor and conceptual significance.

The study produced three categories of visualizations: (1) co-occurrence networks to illustrate keyword relationships; (2) overlay maps to depict subject evolution over time; and (3) density maps to emphasize research concentration locations. The visualizations facilitated the thematic synthesis of data, connecting worldwide research paths with the particular institutional experience of *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi.

Although the study utilized secondary data and therefore did not require ethical clearance, it still faced certain limitations. For example, relying solely on Scopus may have excluded local or non-English studies. Additionally, bibliometric tools measure the frequency of topic appearance, rather than the depth of discussion. Despite these challenges, the method provided a strong and structured way to place *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi's local experience into the wider global academic context. The findings showed that the challenges and successes of *Ma'had* reflect broader issues in Islamic education, offering valuable insights for other madaris in similar multicultural and developing settings.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Figure 1 shows a keyword co-occurrence network generated using VOSviewer. It illustrates how academic keywords related to madrasas, education, innovation, and development co-occur in research published between 2016 and 2024. Each circle represents a keyword, and the size of the circle shows how often the keyword appears in the literature. Lines connecting the circles indicate the frequency with which two keywords are mentioned together in the same study. Additionally, the keywords are grouped into color-coded clusters that highlight related topics and research trends. At the center of the map, common keywords such as "innovation," "education," "future," and "sustainable development" stand out, suggesting that many researchers focus on how educational institutions, including madrasas,

support long-term social and technological progress.

Upon closer examination of the color-coded clusters, the red cluster includes keywords such as "madrasas," "case," and "Islamic study," indicating that many studies focus on Islamic education in specific regions. Meanwhile, the blue and teal clusters contain terms such as "sustainable development," "regulation," and "higher education," indicating increased interest in connecting traditional education systems to national policy. Furthermore, the orange and pink clusters feature terms such as "economic growth," "innovation," and "systematic literature review," indicating research that looks ahead and utilizes data to measure the role of education in national progress. In contrast, the green cluster focuses on terms such as "effectiveness," "Ghana," and "family," which may reflect studies on how education affects communities, especially in African regions. Lastly, the grey and purple clusters include technical or health-related terms, such as "disease study" and "cardiovascular disease," suggesting that some research links education to the health and social sciences. Overall, the map shows that madrasas are now seen not only as religious institutions but also as key contributors to modern, inclusive, and future-ready education systems.

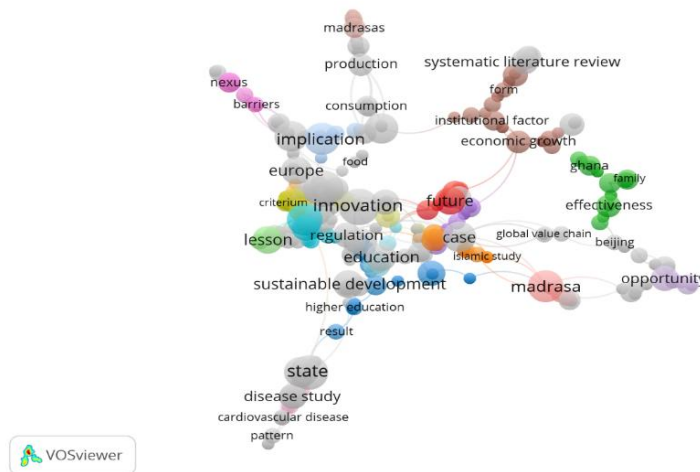


Figure 1. Keyword Co-occurrence Network Visualization of Madrasa-Related Research

Figure 2 illustrates the evolution of scholarly focus on madrasa-related research from 2016 to 2024. Each circle represents a keyword, and its color—from blue (older topics) to yellow (more recent)—indicates the average year the keyword appeared in the literature. The size of each circle shows how often the keyword is used. Common terms such as "innovation," "education," "sustainable development," and "regulation" appear frequently and serve as connections between different topics. These keywords are central in discussions about policy, development, and educational reform, showing their broad relevance. On the other hand, older keywords, such as "state," "disease study," and "cardiovascular disease," shown in blue, reflect earlier research interests that were more focused on health and governance.

Meanwhile, newer and emerging topics are represented in shades of green to yellow. Terms like "madrasa," "madrasas," "opportunity," and "Islamic study" suggest growing interest in how Islamic education fits into modern settings. These keywords are often linked to ideas such as "global value chain" and "case," indicating that researchers are beginning to view madrasas within broader conversations about globalization, reform, and development. Additionally, region-specific terms such as "Ghana," "Beijing," and "family" reflect the localized nature of these studies. At the same time, keywords such as "systematic literature review" and "economic growth" indicate a continuing interest in evaluation and research methods. Overall, the map suggests a shift from general or health-focused studies toward more focused, multidisciplinary research on innovation, sustainability, and educational transformation—especially involving traditional institutions like madrasas.

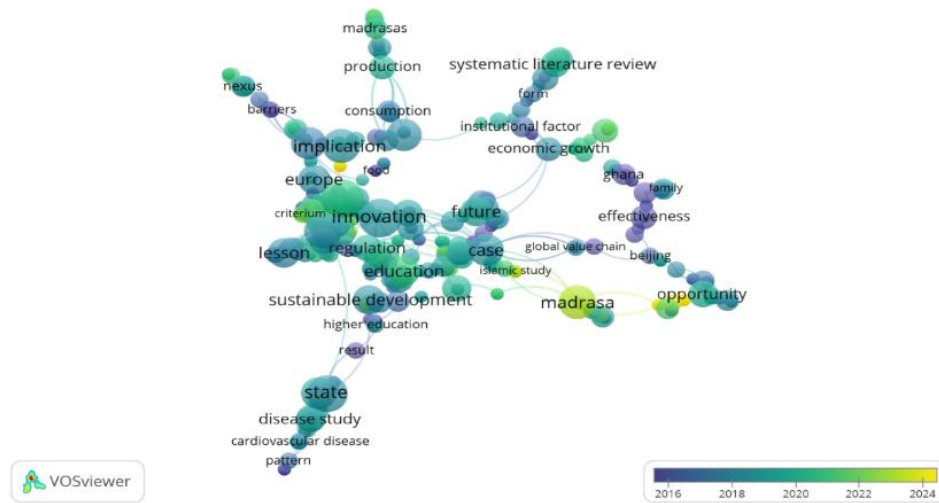


Figure 2. Overlay Visualization of Keyword Co-occurrence in Madrasa-related Research (2016–2024)

Figure 3 indicates the density visualization, created using VOSviewer, which highlights the main research topics related to madrasas, education, innovation, and development. The color gradient in the figure, from blue to green to yellow, indicates the frequency of keywords in the dataset, with yellow areas representing the highest concentration of research activity. Larger and brighter clusters mean that those topics are more frequently studied and often appear together. Notably, keywords such as "innovation," "education," "sustainable development," "regulation," and "future" are found in the strongest yellow areas. This suggests that these topics are central to current research. The strong connections among these terms suggest that many scholars are examining the relationship between innovative educational methods and sustainable development, as well as policy reform.

On the other hand, keywords such as "madrasa," "opportunity," and "state" appear in green areas, indicating a moderate level of research interest. Meanwhile, more specific or less common terms such as "cardiovascular disease," "Ghana," and "Beijing" are located in blue zones, which represent lower research activity. However, the presence of the keyword "madrasa" in a moderately dense cluster suggests that it is gaining academic attention, especially in discussions about development, education reform, and Islamic studies. Overall, this visualization illustrates a growing trend toward multidisciplinary research that incorporates traditional institutions, such as madrasas, in discussions about global development goals, innovation, and educational policy.

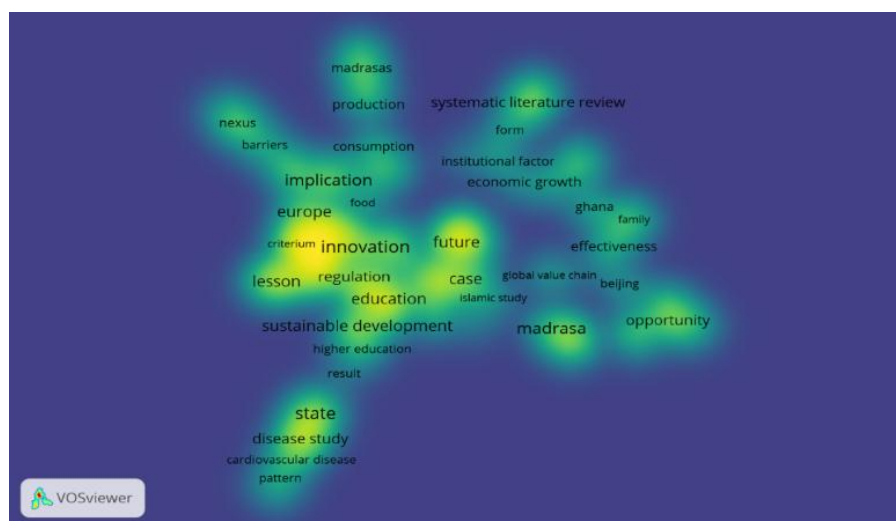


Figure 3. Keyword Density Visualization of Madrasa-Related Research Themes (2016–2024)

Discussion

The development of *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi has been significantly shaped by the Philippine government's legal and policy framework regarding Islamic education. While the 1987 Constitution upholds the separation of church and state, it also protects the free exercise of religion, allowing institutions like *Ma'had* to exist and function under private or religious foundations. This balance is evident in how *Ma'had* operates independently while aligning with educational guidelines through initiatives such as the integration of secular subjects, as outlined in DepEd Order No. 51 (2004). This finding aligns with Zafrullah et al. (2024), who emphasized that legal recognition, even without direct funding, promotes institutional growth and development. Additionally, national frameworks such as the Code of *Muslim* Personal Laws and regional laws under the Bangsamoro Organic Law provide legitimacy for Islamic institutions, demonstrating that governance reforms have been crucial in sustaining madrasa education in *Muslim*-majority regions. This aligns with Batalla & Baring's (2019) view that decentralization and peace agreements can empower local schools, although this empowerment depends on stable and consistent policy implementation and community engagement.

Institutional policy at *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi is structured to balance traditional Islamic knowledge with modern educational needs. The curriculum is organized into stages: elementary (Grades 1-6), followed by Thanawiya (Islamic secondary education), and Mutawassita (intermediate level), reflecting a layered learning system rooted in classical Islamic scholarship. The weekend-only schedule also accommodates students attending secular public schools, demonstrating flexibility in its educational approach. This inclusive design supports lifelong Islamic learning even in rural or marginalized settings. However, similar to the challenges described by (Malik, 2023), *Ma'had* faces constraints in infrastructure, teacher training, and leadership. The literature by (Khilji et al., 2022) Reinforces this, noting that governance and physical conditions are major determinants of madrasa success. Despite these limitations, *Ma'had's* commitment to qualify religious education, coupled with its mission rooted in Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah, has sustained its influence in the province (M. H. Syafii & Azhari, 2024) (H. Syafii, Purnomo, et al., 2025).

The role of local authorities and stakeholders in shaping *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi's governance is becoming more significant. Although initial leadership was centralized under its founder, current governance is expanding to include community participation, *alumni*, and religious councils. This aligns with Arar et al. (2022), who found that strong school leadership must be supplemented by ethical, community-based governance to ensure sustainability (M. H. Syafii et al., 2025). Local involvement also strengthens accountability and trust, especially in religious institutions. While the government cannot fund religious schools directly, the BARMM policies now allow indirect support through curriculum development and legal recognition (M. H. Syafii et al., 2024). *Ma'had* has benefited from this shift by gradually formalizing its operations while maintaining its independence. (Nadeem, 2024) emphasized how reform programs and digital governance tools can improve the management system, which *Ma'had* may adopt in future stages of development. Such a mechanism would enhance transparency, record-keeping, and outreach without compromising religious values (M. H. Syafii & Azhari, 2025).

Finally, when compared to broader madrasah development trends in Southeast Asia, *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi represents a unique case of localized Islamic education rooted in both tradition and adaptive governance. Mas' ud et al (2019) Described how Islamic education systems in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand evolved by integrating local culture, policy, and community values. *Ma'had's* development reflects this same principle; it is both distinctly Islamic and uniquely Filipino, shaped by the region's history as the cradle of Islam in the Philippines. As the first Islamic institution in Tawi-Tawi, it holds both symbolic and functional importance in the community's religious life. With continued support from BARMM, local stakeholders, and policy reform, *Ma'had* can further strengthen its academic and leadership programs. Its model offers valuable lessons for other remote madaris across the Bangsamoro region, especially in balancing religious identity with policy-based development and institutional sustainability (H. Syafii & Purnomo, 2024).

Ma'had Tawi-Tawi's institutional legitimacy and policy framework

The 1987 Philippine Constitution's provision of religious freedom, combined with the decentralized government processes enabled by the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), serves as the foundation for *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi's institutional legitimacy. Together, these regulations create a supportive environment that allows Islamic educational institutions to operate independently while meeting national educational standards. This is consistent with DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory, which describes how organizations adjust to normative and regulatory demands in their sociopolitical environment. According to DepEd Order No. 51 (2004), *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi's adaptation takes the form of curriculum integration, which permits adherence to state laws without sacrificing Islamic identity by enabling religious courses to coexist alongside secular disciplines.

Even in situations when state funding is scarce, legal recognition and adaptable policy frameworks improve madrasah sustainability, according to earlier research (Haddade et al., 2024a). Similarly, decentralized educational governance promotes contextualized reform, especially in areas with a majority of *Muslims*, according to (Haddade et al., 2024b). Therefore, the institutional growth of *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi shows how strategic alignment with larger state and regional legal systems can support the success of localized Islamic education.

The Dynamics of Educational Governance and Political Transitions

From Marcos's Tripoli Agreement (1976) to Duterte's Bangsamoro Organic Law (2018), political shifts in the Philippines illustrate how power shifts directly impact the governance of Islamic education. The level of autonomy and legitimacy granted to madrasah institutions changed depending on the policy stance of each administration. This approach is similar to Kingdon's (1995) Multiple Streams Framework, which describes how "policy windows" for educational reform are created by political change. The Autonomous Region in *Muslim* Mindanao (ARMM), which was established during Aquino's administration, increased institutional autonomy. Later, peace accords signed by Ramos and Duterte solidified these rights within the Bangsamoro's legal framework.

According to empirical research by (Green, 2018) The expansion of Islamic education and community acceptance is substantially correlated with leadership that prioritizes peace and continuity of policy. In this sense, *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi is an excellent example of policy resilience, as it can continue to operate schools even when the political environment changes. This capability is in line with (Munifah et al., 2025) Theory of educational transformation, which emphasizes the value of stakeholder collaboration and adaptive leadership in maintaining reform in the face of erratic political circumstances.

Curriculum Integration and Institutional Policy

Ma'had Tawi-Tawi's internal educational policy is an organized balancing act between modern curriculum integration and traditional Islamic pedagogy (*ta'lim*). Similar to models in Indonesia and Malaysia, its three-tier system—*Ibtidaiyah* (elementary), *Thanawiyah* (secondary), and *Mutawassitah* (intermediate)—showcases the vertical articulation of Islamic knowledge. In keeping with integrative curriculum theory (Hsieh, 2023), which promotes connecting disciplines to facilitate holistic learning, the weekend-only program suggests a hybrid approach that combines Islamic instruction with conventional schooling.

Such a strategy also aligns with (Daou et al., 2019) Findings show that dual-track systems and flexible scheduling enhance access to Islamic education without compromising students' national opportunities. But *Ma'had's* dependence on volunteer teachers and inadequate facilities highlights issues noted by (Oyewale, 2024), who contend that resource management and leadership caliber are important factors in madrasah performance. Notwithstanding these limitations, *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi demonstrates a persistent commitment to the ideals of *Ahlu Sunnah wal Jama'ah* while also preparing students for engagement in contemporary academic and professional spheres.

Religious Leadership, Community Involvement, and Local Governance

Ma'had Tawi-Tawi's participatory governance structure, which involves religious academics, community elders, and *alumni* networks, exemplifies distributed leadership theory (Spillane, 2006), which posits that institutional decision-making is shared rather than centralized. *Ma'had*'s founder, *Ustadz* Ibrahim Tiblani Khairal, has always held a central position in leadership; however, the growing influence of local stakeholders has enhanced social accountability and organizational credibility. Research by Çakmaklı et al. (2017) confirms that community-based governance in faith-based educational institutions strengthens cultural ownership and promotes transparency.

Furthermore, the Bangsamoro Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education's (MBHTE) participation in curriculum standardization bridges the gap between formal and informal Islamic learning systems, representing a new kind of state-community engagement. *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi could implement these innovations for institutional modernization. (Çakmaklı et al., 2017) Point out that digital governance and reform tools in faith-based schools can improve administrative efficiency and data transparency.

Regional Comparison and Theoretical Consequences

Ma'had Tawi-Tawi's development is comparable to the broader shift in Islamic educational systems in Southeast Asia, where religious establishments are increasingly incorporating civic education, national identity, and socioeconomic development. This process of institutions adapting Islamic scholarship to local conditions is known as the "localization of Islamic modernity." (Joseph & Carolissen, 2022). This synthesis is demonstrated by *Ma'had*'s model, which is rooted in historical continuity but adaptable to reform.

The institution is a theoretical example of hybrid governance theory (Jahani & Parayandeh, 2024), which contends that educational systems in plural societies have to balance state frameworks with traditional norms. The concept of institutional resilience (Zhao & Qian, 2025) It is also illustrated by *Ma'had*'s success, showing how religious education can endure in the face of changing social, political, and legal forces. Ultimately, the *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi experience contributes to the growing body of studies that highlight how Islamic education can serve as a tool for social change and cultural preservation when supported by community involvement and adaptive governance.

4. CONCLUSION

This study's findings indicate that the development and governance of *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi encompass four principal topics discovered through the Systematic Literature Review: policy effect, historical development, governance transitions, and leadership dynamics. The institution's durability, in terms of policy impact, is influenced by its capacity to conform to governmental frameworks, such as DepEd Order No. 51 (2004) and the Bangsamoro Organic Law (2018), which confer institutional legitimacy while maintaining religious autonomy. The theme of historical development illustrates how the evolution of Philippine political regimes—from the Marcos administration to the establishment of BARMM—has increasingly acknowledged Islamic education, thereby strengthening *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi's status within national and regional education frameworks. Third, concerning governance transitions, *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi exemplifies a hybrid approach that integrates traditional Islamic management with contemporary administrative principles, thereby preserving institutional continuity despite alterations in state policy and leadership.

The theme of leadership dynamics highlights the crucial role of community engagement and adaptable leadership in upholding the institution's educational mission and spiritual integrity. The four characteristics collectively illustrate that *Ma'had* Tawi-Tawi's success is rooted in its strategic alignment with governmental legislation and religious beliefs, creating a balance that enhances institutional

legitimacy and long-term sustainability.

Subsequent studies should extend comparative analysis to more madrasah and *Ma'had* institutions in the Bangsamoro region and Southeast Asia to investigate differences in governance structures and policy adaptability. Additional empirical research, including field studies, interviews with policymakers, and assessments of institutional performance, would enhance comprehension of the role of Islamic educational governance in fostering social transformation, inclusion, and educational equity across diverse communities.

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