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Development of an Organisational Framework for Madrasah Education in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Madrasah education in Sri Lanka has been studied for a long time, but no organisational framework has been proposed yet. This study is aimed at developing an organisational framework for madrasah education. A Nominal group technique, Interpretive structural modelling, and Fuzzy Delphi methods are used to design, develop and evaluate the framework. Nineteen subject matter experts were involved in this study. The proposed framework comprises five authority levels of ten domains with thirty influential elements. The domains and framework achieved 100% agreement among experts. The organisational framework can solve the madrasah's real-world challenges with robust theoretical underpinning and practical and actionable solutions.

Keywords: Madrasah; Organisational Framework; Sri Lanka; Education

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1.0 Introduction

Sri Lanka is an Indian Ocean island with a population of 21.7 million. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are the four major religions followed predominantly by Sri Lankans. Christians represent 7.6% of the total population, while Muslims are 9.7%, Hindus are 12.6%, and Buddhists are 70.1% (*Census of Population and Housing*, 2015). Sri Lankan Muslims have over 1000 years of history (Dewaraja, 1994). Among Sri Lankans, formal religious education is taught on different platforms: the school curriculum from grades 1 to 11, where religious education is compulsory; weekend and evening schools for public religious education; and seminaries conduct priesthood education. The religious education in public schools and seminaries for the Buddhist population is called Previna education, managed by the National Institute of Education (NIE), which operates under the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Sri Lanka. Aside from this, community organisations and individuals govern the weekend, evening, and priesthood religious education. Hence, the necessity to reform religious education away from school is a concern among education reformists in Sri Lanka (Ramzy et al., 2022).

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The Muslim religious intellectuals and leaders are the product of madrasahs or Arabic colleges, which are registered in the Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs (DMRCA) in Sri Lanka. Before the inception of DMRCA in 1981, the MOE supported a limited number of madrasahs. Currently, 317 registered madrasahs operate in Sri Lanka (DMRCA, 2024). Despite madrasah registration, there is no centralised organisational framework for managing madrasah education. Hence, madrasah education has faced many challenges since its inception in the Late 19th century. The absence of a regulatory arm and an organisational structure has been a serious concern among educational reformists of Sri Lankan Muslims for years (Jazeel, 2020).

Furthermore, the Sri Lankan government also proposed reforming madrasah education, citing the poor quality of madrasah education in many aspects and the absence of a regulatory management structure (Parliament, 2020). However, many previous attempts were made to reform the madrasah curriculum and develop infrastructure, overlooking the need for an overall organisational structure for madrasah education in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by developing an organisational framework for madrasah education in Sri Lanka.

2.0 Literature Review

Madrasah education has been pivotal for generations in maintaining religiosity and cultural identity among Sri Lankan Muslims (Thameem & Fathima Afra, 2023). Previous studies have focused on different aspects of madrasah education among Sri Lankan Muslims. In the face of curriculum reformation, teaching methodologies need digitalisation (Mohideen & Rasheed, 2024). Gafoordeen et al. (2013) studied the practices of the Arabic language. They highlighted the main reasons for the poor quality of education are a lack of curricular development, teacher capacity, teaching materials and a poor learning environment. Thameem and Fathima Afra (2023) highlighted the importance of introducing a unique curriculum for madrasah education and the efforts of the National Shoora Council (NSC) in this regard, but this is not the first time such a proposal has been raised for madrasah education. For instance, Imtiyaz (2021) has studied the contribution of madrasahs to Islamic identity formation among Sri Lankan Muslims. He concluded that the madrasah curriculum should be prepared with the input of community-approved scholars and regulated by the government. Jazeel (2020) critiques the current century-old curriculum of madrasah education and proposes an outcome-based curriculum for Sri Lankan madrasahs. However, Ramzy et al. (2022) found some positive aspects while insisting on the overall curriculum change; the current curriculum of Sri Lankan madrasahs has a potential in inculcating acceptable level of intercultural competency despite there are no any specified arrangements in madrasah environment for engaging with otherfaith, or materials to study about the otherfaiths.

From a historical perspective, Cader et al. (2015) unearthed the millennium of madrasah education and suggested the theory of percolation of education during the colonial rule of the three centuries from 1505 CE to the late 19th century in Sri Lanka. According to him, the madrasa education was instrumental in protecting religiosity and the unique cultural identity of Sri Lankan Muslims during these eras. Jazeel (2019) explored the history of madrasah traditions and their basic characteristics. Anuzsiya (2004) unearthed that Muslim education in colonial Portuguese, Dutch and British also echoed the same percolation theory to present Muslim education, largely ignoring the western-oriented colonial missionaries and relying on madrasah education. In his work on Muslim education during the British colonial era, Asad (1993) explores the circumstances of the establishment of the contemporary madrasah in the late 19th century in British colonial Sri Lanka as a possible alternative to Western missionary education, while Rislan et al. (2025) rebranded the contemporary madrasah education as 'Indian model of madrasah'. Regarding the contribution of institutions and individuals in Muslim education, Jazeel (2017) explored the role of Mosques in Sri Lankan Muslim education, and Cader et al. (2015) compiled the form and functions of madrasah graduates among Sri Lankan Muslims.

However, since the 2019 easter Sunday attack, the studies of madrasah education in Sri Lanka faced a new challenge of stereotypical accusations, that madrasah education was a breading ground of exclusivism and fundamentalism, leading to terrorism despite being none of the terrorists of the easter Sunday attack were madrasah graduates (Ramzy et al., 2022; Zacky, 2025). This Islamophobic phenomenon that surfaced following a terrorist attack is not new. The study conducted on five major terrorist attacks involving 79 terrorists around the world from 1993 to 2005 concludes this notion: since madrasah education does not provide technical skills and knowledge for terrorist attacks, it cannot be a national security threat (Bergen & Pandey, 2006, pp. 117-118).

Nevertheless, the reformation of madrasah education among Sri Lankan Muslim intellectuals has long been a subject primarily due to the development of educational philosophy, dialogue among civilisations, and engagement with modernity (Zacky & Moniruzzaman, 2023). However, studies conducted since 2019 reiterate the need to reform madrasah education. For instance, studies by Zuhyle et al. (2020), the sectoral oversight committee of Parliament (2020), and Rislan et al. (2025) strongly recommend reforming madrasah education in Sri Lanka. However, these latest studies fail to provide a comprehensive organisational framework for madrasah education in Sri Lanka.

3.0 Methodology

This study is conducted using a design and development research approach, DDR (Richey & Seels, 1994). This research applies qualitative research methodologies to each phase of the study, which gives a robust underpinning of the selected pragmatic paradigm and constructivist lens of this research. The selection of pragmatics underpins the development of a framework to address madrasah education's challenges. Pragmatism also incorporates applying different research methodologies to find solutions for action-oriented problems (Morgan, 2007). With the frame of constructivism, where knowledge is constructed through human experience with the context (Merriam, 1998), selecting qualitative methods in each phase gives a robust theoretical underpinning. Table 1 below summarises the research methodologies used in this study in all three phases.

Table 1. Research methodologies used in this study

DDR phase description Methodologies						
DDIX prided description	incuiodologico					
Phase 1 - Need analysis	Nominal Group technique -NGT					
Phase 2 - Design and Development	NGT and Interpretive Structural Modelling - ISM					
Phase 3 - Evaluation and Validation	Survey questionnaire, review of experts, and Fuzzy Delphi Method - FDM					

08 subject matter experts involved in phase one and phase two. Experts were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on experience and knowledge. The robust criteria ensure the quality of inputs: a minimum of a master's degree, completed study in one of the registered madrasah institutions in Sri Lanka, and at least 10 years of working experience in managerial or teaching in a madrasah. Through an NGT session, the research explored the influential elements of madrasah education. In phase two, the framework is designed and developed by the same set of eight subject matter experts using ISM techniques. The NGT session involved two main steps in designing and developing the framework. In the first step, all influential elements of madrasah education were listed under the 10 domains, and domains were ranked based on their influence through a simple voting process among experts. The contextual relationship between the paired domains was established in the second step. The guide shown in Table 02 was used for this purpose.

Table 2. Contextual relationship explanation among the paired domains.

Symbol	Explanation of the paired relationship
	O - No relation between domains (i and j).
x	X - Both direction relations (i and j influence each)
V	V - Relation from "i' to ' j' (I influence ' j')
A	A - Relation 'j' to 'l' (j influence i)

Once relationships among paired domains were established, voting was conducted to ensure the established relationships of pairs of domains. The selected data was analysed through computer-aided software of interpretive structural modelling, SmartISM (Ahmad & Ayman, 2021), to develop the framework.

In phase three of the study, the proposed framework for madrasah education was evaluated and validated by the eleven subject matter experts selected by the purposive sampling method. To increase the robustness of the phase, selection criteria for the subject matter experts were set as 20 years of experience with a master's degree or 10 years of experience with a doctorate, either in managerial or teaching in a madrasah. A survey questionnaire with FDM was used to evaluate the response. A computer-aided Fudelo 1.0 (Mustapha et al., 2021) was used to evaluate the survey responses. In each phase of the study, different techniques were used to ensure trustworthiness and internal validity. In phases one and two, purposive sampling with pre-set criteria was used to increase the robustness. A pre-set criteria were communicated for conducting the NGT sessions, and member checks increased the trustworthiness. Since the evaluation of the framework necessitates experience and in-depth knowledge, robust criteria were set to select the sample for the third phase. A pilot study improved the instrument, while a content validity index (CVI) was calculated for the survey questionnaire, along with the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient - ICC (McGraw & Wong, 1996). The framework for madrasa education is evaluated through five aspects: 1. The selection of appropriate elements for the framework, 2. Classification of elements under the selected domains 3. The respective cluster and classification of domains in the selected cluster 4. The relationship among selected domains and positioning 5. An overall evaluation of the framework to address the challenges of madrasah education. The FDM responses were evaluated using three criteria: 1. Expert consensus \geq 75 %. 2. Threshold value d \leq 0.2. and 3. Fuzzy score A, α -cut value \geq 0.5 (Bodianova, 2006).

4.0 Findings

Thirty influential elements were found in the phase one NGT session. These thirty elements were rearranged under ten selected domains. The domains and the elements on each domain are tabulated in Table 3 below.

Domain	Element						
Curriculum	Teaching and learning methodologies need development						
	Dichotomy - Incompatible, not unified, and not outcome-based						
	Law level of Intercultural Education.						
	Duration of study						
	Fewer opportunities to learn other local languages						
	Madrasah Curriculum not in line with the national education policy goals						
	Extracurricular activities						
Management Board	Qualified members						
	Board members training						
	Succession planning,						
	Accountability.						
Staff affairs	Staff Qualification						
	Staff training opportunities and facilities						
	Implementation of local labour law.						
Vision, Mission and Aims and Objectives.	Vision, Mission and Aims, and Objectives.						
Relations	Collaboration among other local madrasahs and international Islamic institutions						
	Collaboration with government educational institutions						
	Community awareness, engagement and support.						
Resources	Funding and endowments						
	Infrastructural facilities						
	Library facilities.						
Student Affairs	Proper screening of student intake						
Career prospects	Opportunities and resources - Madrasah students to excel in mainstream education.						
Board of Governance	Number of madrasahs and locations of establishment						
	Minimum required standard, duration of study, and Quality accreditation						
	Establishment and management of standard operating procedure						
	Monitor and Audit						
External factors	The role of madrasah graduates within society						
	Religious education in government schools for the public						
	Evening and weekend religious education for the public						

The selected domains were ranked in phase two of the study, and results were obtained in Table 4 below. The contextual relationship was obtained for paired domains.

Table 4. Domains and priority ranks

Domain	Priority Ranks	
Curriculum	1	
Management Board	2	
Staff affairs	5	
Visions, Mission, and Aims and Objectives	4	

Relations	7
Resources	6
Student Affairs	9
Career prospects	8
Board of Governance	3
External factors	10

The relationship matrix was obtained, and a voting process was conducted to ensure the robustness of the structural self-interaction matrix shown in Figure 1 below.

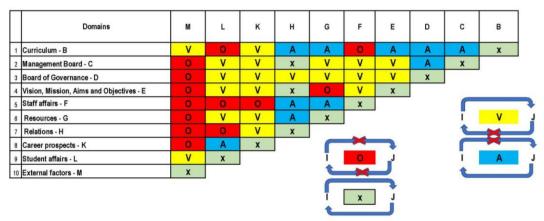


Fig. 1: Structural self-interaction Matrix

Following the replacement of real names of domains, the final reachability matrix was obtained from the SmartISM computer-aided software, as in Figure 2 below.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Driving Power
Curriculum	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3
Board of management	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1*	9
Board of governing Authority	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1*	10
Aims and Objectives	1	1*	0	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1*	9
Staff affairs	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Resources	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1*	6
Relations	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1*	1*	9
Career prospects	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Student affairs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
External factors	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Dependence Power	6	4	1	4	6	5	4	8	6	8	

Fig. 2: Final reachability matrix

The initial diagram of the framework is shown below in Figure 3

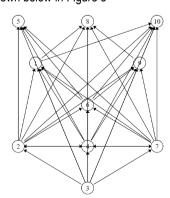


Fig. 3: Initial Diagram of the Framework

The actual domains were replaced to obtain the framework, as in Figure 4 below.

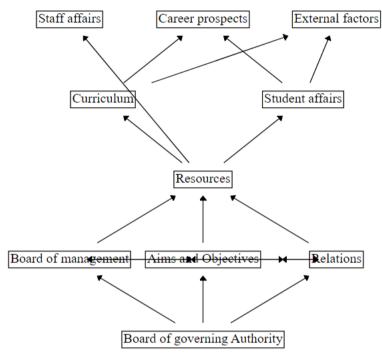


Fig. 4: Organisational framework for madrasa education

After completing the structural self-interaction matrix (ssim) process, Microsoft PowerPoint computer-aided software was used to draw the final framework for more visual impact. Figure 5 shows the framework of madrasah education in Sri Lanka. The final organisational framework was obtained by adding influential elements to each selected domain, as shown in Figure 6.

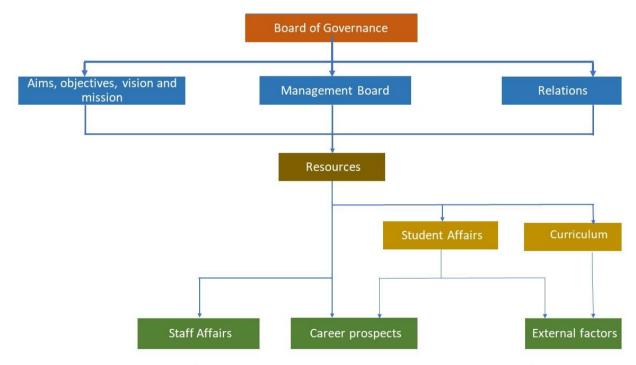


Fig. 5: The final organisational framework for madrasa education with domains

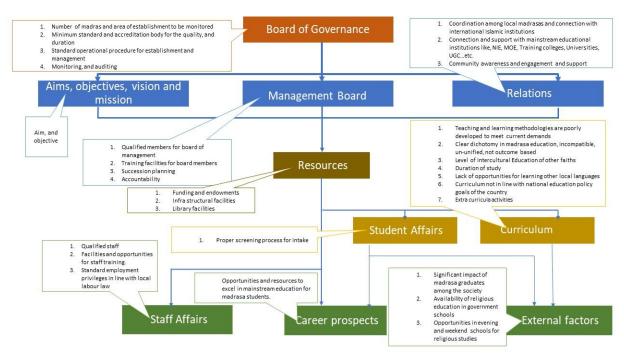


Fig. 6: The final organisational framework for madrasa education with respective elements

The final organisational framework consists of five authority levels. The domain board of governance is the most influential driving power. At the same time, external factors, staff affairs, and career prospects occupy the same level of highly dependent power in the final framework, and domain resources, student affairs, and curriculum lie in between.

The final and third phases of the study showed the evaluation and validation of the organisational framework in all five aspects discussed in the methodology. The average value of ICC obtained 0.986 at a 95% confidence level, showing excellent reliability of the framework. All five aspects obtained 100% unanimous agreement. While the defuzzification value achieved the range from 0.05 to 0.09, both are within 0.2 of the required acceptability. The fuzzzy score (A) α -cut required a minimum of 0.5, also achieved for all survey questions within the range from 0.65 to 0.73. The mean threshold value, which must be within 0.2, is also achieved by 0.06. A 100% overall agreement among the framework subject matter experts is remarkable.

5.0 Discussion

Phase one of this study reveals thirty influential elements of contemporary Indian model madrasah education in Sri Lanka, most of which can be triangulated with previous studies. These elements are categorised under the ten domains. The curriculum takes the lead among all the challenges madrasah education faces in Sri Lanka, despite various efforts in the past to unify the madrasah curriculum in Sri Lanka. The notable initiatives were made by DMRCA, NSC, and All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU) (Zuhyle et al., 2020). Though previous studies mentioned the lack of MOE's role in madrasah education, none proposed a solution to integrate under the supervision of MOE (Jazeel, 2020; Zuhyle et al., 2020). Hence, this study and proposed model integrate madrasah education within the frame of MOE. A minimum standard for the madrasah curriculum shall be defined within the policy guideline of the National Education Council (NEC) of the MOE, contrary to the recommendation of previous studies to bring it under DMRCA. This proposal aligns with the legal requirements since DMRCA has no mandate to manage educational institutions. The National Institute of Education's (NIE) vision further strengthens this finding. NIE's vision states "developing curriculum for the country's primary, secondary, and post-secondary education and managing teacher education and training programs" (NIE, 2024). Hence, this study finds that the NIE shall develop minimum standards for the madrasah curriculum in Sri Lanka as an integral part of the country's larger education system. "NEC has adopted the twelve categories of learning outcomes of the Sri Lankan Qualification Framework - SLQF as the National Learning Competency Domains (NLCDs) of education. "NLCDs should be incorporated into curriculum development at all levels in the country's education system to serve as the foundation for achieving the National Educational Goals" (NEC, 2022, p. 54). Since NLCDs are a mandatory requirement for curriculum development at all levels, they are also imperative for madrasah education.

The Board of Governance is the most independent domain in the proposed framework. This domain also aligns with the previous proposals of Parliament (2020) and Zuhyle et al. (2020). However, in previous studies, the Madrasah Accreditation Board (MAB) was proposed under the DMRCA, which has no mandate for such governance. Hence, this study proposes that DMRCA can be a part of such a governance board under the MOE. The other domains in the framework are the madrasah management board, vision and mission for each madrasah, resource management, relations, external factors, and student affairs. Career prospects are an important aspect of madrasah students. Hence, this study's proposal to integrate the madrasah qualification within the SLQF frame would open a new

horizon for madrasah graduates within and outside Sri Lanka. The SLQF is mandated by the MOE "to create an integral national framework for learning achievements by recognising and accrediting qualifications offered by different institutions engaged in higher education and vocational training in Sri Lanka" Further, the sixth and seventh goals of the SLQF refer to "facilitate lateral and vertical mobility, and progression within higher education and career pathways" and "provide guidance in comparing qualifications offered by different institutions" (UGC, 2015, p. 5). The credibility of the educational attainment depends on the accreditation given by the SLQF in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is mandatory for educational institutions like madrasahs to work within the SLQF framework. Hence, the proposed organisation framework and integration with the educational arms of the country would enhance the quality of madrasah education. The proposed framework will protect and ensure the country's labour law and all applicable employee rights of staff involved in madrasah education. Accordingly, their appointment, salary scale, retirement, and gratiuties shall align with the guidleline and regulations of the relavent government entities. The proposed framework is evaluated and validated by the well experienced experts in Sri Lanka, and their agreement of the framewok in solving the challenges that madrash education faces is remarkable contribution in this field.

6.0 Conclusion& Recommendations

The madrasah education organisational framework is a breakthrough in many aspects. This framework integrates the century-old madrasah education with mainstream educational spheres. The framework amalgamates all the stakeholders of madrasah education, namely MOE, DMRCA, the Ministry of Labour, management boards of madrasah, religious and civil movements, staff, parents and students in reforming madrasah education. The framework can guide all stakeholders in reforming madrasah education in Sri Lanka. Hence, this study recommends applying the proposed organisational framework to enhance the century-old madrasah education in Sri Lanka.

Nevertheless, qualitative methodologies in all three phases of DDR give in-depth interpretive analysis, but they restrict and limit the analytical triangulation. Therefore, future studies can use quantitative and mixed research methodologies to strengthen this research's findings further. Though the experts from the same field of study enriched the outcome, it may have potentially shaped the narratives unintentionally. Hence, this research also suggests involving experts from different fields in future studies. The findings of the ten challenging domains of madrasah education in this research open the way for future in-depth research into all these domains. Moreover, the researchers also propose a tracer study among madrasah graduates to explore the effectiveness of madrasah education in shaping their lives.

Acknowledgement

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The proposed framework and findings of this study are significant in many aspects. The organisational framework addresses the challenges contemporary madrasah education has faced in Sri Lanka for over a century. The framework provides actionable solutions in a single outlook while integrating previous studies. The pragmatistic research philosophy encompasses the solution for real-world challenges of madrasah education. A combination of pragmatism with a constructivist lens through DDR approaches is a unique conceptual framework adopted in this study. The selection of qualitative research methodologies in all three phases of DDR underpins the constructivist lens for finding the solution to the challenges of madrasah education.

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