

# Islamic Education System in Singapore: Current Issues and Challenges

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## **Abstract**

*Although Singapore cannot be used as a model for global Islamic education, this country has quite several madrasahs. The Singapore government is also quite responsive in providing support for the continuation of Islamic education activities. This study aims to analyze the Islamic education system—madrasah management and curriculum in Singapore. Most importantly, this study identifies how the role of madrasahs in the Singapore education system is. The study in this paper is qualitative. This study uses library research, and the method of content analysis and constant comparative analysis becomes the first option of the writer. The results show that Singapore's Islamic Ugama Majlis (MUIS) plays a significant role in monitoring and managing the development of Islamic education in Singapore, which performs three types of Islamic education, Part-Time Education, Full Time Education, and Islamic Study Program for the Community. MUIS created a special curriculum by proposing the Singapore Islamic Education System (SIES) by introducing the ALIVE curriculum. The role and relevance of madrasahs cannot be underestimated or dismissed because the growing Muslim community and society will always need the right channels for real Islamic education regardless of how progressive or modern it is. This paper provides a broad view of madrasah in Singapore and looks at management, curriculum, and the role of madrasahs.*

**Keywords:** *Management, Curriculum, Madrasah, ALIVE.*

### **Abstrak**

*Meski Singapura tidak dapat dijadikan sebagai model untuk pendidikan Islam secara global, negara ini memiliki cukup banyak madrasah. Pemerintah Singapura juga cukup responsif dalam memberikan dukungan bagi keberlangsungan kegiatan pendidikan Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis sistem pendidikan Islam; manajemen dan kurikulum madrasah di Singapura. Serta terpenting mengetahui bagaimana peran madrasah dalam sistem pendidikan Singapura. Paper bersifat kualitatif. Ini adalah jenis penelitian perpustakaan, dan metode analisis konten dan analisis komparatif konstan menjadi pilihan utama penulis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Majelis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS) memainkan peran utama dalam memantau dan mengelola pengembangan pendidikan Islam di Singapura yang melaksanakan tiga jenis pendidikan Islam, yaitu Pendidikan Paruh Waktu, Pendidikan Penuh Waktu dan Program Pengajian Islam untuk Masyarakat. Kurikulum khusus diciptakan oleh MUIS dengan memperkenalkan Singapore Islamic Education System (SIES) dengan memperkenalkan kurikulum ALIVE. Peran dan relevansi madrasah tidak dapat diremehkan atau dihentikan karena komunitas Muslim yang terus tumbuh dan masyarakat akan selalu membutuhkan saluran yang tepat untuk pendidikan Islam yang benar terlepas dari seberapa progresif atau modernnya. Paper ini memberikan pandangan luas tentang madrasah di Singapura, dan melihat manajemen, kurikulum, dan peran madrasah.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Manajemen, Kurikulum, Madrasah, ALIVE.*

### **Introduction**

The existence of Islamic education institutions in countries where the majority of the population is non-Muslim cannot be underestimated. This is due to the presence of these institutions is one of the factors that determines the continuation of the cadre process of prospective Muslim scholars there. One of them is Singapore. The country with a Muslim population of only 14 percent of the total population is now beginning to show scientific enthusiasm in several Islamic educational institutions.

Although Singapore cannot be used as a model for global Islamic education, this country has quite several madrasahs<sup>1</sup>. The Singapore government is also quite responsive in providing support for the continuation of Islamic education activities there. This can be proven through scholarship programs that are routinely awarded to madrasah students every year. The

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad Islamy Jamil, "Ada Banyak Madrasah Di Singapura," 2017, retrieved from <https://www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/islam-nusantara/17/10/23/oy9k5q313-ada-banyak-madrasah-di-singapura>. Accessed 2014-09-11.

local government also often conducts training for Madrasah teachers. All madrasah also receives education funding of more than 3 million dollars per year.

Nevertheless, Syed Muhammad Khairudin Aljunied did not dismiss that currently, there are still obstacles in advancing Islamic educational institutions in Singapore. This obstacle can mainly be seen from the lack of efforts of madrasah managers to promote their institutions to the broader community<sup>2</sup>.

The Singapore government's education policy is driven by the needs of the modern knowledge-based society and economic development<sup>3</sup>. The debate about whether to reform Islamic education has often taken place between the Singapore government and the wider Muslim community—represented by various Muslim organizations. The need for additional funding to carry out reforms has also been a long-standing problem for madrasah. Large sums of money were provided by the government in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to develop new curricula, to hire more qualified teachers or offer development programs for existing staff, and to modernize equipment, technology, and facilities in general. However, it will take many more years before these changes produce tangible results, and currently, madrasah in Singapore are generally underdeveloped in terms of the content taught and the methodology used<sup>4</sup>.

In a previous study, Park and Niyozov (2008), based on the authors' anxieties and confusion about the number of *madaris*, reasons, goals, pedagogy, curriculum, funding, administration, relations with the state, and global violence, especially in *madaris* in South and Southeast Asia, this paper presents a report on the current debate on madrasah education and reform that focuses on *madaris* in a variety of Sunni schools of thought and denominations located in South and Southeast Asia. Based on extensive review and analysis of more than 90 articles, an overview of madrasah education and an examination of the problems and challenges faced by Islamic schools struggling to uphold tradition, and those who have begun to

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Kerstin Steiner, "Madrasah in Singapore: Tradition and Modernity in Religious Education," *19 Intellectual Discourse* 41, no. 70 (2011): 41–70.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 54.

embrace modernization and integration in the process of global change are given. To the extent that some Islamic education systems are willing to collaborate with non-Muslims and in the process have the potential to enrich their circle of interest while engaging with the rest of the world in dialogue, this offered a promising view and a sense of hope for Religion-based education in Muslim communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>5</sup>.

Nor, Senin, Khambali, & Halim (2008) explore the transformation taken by madrasah, especially in preparing students in both the religious and academic fields. Besides, it shows the steps taken by madrasah in instilling religious and racial cohesion that are far from conservatism and extremism persistently labeled to their students. Some relevant literature and data have been analyzed and presented in this paper. The findings in this study are that madrasah in Singapore is always considered to be in a negative nuance because of their ineffectiveness and irrelevant role in economic development. Madrasah education is conservative, and the traditional system also seems to hamper the cohesion of Singapore's Religion and race. Islamic education in Singapore can be observed developing through three phases, the colonial period in which it adopted a secular system, post-colonial with a traditional system, and currently a period of transformation with an integrated syllabus<sup>6</sup>.

Islamic education in madrasah (Islamic religious schools), has generated much interest among policymakers and the general public in recent years. With a religion-based curriculum and exclusive Muslim registration, it has increasingly become a target of research and criticism<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, it is crucial to identify the Islamic education system—Madrasah management and curriculum in Singapore. Besides, the most important is knowing how the role of madrasah is in the Singapore education system. This paper provides a broad view of madrasah in Singapore and looks at management, curriculum, and the role of madrasah. The paper is qualitative.

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<sup>5</sup> Jaddon Park and Sarfaroz Niyozov, "Madrasah Education in South Asia and Southeast Asia: Current Issues and Debates," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 28, no. 4 (December 2008): 323–51, doi:10.1080/02188790802475372.

<sup>6</sup> Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor et al., "Survival of Islamic Education in a Secular State: The Madrasah in Singapore," *Journal for Multicultural Education* 11, no. 4 (November 13, 2017): 238–49, doi:10.1108/JME-06-2016-0043.

<sup>7</sup> Intan Azura Mokhtar, "Madrasahs in Singapore: Bridging between Their Roles, Relevance and Resources," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 1 (March 2010): 11–25, doi:10.1080/13602001003650663.

This is library research, and the method of content analysis and constant comparative analysis becomes the first option of a writer.

## **Singapore Islamic Education System: Management and Curriculum**

The early history of the emergence of Islamic education in Singapore developed since the beginning of the arrival of Islam to Singapore. Islamic education in Singapore is spread by scholars from other countries in Southeast Asia or West Asian Countries and the subcontinent of India. The scholars included Shaykh Khatib Minangkabau, Shaykh Tuanku Mudo Wali Aceh, Shaykh Ahmad Aminuddin Luis Bangkahulu, Shaykh Syed Usman bin Yahya ibn Akil (Mufti Betawi), Shaykh Habib Ali Habsyi (Kwitang Jakarta), Shaykh Anwar Seribandung (Palembang), Shaykh Anwar Seribandung (Palembang), Shaykh Mustafa Husain (Purba Baru Tapanuli), and Shaykh Muhammad Jamil Jaho (Padang Panjang). The increasing development of Muslim education is marked by the implementation of education in madrasah, mosques, and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)<sup>8</sup>.

The development of Islamic education in Singapore became a serious concern when the Islamic Children's Education Council (MENDAKI) took up the issue of education for Muslim children. Malay Muslim leaders received considerable support in the Malay-Muslim group and the government, so the Assembly had changed to the Council for the Development of the Singapore Malay/Muslim Community in 1982. This foundation empowers people through excellence in education in the context of Singapore's multiculturalism. In 2002, the MENDAKI Foundation coordinated and focused on four main areas: Education, Youth, Family, and Work. 30% of the MENDAKI Program targets the Malay/Islamic population and provides subsidies for prevention and development programs. MENDAKI joins to support each other with royal agencies, schools, mosques, Malay/Islamic organizations, entrepreneurs, community centers, and MAECs centers, families, and student service centers<sup>9</sup>.

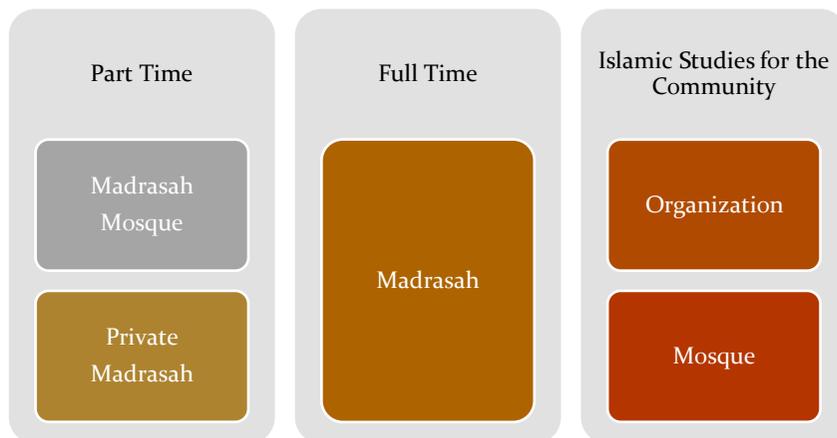
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<sup>8</sup> Syed Muhd Khairuddin Aljunied Nor Raudah Hj Siren, Azrin Ab Majid, "Sistem Pendidikan Islam Sekolah Agama (Madrasah) Di Singapura (Islamic Education System at Religious School (Madrasah) in Singapore)," *Jurnal Al-Tamaddun* 9, no. 2 (2014): 19.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Singapore's Islamic Ugama Majlis (MUIS) has also played a significant role in monitoring and managing the development of Islamic education in Singapore through the Religious Education Cluster division and the Mosque and Social Development Cluster division. The vision of MUIS is "A Gracious Muslim Community of Excellence that Inspires and Radiates Blessings to All." Meanwhile, its mission is "To work with the community in developing a profound religious life and dynamic institutions." Their strategic priority is to set the Islamic agenda, shape religious life, and forge the Singaporean Muslim Identity<sup>10</sup>.

MUIS has developed its Islamic education curriculum called the Singapore Islamic Education System (SIES). SIES is a part-time curriculum developed for Islamic education in Singapore. It aims to provide Muslims of all ages to understand, be proud of, and practice Islam as a way of life, especially in facing current challenges. The curriculum is dynamic and is a learning experience for Muslims in Singapore. The curriculum aims to produce people who are kind, responsible, and virtuous, to understand Islamic knowledge, and to practice it<sup>11</sup>.



**Figure 1. Types of Islamic Education in Singapore**

<sup>10</sup> MUIS, "Vision & Mission," 2020, retrieved from <https://www.muis.gov.sg/About-MUIS/Vision-Mission>. Accessed 2020-01-31.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Muhammad Taufiq Arifin, "Assistent Head, Madrasah Policy and Planning Strategy Unit, Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura," 2014; see also Admin, "Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura," 2020, retrieved from <https://www.muis.gov.sg/>. Accessed 2014-09-11

Figure 1 shows that **Singapore implements** three types of Islamic education for Muslim communities, i.e., Part-Time Education, Full Time Education, and Islamic Study Programs for the Community.

### 1. Part-Time Education

The part-time Islamic education program is implemented in mosques and Private Islamic Religious Schools. The implementation of part-time Islamic education is only done on weekends due to the constraints of national school hours until the evening. According to Muhammad Taufiq,

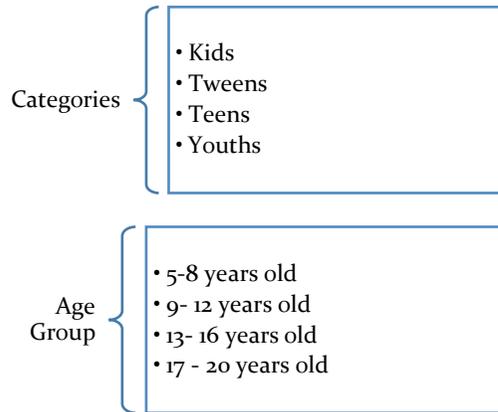
"In the past, the implementation of a religious school may be held in full time in the evening. Nevertheless, after the public school continues the study period until evening, then alternative Sunday classes are forced to be implemented to ensure Muslim children receive an Islamic education"<sup>12</sup>.

The mosque has been strengthened to function not only as a center of worship but also as a center of activity for Muslims as in the time of the Prophet. Currently, Singapore has 70 mosques offering classes to study Religion and other disciplines with 27 mosques implementing a part-time madrasah system. They have a modern and exclusive mosque management system and have a unique recitation system.

The mosque in Singapore is not only a place of worship but has also become a Center for Islamic Learning and Community Development. The local community performs voluntary management of the mosque through the Mosque Management Board (MMB) under the supervision of the Mosque and Social Development Cluster and MUIS.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Arifin, "Assistent Head, Madrasah Policy and Planning Strategy Unit, Majelis Ugama Islam Singapura"; see also Admin, "Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura."



**Figure 2. Full-time Islamic Education Curriculum aLIVE**

Private Islamic Religious Schools also support the implementation of Islamic education in Singapore, some of them are al-Khairiah Islamic School, Madrasah and Tahzibiah al-Islamiah and the Radin Mas Religious School. Madrasah is established on behalf of the company and uses its first curriculum (the focus of Al-Quran and Fardu Ain studies) part-time and is performed over the weekend in the form of tuition fees. This school is an alternative for parents who do not choose the mosque<sup>13</sup>. Besides, efforts to develop Islamic education are also performed by Andalus Corporation. The organizations registered under the organization register offer nursery, preschool, children, high school, youth, adult, tahfiz, and diploma classes to the Muslim community in Singapore.

For the implementation of Islamic education in the mosque, a specialized curriculum was created by MUIS by introducing the Singapore Islamic Education System (SIES) and introducing the aLIVE curriculum, as shown in figure 2 below.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Sharifah Thalha Binti Syed Haron, "Eksekutif, Unit Dasar Dan Perancangan Madrasah, Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura," 2014.

a. KIDS ALIVE

“An Early Start to Islam.” This program provides an introduction to Islam. Students are exposed to the basics of Islam, especially in Aqidah, to anchor their beliefs from a young age.

	Tauhid & Fiqh	Akhlak & Character	Sirah & Islamic Civilisation	Quranic Literacy & Understanding
<b>KIDS Year 1 (5 years old)</b>	- Belief in Allah	- Respect their elders	- Learn the sunnah of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. appropriate to their age	- Introduction to hija'iyah letters
	- Belief in the prophets, angels, Holy Books	- Help others	- Prophet Muhammad's saw. life	- Recitation of Iqra
	- The 2 Kalimah Syahadah	- Learn values like respect, responsible, love, and Ihsan		- Recitation and understanding of short; Surah Al-Fatihah, Al-Asr, Al-Ikhlash and Al-Nas
	- Know the steps and recitation in solat	- Love for Allah, Rasul, self, and others		
	- 5 Solat times	- Being Responsible as a Muslim at home, in school, in the community		
	- Ramadan and Fasting	- Respect for self and others at home, in school, in the community		
	- Halal & Haram foods			
		<b>Tauhid &amp; Fiqh</b>	<b>Akhlak &amp; Character</b>	<b>Sirah &amp; Islamic Civilisation</b>

<b>KIDS Year 2 (6 years old)</b>	- Wudu' (steps, methods & types of water for wudu')	- Peace, respect, responsibility, and love	- Prophet Nuh	- Reading and understanding of Surah Al-Kauthar, Al-Falaq & Al-Nasr
	- Salat (more details - names, times, direction, readings)	- Responsibility is doing what Allah wants us to do	- Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr, and the Spider	- Iqra reading
	- Azan	- Story of Prophet Daud and Jallut	- Prophet Musaa traveled to save his people	
	- Solat with 2 raka'at (actions & reading)	- The story of Dzulqarnain		
	- Du'a for Parents, Du'a for Forgiveness	#VALUE!		
	- Fasting and Zakat	- Honesty to self, to others and Allah		
	- Introduction to Hajj	- Prophet Muhammad's qualities - Al-Ameen & Al-Siddiq		
	<b>Tauhid &amp; Fiqh</b>	<b>Akhlak &amp; Character</b>	<b>Sirah &amp; Islamic Civilisation</b>	<b>Quranic Literacy &amp; Understanding</b>
<b>KIDS Year 3 (7 years old)</b>	- Pillars of Iman:	- Covering our bodies well (Aurah)	- Prophet Muhammad saw. and His Family	- Revision of Surahs learned in K1 & K2
	Name 6 of Allah's angels and their responsibilities			
	Al-Qur'an as the final Revelation from Allah	- Etiquette/ Behavior during Ramadan, Sahur, Zakat & Sadaqah	- Story of Prophet Zulkifli & Prophet Syuaib	- Reading and understanding of Surah Al-Alaq (1-5) Surah Al-Qadr Surah Al-An'am 162 Surah Al-Ma'um Surah Al-Quraisy
	Qiyamah and Akhirah			

	- Pillars of Islam: Solat	- Simplicity & Moderation	- Story of Prophet Muhammad way of eating food while sahur and iftar	- Iqra reading
	Etiquettes related to Solat			
	Azan and Iqamah, Wudu'	- Prophet Muhammad's Daily Routine, the difference & similarities	- Concept of using money wisely: Story of Sahabah giving zakat to prophet Muhammad	
	Sadaqah and Zakat			
	Jamaah prayers	- Concept of feeling contented (Qana'ah)	- Story of Siti Hajar and Ismael	
	- Fasting			
	Blessings of Ramadhan, Value of obligatory fast, Sahur, Iftar, Taraweeh & Eid prayers		- Living the sunnah of Prophet Muhammad	
	- Hajj, Korban rites & its benefits			
			- The concept of "Best Example" (Uswatun Hashanah)	
	- Identifying the importance of the Sunnah and the Hadith			
			- Ways to emulate Prophet Muhammad's teachings, habits, and daily practices	
	- Daily Du'as and etiquette			
	<b>Tauhid &amp; Fiqh</b>	<b>Akhlak &amp; Character</b>	<b>Sirah &amp; Islamic Civilisation</b>	<b>Quranic Literacy &amp; Understanding</b>
<b>KIDS Year 4 (8 years)</b>	- The compulsory acts of solat	- Being patient and responsible Muslims	- Stories of the prophets- Adam a.s., Idris a.s., Nuh a.s., Hud a.s., Salih	- Reading and understanding of Surah Al-Masad Surah Al-Kafirun, Surah Al-

old)		a.s., Ibrahim a.s., Luth a.s., Ismail a.s., and Ishak a.s., Ya'kub a.s., Yusuf a.s., Ayub a.s., Zulkfli a.s., Musa a.s., Harun a.s., Daud a.s., Sulaiman a.s., Ilyas a.s., Ilyasa' a.s Yunus a.s., Zakaria a.s., Yahya a.s. & Isa a.s.	Zalzalalah Surah Al-Qari'ah, Surah Al-Humazah Surah Al-fil
- Taharah - Types of water for Wudu' (revisit)	- I can cooperate and work with others in unity	- A brief story of Prophet Muhammad saw.	- Revision of all surahs
- Tayammum		- Revision on the stories of the prophets	
- Sunnah acts of solat			
- Cleanliness and Personal Hygiene			
During solat (wudu')			
Istinkjak			
Clothing			
Living conditions			
Food & drinks			

## b. TWEENS ALIVE

“Exploring, Discovering & Learning Islam.” This program builds on students' existing knowledge of Islam from the previous program. Students are guided on understanding and carrying out responsibilities as a Muslim so that they will be prepared to face the challenges of pre-teen life.

	<b>Tauhid &amp; Fiqh</b>	<b>Akhlak &amp; Character</b>	<b>Sirah &amp; Islamic Civilization</b>	<b>Quranic Literacy &amp; Understanding</b>
<b>Tweens Year 1 (9 years old)</b>	- Belief in Oneness of Allah	- Have a greater self-awareness & self-acceptance	- Birth of Prophet Muhammad saw.	- Memorization, reading, and understanding of
				Surah Al-Alaq
	- Categories of Islamic regulation - Wajib, Sunnah, Prohibitions, etc.		- Prophet Muhammad saw in his Youth	Surah Al-Bayyinah
				Surah Al-Takathur
	- Solat Sunnah - Tahiyatul Masjid, Rawatib, Terawih, Witr & Eid		- Learn about the Early Spread of Islam and the first revelation	Surah Al-Qadr
				Surah Al-Alaq Surah Al-Tin
	- Classification of Syariah Law (Fardu Ain & Fardu Kifayah)			
	- Cleanliness & Hygiene - Sunnah Acts before Prayers for Jum'at & Eid Celebration			
	<b>Tauhid &amp; Fiqh</b>	<b>Akhlak &amp; Character</b>	<b>Sirah &amp; Islamic Civilization</b>	<b>Quranic Literacy &amp; Understanding</b>
<b>Tweens Year 2 (10 years old)</b>	- Introduction to Solat Jama' & Qasr	- Learn and emulate Positive Attitude as a Muslim - optimism, acceptance & resiliency	- Learn about the history of Hijrah, Muslim's Life in Medina	- Memorization, reading, and understanding of
				Surah Al-Duha
	- Solat Sunnah 3 - Dhuha, Tahajjud, Hajat and Istikharah		- Review Significant events in Sirah	Surah Al-Sharh
				Surah Al-Adiyat Surah Al-Bayyinah
	- Sources of Authority in Islam (Quran, Hadith, Fatwa, Syura, etc.)			
	- Sunnah acts-Umrah			



<b>Tween 4 (12 Years old)</b>	- Aqidah Ahil Sunnah Waljamaah	- Learning about identity as a Muslim	- Celebration in Islam	- Memorization, reading, and understanding of Surah Al-A'la
	- Revisit - Ghusl (Haid, Nifas, Bulugh) Supplementary Programmes	- Learn about responsibility as an adult Muslim	- Islamic Art & Cultural diversities	Surah Al-Tariq
	- Revisit - Solat Jama'ah, Solat Sunat		- Important events in sirah (Revisit)	Surah Al-Buruj Surah Al-Inshiqaq
	- Learn in-depth about Hajj and umrah		- Great Muslim Personalities and their Contribution	
			- Overview of Islamic History and Civilisation	

c. TEENS ALIVE

“Learning, Living & Loving Islam.” This program reinforces Islamic values and builds on students' existing knowledge of Islam. It also provides a platform for students to discuss Islamic perspectives on issues like identity, entertainment, relationships, and other relevant areas concerning teens.

	<b>Tauhid &amp; Fiqh</b>	<b>Akhlak &amp; Character</b>	<b>Sirah &amp; Islamic Civilization</b>	<b>Quranic Literacy &amp; Understanding</b>
<b>Teens Year 1 (13-16 years old)</b>	- Understand the purpose of life and the concept of creation	- Being a good role model and grateful to parents	- Know the early progress of Islam	- Learn simple Arabic words and phrases
	- Seeking help from Allah in dealing with challenging teenage years	- Being responsible and accountable for one's own choices and decision	- Introduction to the Muslim and pluralistic society	- Introduction to Tafsir Al-Qur'an
	- Appreciate the miracles of God's creation in nature	- Appreciate oneself and care for the physical	- Learn the Challenges Muslims faced in	- Understand the meaning of Qur'anic verses

( sky, sea, geology)	self as a trust from Allah	the early days of Islam
		- Understand the Ummah's responsibility and among fellow Muslims

#### d. YOUTH ALIVE

“Empowering Tomorrow's Leaders with Islam.” This program provides a variety of modules for youths with different backgrounds and interests. It also provides an opportunity for youths with minimal or no formal Islamic education background to "catch up" via the "Revisit Series."

	<b>Tauhid &amp; Fiqh</b>	<b>Akhlak &amp; Character</b>	<b>Sirah &amp; Islamic Civilization</b>	<b>Quranic Literacy &amp; Understanding</b>
<b>Youth (17-20 years old)</b>	- Explore deeper into Pillars of Islam and Iman - Clarify any issues or misconception regarding Tauhid - ensure mastery of all the content in the Pillars of Islam	- Learn to communicate and listen effectively - Acquire leadership skills - Being a resilient, confident and robust youth	- Learn the history of Islamic Civilisation and the expansion of Islam beyond the Arab peninsula - Understand the influence of culture and science in Islam - Acquire the usage and misuse of natural resources - Know the economic system in Islam	- Recite and memorize Al-Qur'an - Learn the Arabic language in Al-Qur'an and Hadith - Internalize the meaning of each Quranic verses

## 2. Full-Time Education

Full-Time Education is performed in a formal school or madrasah. Madrasah comes from Arabic, which means 'school' or Islamic school. This madrasah introduces the Islamic education system, studying the Koran and al-Hadith conducted by pious scholars or operated by mosques.

The Islamic Education System in Singapore has traditionally been run using the same school system as in Malaysia, Patani, and the Indonesian Islamic Boarding School. The modern school system refers to Egypt and the West, known as a madrasah, Arabic schools, or religious schools. The western education system has introduced the concept of colonial education (dualism), which has separated religion and secular science (world), as shown in figure 3 below.

DINIYAH CURRICULUM	NATIONAL CURRICULUM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Islamic Education (6 groups of Azhari subjects)</li> <li>• Arabic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mathematics</li> <li>• Malay language</li> <li>• English</li> <li>• Geography</li> <li>• History</li> <li>• Science (Science streams: Chemistry, Biology, Physics, and Mathematics)</li> </ul>

**Figure 3. Singapore Madrasah Curriculum**

According to figure 3 above, each madrasah has its primary curriculum called the Azhari curriculum. Each madrasah will make agreements and revise their original curriculum with universities in the Middle East. For example, Madrasah al-Maarif and Madrasah Wak Tanjong have reviewed their primary curriculum at Riyadh and Azhar University to qualify their students to continue their studies there. There are six (6) groups of primary subjects consisting of Sharia subjects and *Ushuluddin* subjects, all of which come from 18 Azhari subjects. Meanwhile, the national curriculum offers O Level and A Level examination to enable the students to enter local universities or

universities in Malaysia such as Malaysia International Islamic University and Malaya University<sup>14</sup>.

In Madrasah al-Arabiah al-Islamiah, the focus is on the first and national curriculum to produce Muslim scientists. Therefore, pure science subjects are offered in addition to the primary curriculum with the addition of tahfiz and the Qur'an curriculum. Madrasah al-Junied focuses on producing Islamic scholars. Therefore, madrasah focuses on subjects and offers many major national subjects only, Mathematics, English, and Science. All madrasah offers full-time Islamic education from elementary to A, except Madrasah al-Junied and Madrasah al-Arabiah al-Islamiah, which only offer secondary education. There is only one Madrasah, Madrasah al-Irsyad, that still uses the original curriculum developed by MUIS to take the Sijil Empat Thanawi (STE). However, the curriculum is managed entirely by madrasah without MUIS intervention.

All madrasah is subject to the Education Act under Sections 87 and 88 of the Administration of Islamic Law. The control of Islamic schools is under MUIS control. Madrasah was established to produce educated Muslims to lead the community in connection with religious activities. In general, all facilities are provided by the government for madrasah facilities built on waqf land. Each madrasah has its management committee that is registered under the Education Act. Committee members are registered with the Ministry of Education (MOE) every two years with advice from MUIS. Therefore, all madrasah activities are under MUIS control under sections 58 and 59, The Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA), and all waqf land is submitted to MUIS, and all religious activities must be with MUIS permission, under sections 87 and 88, AMLA<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Arifin, "Assistent Head, Madrasah Policy and Planning Strategy Unit, Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura"; see also Admin, "Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura."

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Arifin, "Assistent Head, Madrasah Policy and Planning Strategy Unit, Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura"; see also Admin, "Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura."

Madrasah	Joint Madrasah System
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Madrasah al-Maarif al-Islamiah</li><li>• Madrasah Wak Tanjong al-Islamiah</li><li>• Madrasah al-Sagoff</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Madrasah al-Irsyad al-Islamiah</li><li>• Madrasah Aljunied al-Islamiah</li><li>• Madrasah al-Arabiah al-Islamiah</li></ul>

**Figure 4. Types of Full Time**

Currently, there are six of the largest institutions in Singapore that carry out full-time education. Six madrasahs in Singapore are managed in a modern and professional manner with proper equipment, especially information technology systems. The six madrasahs are under the auspices of MUIS with an education system that combines the science of Religion with general science. The subjects taught in madrasah are Islamic and Arabic, and also national subjects.

According to Figure 4 above, there are two types of madrasah management in Singapore, i.e., Madrasah (Madrasah Management Institutions), and management performed by Madrasah Management Institutions and MUIS. The management of three madrasahs, Madrasah al-Maarif al-Islamiah, Madrasah Wak Tanjong al-Islamiah, and Madrasah al-Sagoff, are performed by the Madrasah Management Institute entirely without MUIS interference. The role of MUIS is only to accept Madrasah registration, to monitor the progress and access of Madrasah data and information, and to transfer funds to madrasah. All administrative functions of madrasah administration, including curriculum designation and appointment of teachers, fall under the jurisdiction of the madrasah.

In 2008, MUIS introduced the Joint Madrasah System (JMS) to help improve management and the continuation of the madrasah's vision and mission to produce Muslim scholars. JMS has also established a comprehensive and balanced curriculum between Islamic and modern science and the approach adopted according to current needs. In 2009, three madrasahs joined JMS, Madrasah al-Irsyad al-Islamiah, Madrasah Aljunied al-Islamiah, and Madrasah al-Arabiah al-Islamiah when an agreement (MoU) was signed by Madrasah Management in 2007. JMS enables Madrasah management to receive human, financial, and information-communication resources from MUIS. Meanwhile,

madrasah management focuses on the core function of the madrasah, which is to educate students and produce future Religious and Asatizah leaders. Through this JMS system, madrasah teachers will be trained by trained teachers and educators at the National Institute of Education (NIE) in collaboration with the MUIS Academy.

In 2003, madrasah teachers received training in collaboration with Edith Cowan University, Western Australia. Subsequently, they received the Special Teaching and Learning Training organized by NIE International and MUIS. To date, around 200 teachers or more than 90% of madrasah teachers have received formal teaching training. The courses performed during this service allow madrasah teachers to have teaching skills. According to Dr. Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister of Islamic Affairs, madrasah work together to send their teachers to improve the quality of education in madrasah. This is because teacher training is an essential aspect of the education system. According to Syarifah Thalha, currently, there are 250 madrasah teachers in Singapore, and 200 of them already have a tertiary education<sup>16</sup>.

All professional institutions and management systems are aimed not only at the formation of the quality of Muslims and the Islamic community that is advanced, moderate and progressive, but also portraits that can compete and improve the image of Islam amid the current unfavorable global landscape. Such a model is now being fought for, so a graceful Islam materializes in the life of the people of Singapore<sup>17</sup>.

### 3. Islamic Studies for the Community

The development of Islam in Singapore has witnessed the rise of other Islamic institutions. Islamic Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) committed to the development of the Muslim community in Singapore. The involvement of NGOs in the development of Islamic education reflects the

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Haron, "Eksekutif, Unit Dasar Dan Perancangan Madrasah, Majelis Ugama Islam Singapura."

<sup>17</sup> Pendi Susanto, "Perbandingan Pendidikan Islam Di Asia Tenggara," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, no. 1 (June 1, 2015), doi:10.14421/jpi.2015.41.71-93.

commitment of the Muslim community in Singapore to uphold the dignity of Islamic education, despite the limited circumstances and constraints as a minority religion in a secular country. However, the involvement of NGOs in the Islamic education system in Singapore is only a support and continuation of broadcasting Islamic knowledge to the public.

For example, Darul Arqam, the idea for somebody that could look into the welfare, religious guidance, and problems faced by new converts to Islam, was conceived in the early '70s. In 1973, "Kumpulan Saudara Baru" or "The New Brothers Group" was formed to have a place where the new Muslim converts could get together and develop the fraternal, religious, and social relationships among themselves.

The group operated out of a modest waqf (to give in the line of Islam and its propagation) house at 24, Pheng Geck Avenue, which was administered and rented out by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore or MUIS. The house was named "Rumah Saudara Baru" or the "Muslim Converts' Home" and was officially opened by the then President of MUIS, Hj. Buang Siraj on 27 November 1977.

In 1979, under the leadership of Bro. Ridzuan Wu, the group decided to apply for the official registration of the Association with the Registry of Societies. This led to the official formation of the "Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore" (MCAS)<sup>18</sup>.

## Roles of Madrasahs in Singapore

"Madrasah" is legally defined in Singapore today as "religious school"<sup>19</sup>. While a simple rendering in contemporary administrative language does point to madrasah to mean a "school" yet, as such, it is not necessarily accurate. Concepts of "religious education," 'religious instruction,' and 'transmission of knowledge and wisdom' were so closely intertwined in the historical understanding of the word madrasah, which makes it almost a

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<sup>18</sup> MCAS, "History - Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore," 2020, retrieved from <https://www.darul-arqam.org.sg/history/>. Accessed 2020-01-31.

<sup>19</sup> Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied and Dayang Istiaisyah Hussin, "Estranged from the Ideal Past: Historical Evolution of Madrasahs in Singapore," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 25, no. 2 (August 2005): 249-60, doi:10.1080/13602000500350694.

misnomer to reduce madrasah to embody “religious school simply.” Many contemporary Muslim scholars have argued that such conceptual inaccuracies in describing many Muslim educational institutions today are products of the truncation of present thought systems from the original ‘greater’ Islamic legacy<sup>20</sup>.

Sikand (2006) states that when people criticize the madrasah education system, researchers tend to forget that the goals are different from modern schools<sup>21</sup>. Some people argue that the only way to assess madrasah is to see the extent to which they can achieve their own goals in their respective cultural, social, and economic contexts. Several articles state that the primary purpose of the madrasah is to spread Islam by producing Islamic religious leaders who can teach Islamic subjects such as the Qur'an, Islamic law and jurisprudence, metaphysical oriented logic, and the traditions of the Prophet<sup>22</sup>. Nor, Senin, Khambali, & Halim, in their research, stated that madrasah in Singapore are always considered in a negative nuance because they are ineffective and irrelevant in economic development<sup>23</sup>.

Talbani noted this when traditionalists argued that the role of the madrasah was to maintain and transmit the received Islamic knowledge (as cited in Milligan, 2004). Milligan (2004) contends that there is another important goal—the Islamization of knowledge derived from secular academic disciplines.

Madrasah has been a significant source of learning and literacy in the Muslim world for several centuries. For most poor Muslims, such as those in

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<sup>20</sup> Syed Muhammad Al-Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), 1980); Anne Sofie Roald, *Tarbiya: Education & Politics in Islamic Movements in Jordan and Malaysia* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994), 52.

<sup>21</sup> Y. Sikand, “The Indian Madaris and the Agenda of Reform,” in *Islamic Education, Diversity, and National Identity*, ed. J.P. Hartung and H. Reifeld (New Delhi: Dini madaris in India post 9/11, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Helen N. Boyle, “Memorization and Learning in Islamic Schools,” *Comparative Education Review*, August 2006, doi:10.1086/504819; see also Geoffrey. Walford and Holger. Daun, *Educational Strategies among Muslims in the Context of Globalization: Some National Case Studies* (Brill, 2004); and M.G. Husain, *Muslim Youth and Madrasah Education: In Purnea District of Bihar* (New Delhi, India: Institute of Objective Studies, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Mohd Nor et al., “Survival of Islamic Education in a Secular State: The Madrasah in Singapore.”

Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Somalia, madrasah education is an opportunity to get out of poverty, gain some form of literacy and practical skills, and for children to seek protection from social ills such as being a victim of child labor or sex trafficking<sup>24</sup>. Mokhtar (2019), in the results of their study, mention that all interviewed religion teachers agreed that there was a need for madrasah in the Singapore education system. Four out of five religion teachers answered that full-time madrasah is very important and cannot be replaced by part-time madrasah mosques to supplement secular education in public schools. They explained that full-time madrasah provides a right balance between secular education and Islam for Muslim students, where there is more in-depth learning and internalization of knowledge than is provided by mosque madrasah<sup>25</sup>.

In brief, the role and relevance of madrasah cannot be underestimated or dismissed because the Muslim community continues to grow, and society will always need the right channel for real Islamic education regardless of how progressive or modern it is. However, in Singapore, some changes to the madrasah education system may be needed, which includes the possibility of being semi-autonomously included under the scope of the government and adopting the national education curriculum to a certain extent, while maintaining the status quo from large divisions. Some parts of the current curriculum are allocated for Islamic education. This will help ensure that madrasah receives more substantial government funding and public contributions, and quality physical and additional human resources<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Michaela Prokop, "Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Education," *International Affairs* 79, no. 1 (January 2003): 77-89, doi:10.1111/1468-2346.00296; see also Karin von Hippel, "The Roots of Terrorism: Probing the Myths," in *Superterrorism: Policy Responses (Political Quarterly Special Issues)*, ed. L. Freedman (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Mokhtar, "Madrasahs in Singapore: Bridging between Their Roles, Relevance and Resources."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

The Singapore government's education policy is driven by the needs of the modern knowledge-based society and economic development. Debates about whether to reform Islamic education have often taken place between the Singapore government and the wider Muslim community, represented by various Muslim organizations. Singapore's Islamic Ugama Majlis (MUIS) plays a significant role in monitoring and managing the development of Islamic education in Singapore, which performs three types of Islamic education, i.e., Part-Time Education, Full Time Education, and Islamic Study Programs for the Community. MUIS designed a specialized curriculum by introducing the Singapore Islamic Education System (SIES) and introducing the ALIVE curriculum. The role and relevance of madrasah cannot be underestimated or dismissed because the Muslim community continues to grow, and society will always need the right channel for real Islamic education regardless of how progressive or modern it is. Madrasah had been a significant source of learning and literacy in the Muslim world for several centuries.

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