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TRACING THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF MADRASAH EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

Mohamed Rislan[1], Zuraidah Binthi Abdullah[1], Mohammad Ismath Ramzy[2]*
[1]Department of Education Management Planning and Policy, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Malaysia
[2]Department of Educational Foundation and Humanities, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Malaysia
*Corresponding Email: ismathramzy@um.edu.my
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ABSTRACT

The *Madrasah* education system in Sri Lanka, established in the late 19th Century, has long been an important aspect of the country's educational landscape. This study explores the establishment, development, and contextual relevance of *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka, focusing on its ability to address contemporary challenges. An integrative literature review, grounded in Phillips and Ochs' theory of education policy borrowing, was employed to examine the historical and current state of *Madrasah* education. The findings reveal that *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka has evolved through three distinct phases: the Monolithic *Madrasah* before colonization (pre-1505 CE), Indigenous religious *Madrasah* during colonization (1505 CE to the late 19th Century), and the Indian Model *Madrasah* that persists today. Despite its historical significance, contemporary *Madrasah* education has failed to adapt to the country's socio-political and educational developments. These findings highlight the need for a comprehensive reform to ensure the relevance of *Madrasah* education, offering valuable insights for policymakers and educators to enhance the integration of *Madrasahs* into Sri Lanka's broader educational system.

Keywords: Contextual Relevance, Educational History, Education Policy Borrowing, Islamic Education Reform, *Madrasah*

INTRODUCTION

The role of *Madrasah* education has been a subject of global debate, particularly in South Asia, where it plays a crucial part in shaping religious and cultural identities among Muslim communities (Arif et al., 2024). Historically, *Madrasahs* have provided religious instruction and leadership training, yet concerns have arisen over their relevance to contemporary educational needs. Worldwide, *Madrasah* education has been criticized for being disconnected from mainstream educational systems, especially in the wake of terrorism-related concerns that have wrongfully linked some *Madrasahs* to extremist ideologies. This global discourse highlights the pressing need to re-evaluate the structure, content, and impact of *Madrasah* education, aiming to ensure that it fosters both religious knowledge and broader competencies required for participation in modern society (Bergen & Pandey, 2006; Sageman, 2004).

In Sri Lanka, the *Madrasah* education system is integral to the Muslim community, providing religious education to preserve cultural identity and religiosity. However, the system has faced significant challenges in integrating with the country's broader educational framework. Despite the government's efforts to provide free education through a centralized system, *Madrasah* education has often operated outside the regulatory structure, lacking administrative oversight since the formation of the Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs (DMRCA) in 1981. The *Madrasah* education system in Sri Lanka has been further isolated from mainstream education, raising concerns about its relevance and quality, primarily as it is

governed by community entities rather than a central authority (Gamage, 2019; Ramzy et al., 2022). This disconnection from the formal education system has been linked to broader issues, including public perceptions of *Madrasahs* in the aftermath of national security incidents like the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks, which led to calls for educational reforms (Parliament, 2020).

Previous studies have extensively discussed *Madrasah* education's challenges, including outdated teaching methods, inadequate infrastructure, and the lack of alignment with national educational standards (Rusmana et al., 2025; Jazeel, 2020; Zacky, 2025). However, much of the existing literature has focused on the immediate reforms needed without examining the historical context in which *Madrasah* education developed. Few studies have explored the roots of *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka, particularly its establishment and evolution over time. This gap is significant, as understanding the historical and contextual factors influencing the *Madrasah* system is essential for crafting relevant reforms. This study addresses this gap by exploring the establishment and development of *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka, examining how the Indian Model of *Madrasah* education, introduced in the late 19th Century, has evolved and adapted to the changing educational landscape of the country.

The novelty of this study lies in its historical approach, using Phillips and Ochs' (2003) Education Policy Borrowing Theory to examine the transfer of the Indian Model of *Madrasah* education to Sri Lanka. While previous research has focused on the challenges and reforms of *Madrasah* education, there is limited literature exploring the process of education policy borrowing and its effects on Sri Lanka's *Madrasah* system. By applying this theory, the study traces how the Indian Model was integrated into the Sri Lankan context and how it has influenced the current state of *Madrasah* education. This framework allows the research to understand the adaptation process of educational models across different cultural and political settings, offering new insights into the historical development of *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka.

METHOD

The integrative literature review was used in this study. Tranfield et al. (2003) explain that a literature review systematically collects and synthesizes previous research. A well-conducted and effective literature review as a research method creates a firm foundation for knowledge advancement (Webster & Watson, 2002). Though there are many methods and approaches in the literature review as a research methodology, Snyder (2019) categorizes three widely used methods: systemic literature review, semi-systematic or narrative literature review, and integrative literature review; an integrative literature review synthesizes and critiques the previous works. In this kind of literature review, samples can be research articles, books, and other qualitative published texts. Hence, this study applied an integrative literature review to synthesize previous work of *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka thematically.

This study has adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis - PRISMA framework for a rigorous and transparent data selection process. The PRISMA framework provides a structured approach for identifying screening and including relevant studies (Da Silva & Daly, 2024) for *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka. This selection enhances the reliability and trustworthiness of the integrative literature review process. The thematic content analysis frame is used to analyze the selected literature. The conventional content analysis technique is aimed at describing a phenomenon, and it is more suitable when the existing literature on the subject is limited. Conventional content analysis is inductive (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Hence, this study uses PRISMA for data collection and conventional content analysis for thematic data analysis. The researcher chooses Web of Science, Science Direct, Scopus, Google Scholar, and the library repository of five state universities in Sri Lanka where either Islamic education or Islamic civilization is taught, namely the University of Peradeniya,

Colombo University, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, Eastern University of Sri Lanka, and the Jaffna University of Sri Lanka. Such a diversity of sample selections is accommodated in the integrative literature review.

The sample size of this research was decided based on data saturation. Data saturation is the level at which the additional data will not bring new information to the purpose. Merriam (2015) explains that in qualitative research, the sample size is determined based on data saturation. Xiao and Watson (2019) explain that a search can be stopped when the repeated search of the subject yields the same results without new references; if the repeated search process obtains no new results, that is the end of the sampling. The following step-by-step procedure is followed to systematically find the literature sources for the subject study, proposed by Davies et al. (2013).

The research began by developing explicit criteria to finalize the studies used for the integrative literature review. These criteria were essential for ensuring that the selected literature was directly relevant to the research objectives. To find relevant literature, several databases were used, including international sources like Web of Science, Science Direct Elsevier, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The library e-repositories of five Sri Lankan universities that offer Islamic education or Islamic civilization as part of their graduate programs were also explored. These universities included the University of Colombo, the University of Jaffna, the University of Peradeniya, the Eastern University of Sri Lanka, and the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka.

The next step involved searching for literature using specific keywords such as "Islamic Religious Education," "*Madrasah*," "Ulama," and "Sri Lanka" or "Sri Lankan Muslims." Tips for search optimization provided by each platform were carefully considered to optimize the search results. Once the literature was gathered, it was filtered using inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the selected studies were relevant and methodologically sound. The inclusion criteria specified that the studies must be related to the research title, based on empirical, qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, and geographically relevant to Sri Lanka. The exclusion criteria included studies published in languages other than English, book reviews, encyclopedias, discussions, and editorials.

After the literature was filtered, the findings of each study were described in relation to the research objectives. The relevance of each study was carefully assessed to ensure it contributed to answering the research questions. Finally, the literature findings were synthesized to provide a comprehensive overview, helping to address the research questions effectively and draw conclusions based on the selected studies.

Figure 1 provides a comprehensive summary of the protocol followed in conducting the literature review. This protocol outlines each step taken during the review process, including the identification of relevant databases, selection criteria for including studies, and the thematic categorization of the literature. It also highlights how sources were filtered and analyzed to ensure relevance and academic rigor. The findings obtained from the literature search across each platform—such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and others—are systematically reported, allowing for a clear comparison of research trends, thematic focuses, and gaps in existing scholarship

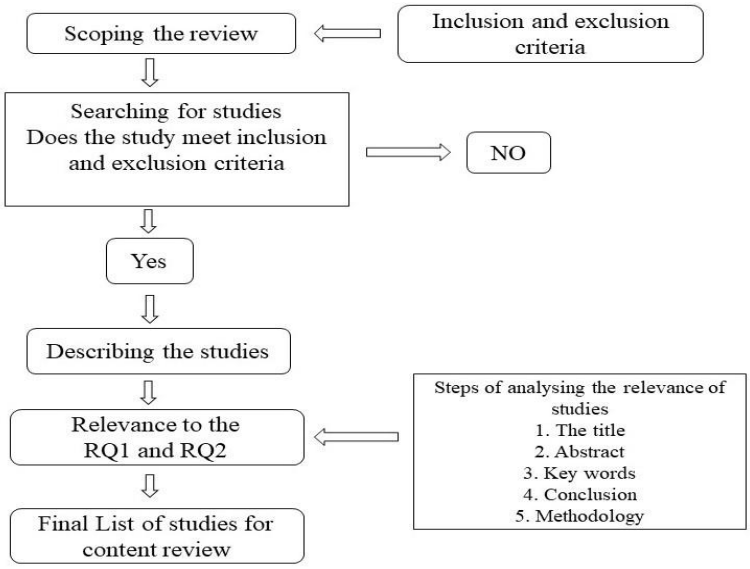

Figure 1. Protocol For Conducting an integrative literature review.
Adopted from Davies et al. (2013)

The protocol in Figure 2 is followed for scooping the article and the initial review. The literature review protocol was developed to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of this research. The strict following of the selected protocol ensures the repeatability of the study and internal validity (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The audit trial process was also followed to ensure the trustworthiness of this research. The audit trail is a method proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Richards (2020) explains that the validity of qualitative research depends on the researcher's ability to convince the readers, how they got the findings, and build confidence; this was the best way to achieve it; for this reason, it is essential to form a log of the process.

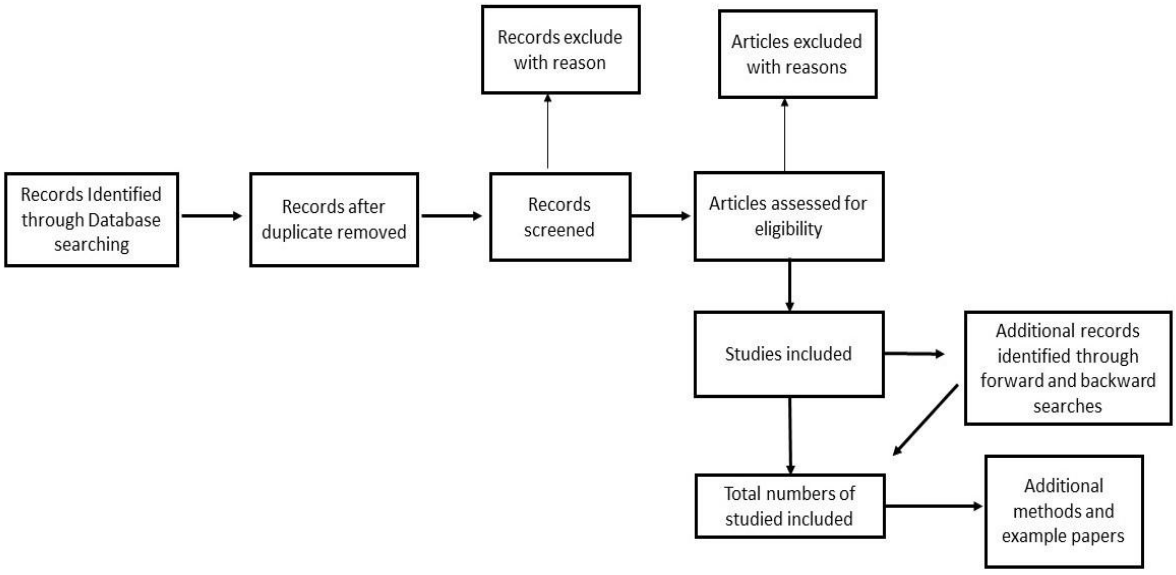

Figure 2. Protocol for literature scooping
Adopted from Xiao and Watson (2019)

The content analysis is conducted through an open coding procedure. Open coding refers to the notes and headings taken while reading the text of the literature (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The codes will be read through repeatedly to ensure all necessary headings are written to cover all aspects of the content (Burnard, 1992; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The headings are collected on a coding sheet (Dey, 2003). Categories are generated freely after the open coding, and categories are grouped under higher-order headings (Burnard, 1992). This stage aims to reduce the number of categories by arranging similar ones into a single broader, higher-order category. The abstraction refers to formulating the general description of the research topic by generating categories. The categories were named using the characteristic content words. The process of abstraction continued as long as the possible information was abstracted from the literature (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

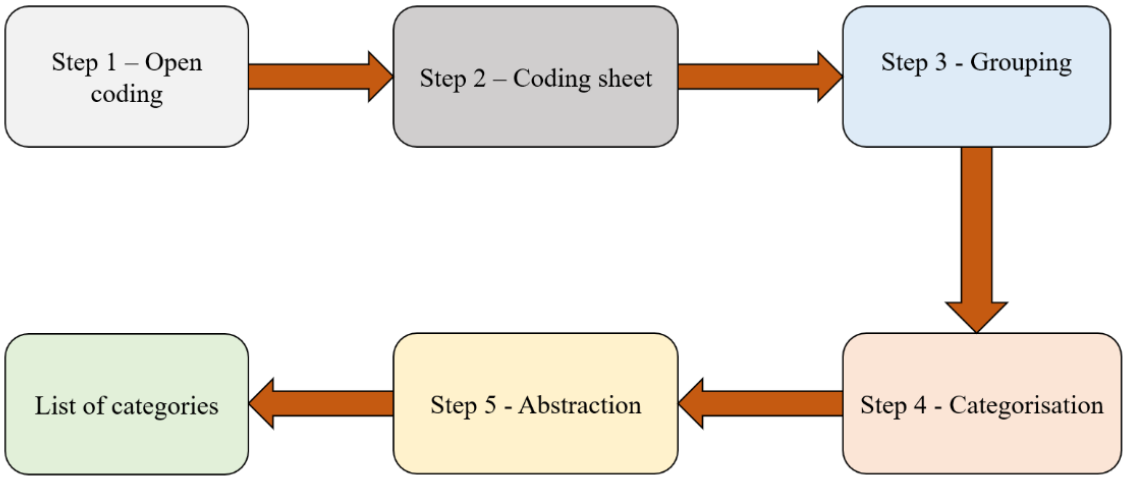

Figure 3. Steps of Organizing Content Analysis

Figure 3 shows the framework used in this research to analyze the contents of the selected literature of this study and report the list of categories in exploring the establishment and development of *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through the literature scooping process, different sources revealed different amounts of literature. Web of Science shows 71 pieces of literature in the initial filter. However, the language exclusion criteria reduced the literature numbers to 67, and through accessibility, the literature was further reduced to 23. All 23 pieces of literature were examined by reading the abstract and conclusions. Only three pieces of literature were shortlisted for the study; in a later stage, due to duplication of one, literature was excluded. Finally, two pieces of literature were selected for review from the sources of the Web of Sciences. Science Direct Elsevier showed 36 works of literature in the initial search. However, encyclopedias, editorials, discussions, and book reviews were excluded from reaching 24 literatures. All 24 works of literature were further studied by title and Abstract, and the researcher found none of the works of literature were relevant to the research question or this study. Hence, no literature was selected from the science direct Elsevier for this study. Scopus yielded 25 kinds of literature in the initial search, all in English. The titles and abstracts of all 25 were studied to find their relevance, and only one was shortlisted for further study.

Compared with all other sources, Google Scholar showed the highest number of works of literature in the initial search, equal to 445. Through the initial overview, the researcher found

that the literature could be further filtered using the geographical option. Hence, literature related to Pakistan was removed to reach 283. However, as there were no further options to filter the remaining articles, the researcher went through each to select relevant literature to the research objective. Eventually, seven articles were selected from Google Scholar for this study. However, in later stages, based on the list of references and authors' contributions, three more works of literature were added, and one piece of literature was removed from the list due to duplication of the same in other sources, which resulted in nine pieces of literature. The e-repository of the University of Jaffna and Eastern University of Sri Lanka yielded no literature. The University of Peradeniya showed 3229 articles, but the researcher found the highest number is due to the term "Sri Lanka." Hence, after going through the list, the researcher decided to further filter the numbers of selected literature by removing the term "Sri Lanka" and found only five. The title and Abstract of all five works of literature were studied to find their relevance, and none were qualified to be included in this research.

Table 1. Summary of selected works of literature from different sources for integrative literature review

No	Source of literature	Number of Literatures appeared	Number of literatures selected for further study	Disqualified due to duplication from other sources	Literature added through reading reference list and authors	Final numbers of literature selected for review
1	Web of Science	71	3	1	0	2
2	Science Direct - Elsevier	36	0	0	0	0
3	Scopus	25	1	0	0	1
4	Google Scholar	445	7	1	3	9
5	E-repository University of Colombo	708	1	0	0	1
6	E-repository University of Jaffna	0	0	0	0	0
7	E-repository University of Peradeniya	3229	0	0	0	0
8	E-repository Eastern University of Sri Lanka	0	0	0	0	0
9	I-repository South Eastern University of Sri Lanka	37	5	2	0	3

The number of works of literature found for review varies in each source, as in Table 1. The e-repository of the University of Colombo showed 708 works of literature, and after studying the title and Abstract, only one piece of literature was selected. In the initial search, the I-Repository of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka showed 37 literatures. All 37 pieces of literature were studied through the title and Abstract, and only five works of literature were

shortlisted for the study. However, it was found that two pieces of literature were duplicates from other sources, and 16 works of literature were relevant to this study. Additionally, through the reference list of the selected literature, one more journal article was found to be included, literature number 17.

Table 2. Details of Literature Selected for Integrative Literature Review

	Author/Authors	Year	Title
1	Ramzy, M.I Alshighaybi, M.S, and Rislan, M	2022	Measuring the Level of Intercultural Competence (IC) among *Madrasah* Leaders in Sri Lanka
2	Sanyal, U.	2021	South Asian Islamic Education in the Pre-colonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Periods
3	Rifai, S	2021	A Brief Survey on the Development of Education among the Sri Lankan Muslim Community Between 1948-2000
4	S. Zuhyle, F. Ruzaik and M. Hakeem	2020	A study on the Contemporary *Madrasah* Education System in Sri Lanka
5	Jazeel, MIM	2020	Application of Outcome-Based Curriculum in Religious Studies: The Case of *Madrasahs* in Sri Lanka
6	Jazeel, MIM	2019	An Analysis of the History of *Madrasah* Tradition in Sri Lanka and Its Basic Characteristics
7	Rameez, A	2019	Second minority in Sri Lanka: Genesis and current crisis
8	Mihlar, F	2019	Religious change in a minority context: transforming Islam in Sri Lanka
9	Jazeel, MIM	2017	The Mosque Programme of Education in Sri Lanka: An Analysis
10	Jalaldeen M.S.M,	2016	Contribution of Islamic revivalist movements of Sri Lanka on education development: a compare study with Buddhist and Hindu revivalist movements
11	Jalaldeen M.S.M,	2016	Contribution of Naleem Hajiyar (Sri Lanka) and B.S. Abdurrahman (Tamilnadu) for the development of Muslim education in their countries - a comparative study
12	Gafoordeen, Nagoor Arifin, Zamri Bakar, and Kasheh Abu	2013	A brief study on practices of the Arabic language in Sri Lanka
13	Ricci, R	2010	Islamic Literary Networks in South and Southeast Asia
14	Anuzsiya, S	2004	Development of education of Muslims during the Portuguese, Dutch, and British rule in Sri Lanka
15	Mahroof. M	1995	The *Ulama* in Sri Lanka 1800-1990; form and function
16	M.N.M. Kamil Asad	1993	Muslim education in Sri Lanka: the British colonial period
17	Mahroof. M	1988	A Millennium of *Madrasah* Education in Sri Lanka

The details of the selected literature are listed in Table 2. Out of the 17 selected works of literature, three studies were conducted using mixed methods involving both qualitative and quantitative designs, and all remaining 14 studies were conducted using qualitative design, and 14 are journal articles, one proceeding, and one book chapter.

The findings explore three modes of *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka. The first is a monolithic *Madrasah* before colonization in 1505CE, which resembled the heyday *Madrasah* of the Islamic dynasty in Bagdad. The second is the Indigenous religious-only *Madrasahs*, which continued for three centuries during the colonial persecution aimed at preserving the religiosity, unique culture, and identity of Sri Lankan Muslims facing the challenges of proselyte missionary

schools. The third and contemporary is the Indian model *Madrasah*, established in the late 19th Century and continues to date.

The pre-colonial and colonial era *Madrasah* are called by different names; For instance, *Veranda palli* (Asad, 1993), Pallikoodams (Anuzsiya, 2004), and *Kuttab* or *Maktab* (Jazeel, 2017; Mahroof, 1988). The contemporary Indian Model *Madrasah* was established in the later period of British colonial rule and independent Sri Lanka; these are called *Madrasah* (Asad, 1993; Mahroof, 1988; Mihlar, 2019; Rameez, 2019) or Arabic colleges (Mahroof, 1988; Zuhyle et al., 2020). According to the findings, the second type of institution borrowed from India and resembled the Indian model *Madrasah* of the 19th Century. "The Indian model *Madrasah* system flourished in Sri Lanka due to the direct influence of rich Indian traditions and the trend of *Madrasah* education" (Jazeel, 2019). Hence, the Indian model *Madrasah* would be the appropriate term for these institutions that exist to date.

The findings show that three modes of *Madrasah* education have been seen historically with the socio-political changes in Sri Lanka. In the pre-colonial and colonial eras, *Madrasah* education significantly differed from the contemporary Indian model of *Madrasah* education.

Pre-colonial and Colonial-era *Madrasah*

The pre-colonial *Madrasah* among Sri Lankans was monolithic, where religious and other branches of education were taught. These institutions have resembled the *Madrasah* institutions in the Islamic world in their zeniths (Mahroof, 1988). Pre-colonial *Madrasahs* delivered religious and other branches of education for Sri Lankan Muslims, notably arithmetic, geography, medicine, art, and languages (Mahroof, 1988). Hence, in pre-colonial Sri Lanka, a flourishing *Madrasah* education was delivering all branches of education among Sri Lankan Muslims, including religious and other education, unlike the colonial era and contemporary *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka. This finding is significant for understanding the origin of *Madrasah* Education in Sri Lanka. Some argue that introducing other branches of education could dilute religious education in *Madrasah*, as Sikand (2005) and Zuhyle et al. (2020) cited in their studies of a few *Madrasah* administrators' claims on this. However, this argument is weak since the original *Madrasah* education before colonial advent was monolithic and transformed into religion only during colonial rule in Sri Lanka. In other countries like Indonesia, Madarash is expected to develop inclusive education (Mareta et al., 2024) and promote multiculturalism education (Syarif et al., 2024)

However, the heyday of *Madrasahs* ended with the Portuguese's advent in 1505 CE for Sri Lankans. The forceful breakup of the relationship between Sri Lankan Muslims and the outer world directly affected the *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka for three centuries during colonial rule. Sri Lanka was colonized by three European colonizers successively, starting from 1505CE to 1948. Portuguese 1501-1658, Dutch 1658-1796 and British 1796-1948 (National Education Council [NEC], 2023). Since the beginning of colonial rule, education had been given a prominent place in their structure, and educational structure was planned and used by the Christian missionary organization for religious conversion (Jalaldeen, 2016). The findings of the literature show that colonial rules negatively affect Sri Lankan Muslim education to a great extent and distort their heyday indigenous monolithic *Madrasah* institutions.

During the colonial era, *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka primarily functioned in a survival mode, focusing on preserving the religiosity, culture, and identity of Sri Lankan Muslims. Several theories explain the Muslim community's approach to education during this period. According to Anuzsiya (2004) and Jazeel (2019), the "percolation education theory" reflects how Muslim education aimed to safeguard their cultural and religious identity amidst colonial rule. In contrast, Asad (1993) presents six contradictory theories that offer different perspectives on Muslim education during the colonial era. These include the idea that Muslims

were conservative and non-progressive, reacting negatively to Western education, which could have led to religious conversion had they not resisted. Another view suggests that Muslims, while accepting Western education later in the colonial period, maintained a conservative stance in relation to their culture and practices. Some argue that the lack of educational expertise contributed to the educational backwardness of Muslim missionaries, while others assert that indigenous *Madrasahs* provided only basic religious education, such as recitation and rituals, without broader educational offerings.

The arrival of colonial powers, notably the Portuguese in 1505 CE, had a profound impact on Sri Lanka's educational system, affecting all religious communities, including Muslims. The colonial administration's primary objectives—economic exploitation and religious conversion—significantly affected the Muslim community, which resisted conversion more than other religious groups. As Dewaraja (1994) notes, this resistance led to significant challenges for Muslim education, particularly in *Madrasahs*, which suffered under colonial rule. For three centuries, colonial influence disrupted the educational systems of Sri Lanka, and the Muslim community's isolation from the broader Muslim world further hindered the development of *Madrasah* education, as they relied heavily on external resources for support. Consequently, the *Madrasah* education system faced considerable setbacks during the colonial period.

The persecution of Muslims in Sri Lanka continued until the late British era in the 19th Century. During this incommunicado of three centuries, Muslims of Sri Lanka mainly focused on preserving their religiosity, culture, and identity, as stated by Asad (1993). Hence, the purpose of *Madrasah* education had transformed from a monolithic educational institute to a religious-only, zealously conducted *Madrasah*. The backwardness in education during this time prevailed in historical findings due to their firm stance against colonial missionary schools (Dewaraja, 1994), enmity towards Christian forceful conversion (Asad, 1993), and lack of opportunities to improve their survived *Madrasah* education (Mahroof, 1990). The condition and the quality of *Madrasah* education gradually deteriorated over time, and the purpose was reduced from a monolithic educational institution to a religious institution teaching basic morals and rituals (Jazeel, 2019). The findings and understanding of the transformation of *Madrasah* education during the colonial era are very significant in supporting the reformist argument that *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka needs rigorous intervention and reformation. The context of the country and paradigm of education has changed significantly compared to the colonial era in Sri Lanka, especially in Sri Lankan Muslim Society.

Contemporary *Madrasah*

With the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of Sri Lankan Muslims during the latter part of British colonial rule, their contact with the outer world, especially with neighboring India, helped them explore more educational opportunities. The findings show that changes in the British approach towards Sri Lankan Muslims created new opportunities to re-introduce one-time glories of *Madrasah* education, which deteriorated during the Portuguese and Dutch eras (Asad, 1993). However, Sri Lankan Muslims' re-approach with the outer world in the 19th Century started primarily with their neighboring British-ruled India.

Cross-National Attraction

The ingeniousness *Madrasah* that survived persecution from Portugues, Dutch, and Early British colonial rule was not sufficiently equipped to address the Muslim's educational needs, so Sri Lankan Muslims were compelled to find alternatives. "The indigenous *Madrasah* education did not equip Muslims to integrate into the national education system under British colonial administration" (Asad, 1993). Hence, the Indian model *Madrasah* becomes a foreseeable

choice for growing demand. As both Sri Lanka and India were under the same British colonial rule, it became one of the convenient choices for Sri Lankan Muslims. All these Indian model *Madrasahs* established in Sri Lanka were relied upon for their textbooks in India and teachers (Mahroof, 1995). "It is evidenced that the origin of *Madrasah* education in Sri Lanka is directly connected to the rich tradition of Muslim India, where the Muslim rule started from the 12th century and continued up to the 19th century". (Jazeel, 2019). The cross-national attraction helped revive Sri Lankan Muslim education in three main ways. (1) The economically viable group of people sent their kids to learn in Indian *Madrasah*. (2) Indian scholars visited Ceylon to teach; consequently, some initiated the establishment of the same model *Madrasahs* in Ceylon. "Religious teachers and leaders from India often traveled in the region, envisioned to disseminate their knowledge and conviction of others" (Ricci, 2010). (3) Students who studied in Indian *Madrasahs* started their own *Madrasah* in Sri Lanka.

However, the Indian Muslims were at the forefront against Western imperialism and colonization under the Mughal rule in the same period in history. Because of this reason, enmity towards British and Western civilization was reflected in their approach to *Madrasah* education as well (Sikand, 2005b). During the heyday of Mughal rule, *Madrasah* enjoyed royal support for multidisciplinary education. "Mughal scholarship and education system were not confined to theology or theological themes. Many rational subjects like medicine, zoology, botany, chemistry, physics, geography, and gemmology were studied and taught. It would be incorrect to say that the Mughal schools and colleges were heavily oriented toward religious education or training; education under the Mughals sought to cater to all sections of society" (Rezavi, 2007). The subjects included in the curriculum designed by Mulla Nizam al-Din included both *Manqulath*-transmitted sciences and *Ma'qulath*-other sciences like logic (*mantiq*), philosophy (*hikmat*), dialectical theology (*kalam*), rhetoric and astronomy. *Manqulath* includes hadith studies, Quran exegesis, and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) (Ingram, 2019). Jazeel has listed a few more secular subjects in Medieval Indian Madrasas under the Mughal rule. The advancement of education under the Mughal rulers included many secular subjects like mathematics, astronomy, agriculture, and accountancy (Jazeel, 2019).

With the decline of the Mughal Empire, the tradition of education within *Madrasahs* gradually shifted towards focusing solely on religious instruction. Although the educational syllabus established by Mulla Nizam included rational sciences as a foundation, the 18th Century saw a marked decline in the prominence of these subjects as religious education took precedence. According to Riaz (2010), the study of rational sciences began to wane in the later stages of Mughal rule, and the *manqulath* tradition—emphasizing revealed sciences—gained prominence. Shah Waliullah Dehalvi (1703-1762) played a significant role in this shift by founding the Madrasa-e-Rahimia, where religious education was prioritized over secular subjects. As a result, various adaptations of the Dar-e-Nizami syllabus became widespread in *Madrasahs* across the Indian subcontinent, further reinforcing the dominance of religious education at the expense of other disciplines.

This shift toward religious education led to the emergence of the Ulama as community leaders in Muslim society, particularly as the Mughal Empire's decline removed the patronage that had previously supported them. Ingram (2019) argues that the Ulama rebranded themselves as religious leaders for public morality, stepping into a more active role within society and reshaping the moral and spiritual guidance of the community. This transformation marked the rise of the Ulama as a significant figure in Muslim societies, a trend that continued and deepened during the colonial era. As the *Madrasah* system became increasingly centered on religious education, the Ulama solidified their position as key influencers in religious and social matters, which played a pivotal role in shaping Muslim identity during both the decline of the Mughal Empire and the onset of British colonization.

The new policy of British colonizers adversely induced *Madrasah* leaders to establish many *Madrasah* institutions. However, this time, it is solely based on religious education, ignoring the other compartment of education. To name a few of such kind, Darul Uloom Deoband in 1866, Darul Uloom Numaniyyah of Lahore in 1887, Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama (in short Nadwa) in 1896, and *Madrasah* Manzar al-Islam in Bareilly in 1904. The formation of a *Madrasah* is considered the religious duty to protect against the intrusion of Western Christianity through education. Hasan (2006) substantiates this argument. According to him, the formation of the *Madrasah* and propagation of religious education is a form of resistance to Western cultural intrusions.

The British interference in *Madrasah* education in the Indian subcontinent had two significant impacts: the formation of educational dualism and a dichotomy between religious and secular, as well as the creation of religious movements and activism. "The education policies of the colonial administration, especially its insistence on Western education (labeled as secular education), had an impact in two ways: first, it bifurcated education into two realms – secular and religious. Educational dualism religion was pushed to the private sphere and was identified as a distinct sphere of life and activity, neatly separate or separable from other similarly defined spheres. The second impact is creating a new social space for religio-political activism. The marginalization of religious education and the exclusion of overt religious texts in schools created a space for religious movements to reach a new public through their educational institutions in the 19th century" (Sikand, 2005a).

Given that both India and Sri Lanka were under British colonial rule, Sri Lankan Muslims found the relatively recent Indian model of *Madrasah* education to be an appealing and practical solution for addressing their own educational needs. The structured nature of the Indian *Madrasah* system offered a ready-made framework for delivering organized religious and academic instruction. As for Jazeel (2019), "the establishment of [the] Indian model *Madrasah* aimed at providing structured education," filling a significant gap in the educational landscape for Sri Lankan Muslims at the time.

Decision and Implementation

In the local context, the findings of the integrative literature review show Muslim parents, too, appealed to the *Madrasah* education as an alternative for their kids' educational needs. This is due to many reasons: (1) Muslims were given no opportunities in British elite schools, (2) Muslim parent's fear of exposure to proselyte British schools, (3) Exorbitantly expensive missionary school education, and (4) Absence of financial support from the government for parents to educate their kids are few. On the other hand, the *Madrasah* education was provided free of lodging and education expenses and more religious content (Asad, 1993). The local Muslim philanthropists and community endowments finance these Indian model *Madrasahs*. The first of the existing Indian models, *Madrasah*, is recorded as *Madrasahthul* Bari in Waligama, the southern city in Sri Lanka. "The first *Madrasah* was established by visiting Indian scholar Mappillai Lebbai Aalim from Kelakkarai Tamil Nadu in 1884" (Jazeel, 2019). Within 01st half of the 20th Century, nine Indian model *Madrasah* were established throughout the country (Asad, 1993).

The Indian model *Madrasah* was transplanted to Sri Lanka without any contextual suitability analysis, carrying both its strengths and weaknesses. One key limitation was its reinforcement of a rigid religious-secular dichotomy, with a clear emphasis on religious instruction; as Asad (1993) notes, "the *Madrasah* education introduced during the British colonial era was only with religious subjects." This study introduces the term "Indian model *Madrasah*" to underscore its broader implications for understanding the structure and orientation of existing *Madrasah* institutions among Sri Lankan Muslims. Scholars generally agree that the

Indian *Madrasah* system established itself firmly as a religious institution, reflecting the 19th-century separation between religious and secular education (Riaz, 2010). This influence is evident in the early *Madrasahs* in Sri Lanka, shaped by Indian scholars and Sri Lankan students who trained in India and later replicated similar models at home (Mahroof, 1988). Despite the system's contribution to reviving religious education among Sri Lankan Muslims over the past Century, it failed to offer a holistic educational approach. Interestingly, while the influence of Indian *Madrasahs* is well-documented, no prior studies have explicitly used the term "Indian model *Madrasah*," which this research seeks to establish as a critical conceptual lens.

Internalization

The Sri Lankan Muslim community was explored, and a few learned leaders identified the inefficiency of the Indian Model *Madrasah* in providing holistic education as a single source. In the third quarter of the nineteenth Century, Muslim leaders were deeply disturbed by the backwardness of their community in education (Jalaldeen, 2016). Hence, they started a campaign to establish Western-style government-sponsored schools for Muslims. "Sri Lankan Muslims send their kids to South India for higher education. In the later 1890s, the Muslim community became more assertive and asked for schools themselves provided by the central government but administered according to Islamic culture and practices" (Asad, 1993). The efforts of Muslim leaders came to reality in the late 19th Century, "with the efforts of notably Siddi Lebbe, and support of Ahmed Orabi Pasha, the first Anglo Mohammedan school (*Madrasahthul Khairiyya Islamiyyah*) established in November 1884 marked the beginning of Muslim education integration with the mainstream government educational organ" (Jalaldeen, 2016). Consequently, the inception of Muslim vernacular schools and compulsory religious education in government-funded schools busted the barriers that prevented Sri Lankan Muslims from emerging into mainstream educational institutions. This development would have reduced the number of *Madrasahs*, but in contrast, it reacted the opposite way in parallel.

The *Madrasah*'s failure to react to the contextual development is evident in other factors. For instance, unlike in the colonial era, few more formal arrangements were developed for the Muslim public's religious education: evening and weekend Quran-*Madrasah*, weekend Ahadiyya Daham schools, and Islamic religious higher education opportunities in government Universities are few formal educational opportunities. The Ahadiyya Daham part-time schools have operated since 1951 (DMRCA, 2022). Evening Quran-*Madrasah* developed in almost every Jummah Mosque (Jazeel, 2017); these two educational institutions are registered under the DMRCA. Additionally, four government universities offered Islamic religious education: Peradeniya, Colombo, and South Eastern and Eastern Universities; these developments significantly improved the opportunities for the Muslim Public's religious education.

Nevertheless, there is a similar context in some other Muslim minority countries like Singapore; after the independence from colonial British rule and the introduction of fund-free education like in Sri Lanka, the number of *Madrasah* had been reduced significantly from sixty-five in the 1950s to six in 2000 in Singapore (Tan, 2009; Rahman et al., 2019). However, one of the main reasons suggested by the findings of this study for the question of "how *Madrasah* education separated from mainstream education" is the transfer of *Madrasah* education from the Ministry of Education to the Department of Muslim Cultural and Religious Affairs in 1981(Mahroof, 1995). Since then, due to the absence of a monitoring and control system and an administrative framework, the quality of *Madrasah* education has declined, despite some questioning the legality of DMRCA in handling the educational entities (Parliament, 2020; Zuhyle et al., 2020). Even past graduates from the same *Madrasahs* started their ventures in good faith and for their economic survival with the support of local philanthropists, in some instances without proper teacher training (Jazeel, 2019). Hence, the quality of the *Madrasah* deteriorated

over time, with no tangible improvements within the last one and a half centuries compared to the contextual development of the country's education sphere.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary Indian model of *Madrasah* education borrowed in the late 19th Century during British rule was the foreseeable source of education for Sri Lankan Muslims then. The *Madrasah* education primarily served the Sri Lankan Muslim community's religiosity and cultural identity in history. However, *Madrasah*'s education was detached from mainstream education and has not had administrative and organizational supervision since the establishment of DMRCA in 1981, when it became under the authority of DMRCA. Hence, the Indian model of *Madrasah* education largely failed to internalize in Sri Lanka. Consequently, *Madrasah* education inevitably faces many challenges in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study concludes that a holistic intervention is needed to improve the quality of *Madrasah* education while integrating with mainstream broader educational system in Sri Lanka.

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