



Institutional Resilience and Cultural Adaptation of Madrasahs in Muslim-Minority Contexts: Vietnam and the Philippines

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Abstract: The Islamic educational institutions in Muslim-minority countries, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, have played important roles both in spreading Islamic teachings and in developing Islamic identities in multi-religious communities. This research aims to examine the institutional resilience and cultural adaptation of madrasahs in Vietnam and the Philippines through identifying the actual conditions of madrasahs, national regulations, challenges, and resilience strategies of Islamic communities in both countries. This research employs a descriptive-exploratory qualitative approach integrated with a multiple-case study design. The study was conducted in Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh in Vietnam, and in Marawi City in the Philippines. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and library analysis, and then analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that madrasahs face limited legal recognition, inadequate funding, weak infrastructure, and socio-cultural pressures. Nevertheless, they maintain their existence through community-based leadership, contextual curriculum development, social networking, economic self-reliance, and adaptation to local customs. In comparative Islamic education studies, the findings of this research prove that madrasah resilience is a socio-cultural process that is shaped by community legitimacy, identity negotiation, and adaptive educational practices.

Keywords: cultural adaptation; institutional resilience; islamic education; madrasah; muslim-minority countries

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INTRODUCTION

The Islamic educational institutions in Muslim-minority countries, especially in Southeast Asia, hold a complex position between religion, education, culture, and state policy. Muslims in Vietnam constitute an extremely tiny number, less than 1% of the population. Islamic education in Vietnam is predominantly conducted within informal or semi-formal madrasahs with limited recognition from the Vietnamese government. In the Philippines, especially in the Bangsamoro region, madrasahs face challenges related to curriculum implementation, school accreditation, teacher quality, and limited resources (Sali & Marasigan, 2020; Dreisbach & Mendoza-Dreisbach, 2023). Preliminary observations indicate that numerous madrasahs in both countries operate with inadequate infrastructure and strongly depend on community support. Most madrasahs have to adjust their educational processes to be culturally interrelated with the socio-cultural conditions in their areas. These circumstances are evident in many madrasahs in Muslim-minority countries. They are shaped not only by educational needs, but also by broader national political, cultural, and social constraints.

Madrasahs are generally defined as educational institutions that transmit Islamic teachings, shape religious identity for younger generations, and preserve Muslim communities. The initial observation in Vietnam and the Philippines, on the other hand, found that nearly all madrasahs must operate within non-Muslim-majority contexts with inadequate support from the authorities. Also, madrasahs must be able to maintain their relationship with local cultures and national education systems. This suggests that the problems faced by madrasahs in Muslim-minority countries cannot be solely understood as an institutional matter. This phenomenon is evidence and needs immediate attention to measure the extent to which cultural adaptation is acceptable under broader social and political pressures in these madrasahs.

Even though cultural adaptation is not a peripheral issue in these madrasahs, it needs attention to identify which madrasahs negotiate identity, legitimacy, and educational relevance in both countries. This research maps madrasahs' ability to survive by examining the ways they preserve core Islamic values while keeping institutional practices aligned with social expectations, environmental policy, and local cultures. The cultural dimension is very important in Muslim-minority communities. In these settings, a madrasah is not only a religious institution but also a social space. Here, Islamic identity, local culture, and daily life are constantly integrated. Cultural adaptation is understood not just as full assimilation into majority culture, but also as the

capacity of institutions to adjust their curricula, interactional patterns, social language, and institutional strategies to local contexts without losing core Islamic identity. Within the framework of institutional resilience and comparative education, cultural adaptation is treated as a key mechanism in which madrasahs maintain their religious mission while reorganizing educational practices, social relations, and institutional strategies in response to minority conditions (Cowen & Kim, 2023; Duchek, 2020). Therefore, the study of institutional resilience among madrasahs must be interlinked with cultural adaptation, since their endurance depends on formal structures and their ability to navigate marginalization, negotiate educational spaces, and sustain social legitimacy (Alkouatli et al., 2023; Memon et al., 2023).

In line with that premise, education for Muslim minority learners should respond to religious identity as part of their cultural experience rather than treating it separately from educational practice (Spiegler et al., 2019; Torres-Zaragoza & Llorent-Bedmar, 2024). Recent studies show that educational institutions must respond to religious diversity, recognition, and the social realities of Muslim learners in plural societies through inclusive pedagogy, institutional support, and culturally responsive engagement (Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2020; Memon & Chown, 2023; Torres-Zaragoza & Llorent-Bedmar, 2024). Related to this matter, the case of Muslim minorities in Vietnam and the Philippines should not be treated merely as two empirical sites, but as contrasting socio-political contexts that reveal how different policies, minority positions, and community structures shape distinct forms of madrasah resilience and cultural adaptation. This comparative view strengthens the study's contribution. It connects local educational practices with wider issues, including minority education, institutional survival, and cultural negotiation.

Previous researches about Islamic education in Muslim-minority, especially in the Southeast Asia, can be grouped into three major categories: 1) studies focus on the diversity of Islamic educational institutions (madrasahs, pesantren, and pondok) which grow from local traditions and play important roles in spreading Islamic teachings whilst shaping Islamic identity consequently (Susilo & Dalimunthe, 2019); 2) studies highlight on the role of Islamic education in promoting tolerance and interreligious relations which show the application of tolerance-based curricula in Muslim-minority areas (Kosim et al., 2025; Saada, 2023); and 3) studies examine Islamic education in terms of modernization and adaptation which mostly discuss changes, e.g., integrating secular subjects, implementing modern teaching methods, and responding to current social issues (Sumanti et al., 2024; Zaini, 2022). Moreover, such transformations do not imply a detachment from community roots, as Islamic educational institutions continue to sustain local culture, social cohesion, and public acceptance (D'Agostino & Asadullah, 2025; Fahmi et al., 2025; Lahmar, 2020).

Despite these important contributions to Islamic education in Muslim-minority communities, several gaps remain. Much research on Islamic education in Muslim-minority communities mostly focused on institutional diversity, tolerance, or curriculum reform as a separate object, without integrating these dimensions into any institutional frameworks. Cultural adaptation is rarely positioned as a primary analytical lens as an indicator of how madrasahs survive, gain legitimacy, and remain relevant in Muslim-minority countries. Furthermore, comparative studies between Vietnam and the Philippines remain limited. The two countries offer significant contrasts, with Vietnam being a secular-communist country with narrow formal space for Islamic education and the Philippines, especially in Bangsamoro, bringing a more policy-accommodative context which nevertheless continues to face inequality, historical conflict, and uneven institutional implementation. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in integrating institutional resilience and cultural adaptation within a comparative framework in explaining how madrasahs in Muslim-minority countries survive and remain relevant under different conditions.

This study aims to analyze madrasahs' institutional resilience and cultural adaptation in Vietnam and the Philippines. The analyses of this research are focused on: 1) describing the existence of madrasahs within Muslim-minority communities; 2) examining government policies regulating Islamic education in both countries; 3) analyzing the challenges faced by madrasahs in maintaining their existence and sustainability under social, political, cultural, and infrastructural pressures; and 4) identifying and mapping the strategies of institutional resilience and cultural adaptation developed by madrasahs in managing limited resources, building social legitimacy, and adjusting educational practices to local cultural realities. The study contributes theoretically to comparative Islamic education studies and practically strengthens more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable Islamic education systems in Southeast Asia.

METHODS

This descriptive-exploratory study employed a qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design. The descriptive approach was used to portray the factual condition of madrasahs and the policy framework governing religious education in non-Muslim-majority countries. The exploratory approach was conducted to trace the forms of institutional resilience and cultural adaptation developed by madrasahs in response to social, political, cultural, and infrastructural pressures. The combination of these two approaches was considered appropriate because the study sought to describe the institutional condition of madrasahs and, at the same time, interpret how these institutions sustain their existence and relevance. A multiple-case study design was

selected to allow an in-depth investigation of each case and a cross-case comparison between two national contexts with different regulatory structures and socio-religious dynamics (Yin, 2018; Hall & Liebenberg, 2024; Imbeau et al., 2021). The research was conducted in two Southeast Asian countries: Marawi City, the Philippines, and Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh Province, Vietnam. These locations were selected because they represent important positions of Islamic education in Muslim-minority communities, which reflect different patterns of interaction among madrasahs, governments, and local communities. The data were collected on four madrasahs: Madrasah Al-Hikmah and Madrasah Darul Arqam in the Philippines and Madrasah Al-Nur and Ma'had Darussalam in Vietnam. The selection was based on three criteria: 1) the madrasahs are currently active; 2) they deal with different societal policies; and 3) the accessibility of key actors who could provide relevant information on institutional resilience and cultural adaptation. The Informants for this research are the principals, teachers, and students of the four madrasahs, officials from the national education affairs, and local Muslim communities.

The informants were selected through snowball sampling, with key informants being the principals of the madrasahs. These initial informants would then recommend relevant informants, i.e., teachers, religious figures, students, and local Muslim community figures who were directly involved in madrasahs' activities. This strategy was considered appropriate because madrasahs in Muslim-minority communities often operate through community-based networks, making access to potential informants limited and more dependent. The total number of informants was 45, consisting of the principal, 9 teachers of Madrasah Ma'had Darussalam, 10 teachers and students of Madrasah Al-Nur, 5 Muslim figures from the community in Vietnam, 10 teachers and 5 students of Madrasah Al-Hikmah and Madrasah Darul Arqam, and 5 Muslim figures from the community in the Philippines.

The data for this comparative research were collected in several phases: 1) direct observation in the regions, 2) in-depth interviews with informants, 3) focus group discussions among scholars, and 4) library analysis to strengthen and validate the data. Direct observation was conducted to understand educational practices, classroom interactions, the use of learning spaces, and the social atmosphere that reflects the daily cultural adaptation of madrasahs' life. The In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the experiences and perspectives of key actors regarding institutional sustainability, educational challenges, relations with the state, and forms of adjustment to local cultural realities. The focus group discussions were used to capture collective reflections on community support, shared constraints, and institutional responses to changing educational and social conditions. The library analysis included national and local education policies, regulations on religious education, madrasahs' curricula, institutional archives, and related reports. The use of multiple data collection techniques enabled source and method triangulation, allowing the study to present a more comprehensive and accountable account of the cases (Flick, 2018).

This research also utilized several triangulation processes for methodological consistency. The source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from madrasahs' principals, teachers, students, community figures, education officials, and library analysis. Method triangulation was implemented by cross-checking interview data with focus group discussions, direct observations, and library analysis. The credibility of the research was strengthened through repeated checking of emerging themes against field notes and interviews to ensure that interpretations were consistent and categorized as valid. Data reliability was supported through a systematic coding process, the use of consistent analytical categories across nations, and the documentation of analytical decisions during data reduction and interpretation. These procedures were conducted to minimize bias and to ensure that the findings were established based on empirical data.

In analyzing the data, the research team implemented thematic-based analysis to identify patterns, categories, and major themes relevant to the research objectives, following the Braun and Clarke (2022) model of analysis. The analysis proceeded through data reduction, coding, categorization, interpretation, and cross-case comparison between Vietnam and the Philippines. The analytical attention was divided into three main dimensions: 1) the presence of the madrasahs and legal policy frameworks in their regions, 2) the challenges faced by madrasahs, and 3) madrasahs' strategies of institutional resilience and cultural adaptation developed in managing limited resources, building social legitimacy, and adjusting educational practices to local cultures. The cross-case analysis was conducted systematically in three stages. First, cases in each country were analyzed separately to identify their specific institutional conditions, policy contexts, challenges, and adaptation strategies. Second, the findings from Vietnam and the Philippines were compared across the same analytical dimensions to identify similarities and differences. Lastly, the comparative patterns were interpreted to explain how different socio-political and cultural contexts shape distinct forms of madrasah resilience. This procedure allowed the study to move from case-specific description to comparative analytical synthesis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Even though Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in the world, Islam in Vietnam and the Philippines develops within noticeably different social and political situations. In Vietnam, whilst the country adopted a communist system that permits any religious practices, Muslims remain with an extremely small

population. According to the interview with Ma Thanh Thanh Hoang (2025), the Vietnamese Muslim population in 2024 was estimated at around 35,000 to 40,000 people, the majority of whom belong to the Cham community. This community generally adheres to Sunni Islam, with influences from Ash'ari-Maturidi theology and the Shafi'iyah school. In the present day, the challenges to Islamic religious identity in Vietnam have become more evident with the presence of the Bani group. The Bani group was initially a group of Muslim community members. However, in recent years, this group has been more widely understood as practicing religious syncretism, which combines elements of Hinduism, local traditions, and Islamic teachings. This phenomenon illustrates how Muslim identity in Vietnam shifted around secular political situations and culturally dominant non-Muslim cultures. This condition is in line with the theory of religious minoritarianism, where small religious groups in secular political systems tend to adjust their identities to survive among dominant cultural and political pressures (Koenig, 2023; Lizotte, 2020).

In the Philippines, the Muslims communities have a much longer historical presence. Muslims in the Philippines have existed since the fourteenth century, long before the arrival of Spanish colonizers. According to the 2020 Census of Population and Housing of the Philippine Statistics Authority, Muslims in the country account for 6.4% of the Philippine population (6,981,710 people). They mostly reside in Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. According to an interview with Pepito and Casnor (October 1, 2025), the contemporary Muslim population in the Philippines today may be approaching 12 million people. The long history of Islam in the Philippines has shaped strong Muslim social structures, even though Filipino Muslims continue to face discrimination, negative stereotypes, and the continuity of historical conflict. At the same time, the growth of Muslim communities in the Philippines is also noticeable with the spread of Salafi orientations among Filipino's younger generations who study in the Middle East and familiarize themselves with global influences on Islamic understandings in the country. Compared to Vietnam, the Philippine case shows that a stronger historical Muslim presence does not automatically eliminate pressures on the Islamic minority group. Rather, it produces a different form of identity negotiation shaped by autonomy, conflicts, and global Islamic networks. This condition can be identified through the lens of Islamic revivalism and identity politics, as discussed by Mandaville (2020).

The Vietnam and the Philippines cases show that different configurations of minority status shape madrasahs' resilience. In Vietnam, resilience emerges under conditions of small demographic size and limited formal recognition, whereas in the Philippines it develops within a more historically rooted Muslim community that nevertheless faces conflict, inequality, and uneven policy implementation. This comparison extends the existing studies on Islamic education in minority contexts by showing that minority status is not a single condition, but a differentiated socio-political field that shapes distinct patterns of institutional adaptation and cultural negotiation.

Government policies and community support shape the existence of madrasahs in Vietnam and the Philippines. Officially, religious freedom in Vietnam is recognized by the government. However, the recognition is strictly limited and controlled if it is seen as a threat to national stability. This rule is often used to restrict religious groups and activities. As a result, Islamic education develops in a narrow and closely monitored space (Rumsby, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2024). In the Philippines, on the other hand, the policies are more open, especially in Bangsamoro. However, social discrimination and tensions with the Catholic majority still exist. These issues make it harder to fully integrate Islamic education into the national system (Kovacs et al., 2021). In both countries, madrasahs develop through constant negotiation. They must balance government rules, community needs, and life in a diverse society. Cultural adaptation is very important in this process. Madrasahs do not only survive as religious institutions. They also adjust their organization, teaching methods, and social relations to local conditions. At the same time, they keep their Islamic identity. This pattern matches the idea of acculturation. Acculturation is a process of negotiation, adjustment, and adaptation between cultures (Stathi & Roscini, 2016; Ward, 2024).

Madrasahs in Vietnam mostly operate as non-formal education in mosques. Islamic learning usually takes place outside the national education system. This happens because the Muslim population is small and there are limits on building formal institutions. Based on an interview with Ustadz Zulkifli, Madrasah Al-Nur at Jamiul Anwar Mosque plays an important role. The madrasah teaches Muslim children after school. The lessons include the Qur'an, basic fiqh, and akhlaq. A more structured semi-formal model has also developed at Ma'had Darussalam in Tay Ninh, which follows a model comparable to Indonesian *pesantren* and offers instruction in fiqh, tajwid, tafsir, and Arabic to around 120 students. Although it has not yet obtained official recognition, the institution illustrates how madrasahs in Vietnam remain viable by adapting their institutional form to a narrow regulatory environment and to the needs of a Muslim minority community (Mendes et al., 2024).

Madrasahs in Bangsamoro are more closely aligned with Philippine government policy. Based on an interview with Pepito and Casnor, these madrasahs are integrating general education and religious teaching in their curricula. This system is fully supported by the Bangsamoro Education Code (2021) because it keeps an equal portion of general science and Islamic teaching. The Bangsamoro policy categorized Islamic education into formal, non-formal, and informal types. These include *Tahderiyah*, *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah*, *Mutawassitah*, *Thanawiyyah*, Qur'anic memorization, mosque *halaqah*, and family-based learning. However, the authority

support does not eliminate all Islamic institutions' problems in Bangsamoro. According to an interview with Sumayan and Casnor (2025), the facilities and resources available in madrasahs are rickety and unevenly distributed compared with other non-Islamic educational institutions in the region. This contradicts the idea that authority recognition always brings equality; formal support alone is not enough. It must also consider other aspects, e.g., resources, past conflicts, and regional differences.

Traditional madrasahs are still important in the Philippines. These madrasahs help preserve religious traditions and Muslim cultural identity. Based on the interview with Magarang and Sumayan (2025), many traditional madrasahs in remote areas are not officially recognized by the government. These madrasahs educate children whom public schools do not serve well. Their role can be explained through Islamic literacy and identity. Informal religious education helps people understand their religion. It also keeps social unity strong. This is important during modernization and secularization. Islamic educational institutions in the Philippines teach more than mere religious values. They also keep collective memory and shared values alive in society and strengthen Muslim identity in a minority setting. Madrasahs act as places of cultural adaptation which maintain religious continuity in a diverse society (Duderija & Rane, 2019; Lahmar, 2020). The main findings of this study are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics, Policy Context, and Cultural Adaptation of Madrasahs in Vietnam and the Philippines

Aspect	Vietnam	Philippines
Institutional status	Non-formal/semi-formal; not integrated into the national system	Formal, non-formal, and informal; partly integrated through the Bangsamoro Education Code
Forms of madrasah	Mosque-based madrasahs; semi-formal ma'had	Integrated madrasahs and traditional madrasahs
Government policy	Freedom of religion is recognized, but formal space for Islamic education is limited.	More accommodative; Islamic education is regulated within the Bangsamoro autonomy framework.
Learning orientation	Focus on the Qur'an, fiqh, akhlaq, and Arabic	Integration of religious and general subjects
Cultural adaptation	Institutional forms are adjusted to narrow socio-political space and community-based settings.	Madrasahs are adjusted to the regional system while retaining the Muslim community base.
Main challenges	Lack of state recognition; limited funding	Regional disparities; accreditation; facilities and the impact of conflict

Table 1 shows that the resilience of madrasahs in Muslim-minority communities does not depend on one fixed model. It depends on how well they adjust to political and social conditions. Madrasahs in Vietnam show resilience through mosque-based and community-centered learning. These forms are accepted under strict government rules. In the Philippines, resilience appears in different ways. Madrasahs in the Philippines combine partial policy support, traditional community education, and identity preservation. The non-formal education is extended to adolescents and adults, for example through the Halal marriage workshop, which introduces Islamic perspectives on marriage to newly married couples. The non-formal education in Vietnam also shows a strategy of cultural adaptation. Islamic education takes place in spaces that are accepted locally, e.g., mosques and community forums, which do not rely on formal institutions. These activities indicate that religious learning does not stop in childhood; it continues throughout life. This idea matches the concept of lifelong learning as a self-directed and continuous process of personal development (Köiv & Saks, 2023; Mendes et al., 2024).

In the Philippines, the significance of the Bangsamoro framework lies in its ability to organize Islamic education across multiple educational stages, from early childhood to higher education (Dreisbach & Mendoza-Dreisbach, 2023). Based on Articles 11 and 49 of the Bangsamoro Education Code (2021), Islamic education in Bangsamoro is divided into formal, non-formal, and informal systems. Formal education begins with Tahderiyah, Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah, Madrasah Mutawassitah, and Madrasah Thanawiyyah, where students receive both general and religious instruction. This model is important because it balances academic and religious competence, thereby preparing graduates for both higher education and professional sectors (Pepito & Casnor, interview, 2025). However, its analytical significance lies not simply in the existence of formal stages but extends to how the integration attempts to institutionalize Islamic education while still depending on community capacity and local implementation. These findings show that Islamic education in Vietnam and the Philippines survives through adaptation. Madrasahs use formal, non-formal, and informal forms of education. They adjust these forms to national policies and local conditions. From the perspective of organizational resilience, a strong institution can handle pressure. They can respond to limits and reorganize their practices. This helps them continue their main educational functions even when the authority support is uneven (Duchek, 2020). This layered pattern is also consistent with contemporary understandings of lifelong learning, which emphasize cross-

context learning competencies. It requires skills such as self-control, initiative, and adaptability. These skills allow students to maintain lifelong learning in various learning spaces (van den Broeck et al., 2024). At the social level, the existence of Islamic educational institutions in Muslim-minority areas supported by local communities demonstrates the importance of social capital in education, i.e., networks, trust, and norms. These factors help Islamic institutions in minority areas survive even though the authority support is limited (García-Marirrodiga, 2024; Mikiewicz, 2021). The findings extend previous research by demonstrating that resilience in madrasahs is produced through the interaction of organizational capability, lifelong learning, and social capital, rather than through policy recognition alone.

Interview and focus group discussions show that the most fundamental challenges faced by madrasahs in Vietnam and the Philippines are weak legal recognition, limited policy support, and fragile institutional resources. In Vietnam, Madrasah Ma'had Darussalam in Tay Ninh and Madrasah Al-Nur in Ho Chi Minh City operate outside the national education system because they do not obtain legal recognition from the Vietnamese government. In the Philippines, even though legal authority is relatively open, many madrasahs also lack official accreditation from the country's Department of Education or MBHTE-BARMM. These phenomena indicate that the sustainability of madrasahs in both countries is not entirely dependent on legal support from the government. The sustainability of madrasahs is also affected by social legitimacy, which is built through the trust of Muslim communities. From the perspective of organizational resilience, this confirms that organizational sustainability is determined by adaptive capacities, including cognitive, behavioral, and contextual, in responding to external pressures rather than simply by formal structural power (Cedergren & Hassel, 2024; Duchek, 2020).

Funding and infrastructure remain two key challenges in both countries. In Vietnam, madrasahs largely depend on community donations and income from communal enterprises, e.g., from rubber plantations. In the Philippines, financial support is derived from local communities, zakat, and international organizations, e.g., Islamic Relief, OIC, and IDB. These insufficient resources directly affect the quality of madrasah education. Madrasahs usually struggle to pay teachers' salaries and maintain learning facilities, such as libraries, laboratories, and access to digital technology. The reliance on external and often unstable funding also increases institutional vulnerability. Changes in donor priorities or funding structures can influence both financial stability and institutional autonomy (Arvidson & Linde, 2021; Lu et al., 2019). Within the framework of organizational resilience, this situation shows that institutional endurance is not always built on state strength, but rather on adaptive capacities supported by social networks, trust, and community solidarity as alternative resources (Duchek, 2020). From a cultural perspective, this endurance may also be understood as cultural resilience, namely the capacity of communities to draw on values, socio-cultural support, and collective adaptive patterns in confronting material pressures (Cubeddu & Martini, 2025; Zhao et al., 2025). This finding extends resource dependence perspectives by showing that community-based support is not only a financial substitute for weak state support, but also a cultural resource that reinforces autonomy, solidarity, and institutional legitimacy.

At the learning stage, madrasahs in both countries face ongoing challenges related to pedagogical quality and human resource capacity. Many teachers have strong expertise in Islamic sciences. However, they often lack training in modern pedagogy, digital literacy, and access to up-to-date teaching materials. This gap can slow improvements in learning quality and widen the distance between traditional teaching models and the expectations of younger, technology-oriented learners. At the same time, the data show that madrasahs are not static. They respond to these pressures by adapting their curricula and teaching approaches. For example, Ma'had Darussalam incorporates themes such as *tasamuh*, Islamic economics, and global issues. In the Philippines, madrasahs tend to emphasize humanistic approaches and close relationships between teachers and students. This situation resonates with Appadurai's *Capacity to Aspire* (Leßmann, 2024), as well as with the perspective of *culturally responsive pedagogy*, which positions learners' religious and cultural identity as a basis for educational practice, as well as Franco et al. (2024) on *culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy*. Thus, curriculum adaptation functions not only as pedagogical improvement, but also as a resilience strategy through which madrasahs respond to generational change without abandoning their religious foundations.

Madrasahs in both countries also face significant socio-cultural challenges. In Vietnam, as a very small minority, Muslims must continuously preserve their religious identity amid dominant cultural currents. In the Philippines, madrasahs operate amid stereotypes, discrimination, and the lingering legacy of conflict in Marawi, Sulu, and Basilan. In such contexts, madrasahs are required not only to transmit religious knowledge, but also to preserve social cohesion and build interreligious relations. The findings show that in Vietnam madrasahs actively engage with Buddhist communities through social activities, humanitarian dialogue, and shared religious celebrations such as the Prophet's Mawlid, which function as symbols of interfaith harmony. In the Philippines, meanwhile, madrasahs play a strategic role as spaces of post-conflict reconciliation and peacebuilding in Marawi, Sulu, and Basilan by involving teachers, ulama, and youth in peace education programs. In the Mindanao context, interfaith dialogue has likewise been recognized as a peacebuilding strategy mediated by religious actors in conflict-affected areas (Corpuz, 2025). Therefore, the challenges faced by madrasahs cannot be understood merely as administrative problems, but as fields of cultural negotiation in which institutions must preserve Islamic identity while building social trust in plural environments. This finding strengthens resilience

theory by showing that socio-cultural legitimacy is a central dimension of institutional survival in minority religious education. The findings indicate that the institutional resilience and cultural adaptation strategies of madrasahs in Vietnam and the Philippines may be understood as responses to external pressures through a set of community-based strategies that generate institutional sustainability, strengthen Islamic identity, and foster social cohesion, as summarized in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Challenges, Resilience and Cultural Adaptation Strategies, and Outcomes of Madrasahs in Vietnam and the Philippines (*Source: developed by the authors based on interviews, observation, focus group discussion, and library analysis*)

As shown in Figure 1, the strategies developed by madrasahs preserve institutional continuity while adjusting educational practices and social relations to local cultures. Here, institutional resilience and cultural adaptation cannot be separated. They mutually reinforce each other in explaining how madrasahs survive and remain relevant in Muslim-minority areas. The analytical implication is that madrasah resilience should be understood as a relational process. The institutions survive because they mobilize leadership, curricula, networks, economic resources, and social legitimacy in ways that respond to the society. The findings indicate that the most fundamental strategy developed by madrasahs in Vietnam and the Philippines is the strengthening of community-based leadership as the foundation of institutional resilience. In Vietnam, Ma'had Darussalam Tay Ninh and Madrasah Al-Nur sustain themselves through collective leadership patterns that balance Islamic values with compliance with state regulations. In the Philippines, madrasah leaders such as Zainoden Disocor function not only as institutional administrators but also as spiritual figures and community mobilizers. Leadership in these madrasahs therefore becomes a social mechanism for building trust, solidarity, and shared moral responsibility. This finding is consistent with [Ashta and Parekh \(2023\)](#), who argue that *spiritual leadership* can strengthen resilience by building trust, social capital, and community engagement. The present study extends this argument by showing that, in minority Islamic education, leadership also functions as a mediator between religious authority, community expectations, and state constraints.

A second strategy is developing culturally integrated curricula as the clearest form of cultural adaptation. Ma'had Darussalam combines the classical *halaqah* system with contemporary subjects, for example, Islamic economics and global issues, while madrasahs in the Philippines emphasize humanistic approaches to strengthen relational closeness between teachers and students. These models demonstrate that madrasahs are not only trying to survive but, furthermore, adjusting their educational practices to the social and cultural needs of Muslim communities. Within the framework of social innovation in education, such innovation emerges from collective learning, creative problem-solving, and the strengthening of institutional practice ([Schröder, 2021](#)). This strategy is in line with the idea of strategic bricolage, namely the institution's ability to assemble tradition, local wisdom, and available resources into useful and relevant solutions under limited authority support ([Eddy-Spicer et al., 2020](#)). This analysis is further reinforced by culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy, which puts learners' socio-cultural status at the center of educational design ([Franco et al., 2024](#); [Smith et al., 2022](#)). Thus, the findings refine culturally responsive pedagogy by demonstrating that, for madrasahs in Muslim-minority areas, cultural responsiveness involves not only adapting teaching to learners' backgrounds but also preserving religious continuity under constrained institutional conditions.

Institutional resilience and cultural adaptation are also strengthened through social and academic networks. In Vietnam, connections with Islamic institutions in Malaysia and Indonesia open access to teacher exchange, scholarships, and methodological enrichment, including the reception of student interns from Indonesia. In the Philippines, networks among madrasahs under BARMM facilitate educational collaboration, technical assistance, and stronger institutional coordination. Within *Social Capital Theory*, these networks strengthen trust, collaborative norms, and cross-border solidarity ([Oh & Bush, 2016](#)). At the same time, these networks also have a cultural dimension because they expand social recognition of madrasahs and allow exchanges of values, educational practices, and forms of Islamic moderation across contexts. Thus, social

networks function not only as institutional resources but also as media of cultural adaptation that help madrasahs remain relevant in plural environments. This comparison shows that networks operate differently across contexts: in Vietnam they compensate for limited domestic policy space, while in the Philippines they strengthen coordination within a more formalized regional education structure.

Another important strategy is community-based economic self-reliance. Madrasahs in Vietnam use local resources such as rubber plantations and community *infaq*, while madrasahs in the Philippines rely on community donations, zakat, and assistance from international institutions. In the framework of *Resource Dependence Theory*, both cases show how institutions manage dependence on external resources through community-based diversification of support (Arvidson & Linde, 2021; Lu et al., 2019). When the state is not fully present, the community becomes the primary source of legitimacy and institutional continuity. In this sense, institutional resilience does not simply mean financial survival, but also the preservation of the autonomy of Islamic education under limited formal support. Moreover, community-based economic practice itself reflects cultural adaptation, as local resources, social trust, and norms of mutual assistance are transformed into institutional strength for minority Islamic education. This finding extends resource dependence theory by showing that financial diversification in minority madrasahs is inseparable from cultural norms of solidarity and religious obligation. The culmination of these strategies is the construction of social legitimacy through cultural adaptation. From a social perspective, madrasahs in Vietnam and the Philippines function not only as institutions of religious education but also as institutions that maintain social cohesion and strengthen interreligious tolerance. In Vietnam, social activities with Buddhist communities strengthen intercommunal relations, while in the Philippines madrasahs serve as spaces of post-conflict reconciliation through peace education in Marawi and Sulu. Values such as *tasamuh*, empathy, and interfaith dialogue operate as social mechanisms for building harmony amid cultural and religious plurality. These findings may be read through the framework of peace-supporting education Eddy-Spicer et al. (2020) and through Mahé and Martel's (2023) view of institutional resilience as a socio-interpretive process.

In addition, this strategy can also be understood through the lens of *acculturation and adaptation*, which emphasizes the ongoing negotiation between identity, social environment, and institutional sustainability in plural contexts (Crocetti et al., 2024; Ward, 2024). Thus, madrasahs in both countries survive not only because they can manage resources and institutional pressures, but also because they can adapt their educational practices, social relations, and expressions of Islamic identity to local cultural realities. Comparatively, madrasahs in Vietnam are more prominent in social integration and cultural adaptation, whereas madrasahs in the Philippines are stronger in institutional networking and cross-community collaboration. This comparative finding demonstrates that cultural adaptation is not merely a response to external pressure, but a theoretical bridge linking institutional resilience, identity negotiation, and social legitimacy in Muslim-minority education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the sustainability of madrasahs in Muslim-minority countries, especially in Vietnam and the Philippines, is shaped by the madrasahs' ability to construct their institutional resilience through continuous cultural adaptation. Even though both countries provide different policy environments, madrasahs in Vietnam and the Philippines generally face similar structural challenges, i.e., limited legal recognition, inadequate resources, infrastructural inequality, and socio-cultural pressures. In response to these, the madrasahs sustain their existence not only as sites of religious learning but also as adaptive social institutions for Muslim minority groups of the two countries. This is reflected in their reliance on community-based management, the development of culturally integrated curricula, the strengthening of social and academic networks, and efforts toward economic self-reliance, all of which contribute to maintaining social legitimacy within local cultures. These findings highlight that institutional resilience and cultural adaptation are deeply interconnected in illuminating the continuity of Islamic education as a minority group. The study therefore underscores that the endurance of madrasahs in Vietnam and the Philippines cannot be understood solely through legal policy or structural perspectives. Rather, it should be approached as a socio-cultural process shaped by ongoing identity concession, the mobilization of social affluence, and the institutional ability to translate Islamic values into educational practices that remain relevant within plural societies.

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