

The Contribution of Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah in Singapore to Islamic Education

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Abstract

Singapore identifies itself as a secular state, with no religion designated as the official religion. This means the country chooses to remain neutral concerning religious doctrines. However, the Singaporean government still permits religious-based schools to continue their operations. There are six madrasahs in Singapore and Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah which was built in 1912 is the oldest Islamic school established there.. Reaching 111 years old as of 2023, it contains a rich history behind how it was built, its mission and vision, the education system, and its achievements. However, there seems to be a general perceivment amongst the public who thought of madrasahs as a school that focuses only on Islamic subjects when that is not the case. All 6 madrasahs in Singapore strive to offer a holistic educational programme that aims to empower its students with a strong Islamic and secular background. Hence, this study is conducted to look into and analyse the history of Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah. This includes its background, founder, the alumni, the graduates and much more. This study implements a qualitative approach and uses document analysis. The results of this study shows that the intention behind the establishment of this madrasah is to produce graduates with excellent Islamic qualities through a dual education system that combines secular and religious learning. In conclusion, this study is able to shine light upon its significance in moulding and nourishing a successful Malay Muslim community in Singapore.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Singapore declares itself as a secular state; no religion is to be declared as an official religion. Meaning that this country chooses to remain neutral regarding religious doctrine. After independence, it was clear for the nation's founders that religion-based politics could not work in a multi-racial and multi-religious Singapore. This was affirmed by then Law Minister E. W. Barker (Parliament of Singapore 1965) who introduced the Constitutional Reform Commission in Parliament in December 1965 (Mohammad Alami Musa, 2023) as follows:

“Whilst a multi-racial, secular society is an ideal espoused by many, it is a dire necessity for our survival in the midst of turmoil and the pressures of big power conflict in an area where new [forms of] nationalisms are seeking to assert themselves in the place of the old European empires in Asia. In such a setting a nation based on one race, one language and one religion, when its peoples are multi-racial, is doomed to destruction”.

Since this declaration had been put into effect, many state decisions were impacted by this, including the exclusion of religious studies in national schools. As such, the Muslim leaders saw it fit to improve Islamic education in Singapore. Actions were taken with regards to aiding the curriculum for the six madrasahs; a sizable budget was allocated to improve facilities and the

infrastructure, to upskill the teachers, to provide beneficial programmes for the students to ensure that those who graduated from madrasahs are able to navigate not only the Islamic workforce, but the national workforce as well. It was certainly tough at first, but over the years, all six madrasahs remained steadfast in maintaining their identity as an established formal educational institute in Singapore.

Madrasah Alsagoff, along with the other 5 madrasahs, have struggled to survive in this secular country. Looking back at their history, there were a lot of challenges faced in order for them to maintain their relevance as an Islamic religious school. However, they managed to overcome them and will continue to do so for the years to come. Unfortunately, much could not be changed regarding the public's opinion on madrasahs. What happened back in the late 1990s shaped the core perception of madrasahs; although the demand for the enrolment of students in madrasahs was at its peak, the Singapore government expressed its concern due to the high attrition rate amongst students. Those who dropped out of primary or secondary education found that they did not have the necessary skills to join the national labour (Intan Azura Mokhtar, 2010). Hence, this led to many thinking of madrasahs as educational institutions that centered around Islamic studies as their core education system, without prioritising academic subjects.

2. OBJECTIVES

This article aims;

- i. To highlight the history behind the oldest madrasah in Singapore; Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah. From the founder to its achievements and educational development, this study will dissect all aspects of the school that made Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah what it is today.
- ii. To shift the perception and idea of the general public of madrasahs by discovering its history, and shine light upon the dual objective education system employed by all six madrasahs in Singapore.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Singapore Education System

Singapore has one of the best education systems in the world, and is said to be ranked the best in ASEAN (Helmiati, 2020). It flaunts a very systematic and quality driven curriculum that strives to bring out the best in each student. With formal education beginning from kindergarten, then moving on to primary school whereby students are mandated to undertake the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) at primary 6 (12 years old). Afterwards, based on their PSLE results, they will then enrol in secondary schools, and then on to tertiary level with junior colleges, Institute of Technical Education (ITE), or polytechnics as their options, and lastly, university. Its consistent stellar academic performance does not stem from nothing. It all goes back to the day Singapore gained its independence. Starting off as a small new nation with little to no natural resources, Singapore knew that in order to survive, it had to put its focus on the only available resource that they have; the people. It then recognises the importance of education as one of the investments for a brighter future (human capital)

It is helpful to note that there were three phases in the educational development in Singapore since its independence. The first phase was survival-driven (1959–1978), where the aim was to create a uniform education system. The important task was a settlement on the place of language, both in the wider society and in schooling. A major reform in the first phase was the introduction of bilingualism and bilingual policy in 1966, in which it implemented a Singapore-style school bilingualism, with English as the main medium of instruction and a compulsory mother tongue

(Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil) to be studied as a subject from grade 1 and with students needing to meet specified standards of proficiency to proceed to the next level of education (Gopinathan S., 2017).

Next, the efficiency-driven phase (1979–1996): As a consequence of learning two languages at once, it was reported via The Report of the Ministry of Education 1978 (The Goh Report) that almost 30% of students dropped out as they could not cope with the bilingual system. Hence, an ability-based streaming was introduced which involved technical education to reform the academic-oriented curriculum. School leaders were also given greater autonomy to run their schools to develop different curriculum that catered to the students' varying levels of abilities and talents. Another major educational change was to fine-tune the streaming system where students were placed in different academic tracks based on their exam results obtained at the PSLE (Tan, et al., 2016).

Lastly, the ability-driven phase (1997 until present): It was launched under the 'Thinking Schools, Learning Nation' (TSLN) vision that aspires to develop creative thinking skills, a lifelong passion for learning, and nationalistic commitment in the young (Tan, 2011). Under the TSLN vision, an 'ability-driven' education is premised on the belief that all talents and abilities are equally valuable and will be equally nurtured. To summarise this phase, it focuses more on quality rather than quantity (Helmiati, 2020). It is important to note then that Singapore does not abandon its religious education aspect, including Islamic education or learning. It is still present despite being a secular country. The Muslim community never stop in their efforts to advocate for the provision of an Islamic education to the Muslim students, be it formal or informal education.

3.2 Importance of Islamic Education in a Secular Country

Singapore has been known as a secular country. It is a multi-ethnic country with more than four million residents, comprising of Chinese (78%), Malays (14%), Indians (7%) and other races (1%) (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2000). This overall shows that the Malays are a minority, amounting to 14% of the total population (Tan and Kasmuri, 2007). As of 2023, the Muslims and the Malays are still part of the minority population. Despite the low percentage of Muslims, the government has actively promoted religious harmony and understanding among its diverse population and recognizes the importance of accommodating the religious and cultural needs of its Muslim population, and Islamic education is provided through various channels, including madrasahs. According to Abdullah Othman and Abdullah Yusuf (2016), the rich history of Islamic education in Singapore spans from the early ninth century to the present day, and now Singapore continues to have Islamic education as part of its diverse educational landscape. This makes Islamic education a crucial and esteemed aspect of Singaporean society.

In addition to that, Singapore has three types of Islamic education: part-time education, full-time education, and Islamic studies for the community. Part-time education offered in mosques and private Islamic religious schools, using the aLIVE curriculum designed by MUIS. While full-time education is conducted in formal madrasahs, which have their own curriculum based on the Azhari system. Whereas Islamic studies for the community are provided by various non-governmental organizations, such as Darul Arqam and Andalus Corporation (Abdul Rahman et al., 2019). It should be emphasised that Islamic education in Singapore is very significant to ensure that Islamic knowledge and values are not lost to future generations. Thus, Singapore has offered various platforms as part of its commitment to recognizing and accommodating the diverse religious and cultural needs of its population including madrasahs. Madrasahs in Singapore serve as institutions that provide Islamic education, teaching students about Islamic principles, values, and practices alongside the national curriculum.

3.3 Madrasah Education in Singapore

Madrasah education in Singapore reflects a delicate balance between tradition and modernity in religious education. The country's approach to integrating Islamic education into its diverse and

secular educational system illustrates its commitment to preserving cultural and religious identity while preparing students for the challenges of the modern world. She also touches upon the curriculum and teaching methods employed in Madrasahs, as well as the challenges and criticisms faced by these institutions (Kerstin Steiner, 2011). Local madrasahs offer a dual-education system that combines secular and religious learning. It discusses the efforts of some madrasahs to place increasing importance on secular subjects while retaining their core competency in religious education. This approach aims to provide students with a more comprehensive education that includes improved numeracy and better preparation for national examinations (Mukhlis Abu Bakar, 1999/2000).

In Singapore, there are six fulltime madrasahs that has been registered with the Ministry of Education. Each of the madrasahs has its own unique history, identity, vision, and focus. However, their educational philosophy is rooted in Islamic tradition and values, but with a modern outlook that is forward-looking and progressive (Our Madrasah, MUIS). In terms of the level of education, it caters to students from primary to secondary levels and some caters to pre-university or diploma levels. As for the part-time madrasah, the aLIVE program was introduced to replace the older mosque madrasah curriculum. The four major segments of the new program introduced includes, kids (5 to 8 years old), tweens (9 to 12 years old), teens (13 to 16 years old) and youths (17 to 20 years old) (Abdullah Othmen and Abdullah Yusuf, 2016).

3.4 Madrasahs in Singapore

The establishment of Islamic schools in Singapore dated back to 1905 when the first ever madrasah was established, named Madrasah Sibyan. Afterwards, there were many more madrasahs built for the purpose of providing the Muslim community in Singapore a well-rounded Islamic education and to ensure that they are equipped with the basic and necessary knowledge to spread dakwah to others. The demand for madrasah enrolment also steadily increased until there were 28 Islamic schools in 1962 (Farah and Zalman, 2018). Unfortunately, it was short-lived, right after Singapore's independence. Now, there are only six madrasahs left standing, starting from the oldest, Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah, Madrasah Aljunied Al-Islamiyyah, Madrasah Maarif Al-Islamiyyah, Madrasah Al-Arabiyyah Al-Islamiyyah, Madrasah Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah, and Madrasah Wak Tanjong Al-Islamiyyah.

3.4.1 Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah

The oldest madrasah in Singapore built in 1912 and founded by Syed Muhammad bin Ahmed Alsagoff. A study by Siti Noorasikin et al. (2011) found that the school was first established to teach the young from the Alsagoff family with its teachers also being from the Alsagoff family. As time passed, there seemed to be a rising number of students from Arab countries who travelled to Singapore to pursue Islamic education there. Consequently, the founder decided to scrap the old building and build a bigger building that could house more students. Still standing at 111 years old, it was an anomaly how little research and study had been done to discover the history behind it. As of 2023, there have been many staggering achievements accomplished by its students over the years. Ranging from attaining impressive academic achievements to establishing wins and securing participations in both national and international competitions.

3.4.2 Madrasah Aljunied Al-Islamiyyah

It was built in 1927 and founded by Syed Abdul Rahman bin Junied. Located at 30, Victoria Lane, it houses both male and female students. Initially, it had only 10 male students, and later continued to increase over time. One of the biggest challenges that the school faced was when Singapore announced a proposal of Compulsory Education (CE) system in 1999, and it was later announced that the six madrasahs could be exempted from CE if they could meet the PSLE benchmark. In 2008 however, Madrasah Aljunied failed to do so hence they were mandated to cease primary education. Consequently, they joined the Joint Madrasah System (JMS) which was formed in 2009, who later

selected Madrasah Al-Irsyad as the feeder school to Aljunied, and the situation continues on until today (Farah and Zalman, 2018). Madrasah Aljunied's excellence lies in the implementation of the Integration Curriculum, which includes Islamic Studies, Arabic Studies, and General Education, specifically the Cambridge curriculum, especially GCE O level. Additionally, this Islamic school is known for being the best in creating an Arabic-language environment. (Siti Noorasikin et al., 2011). It now remains as a school whose pathway is specialisation in Islamic Sciences with eventual entry to Al-Azhar University or other Islamic universities.

3.4.3 Madrasah Maarif Al-Islamiyyah

This school was built in 1936, located in Tanjong Katong, and was established by Muhammad Fadlullah Suhaimi who came from Wonosobo Indonesia. Its students only comprise of the female gender. If Madrasah Aljunied is known for its excellent Islamic and Arabic syllabus, then this school excels in its academic driven education programme. The Pre-University level provides both specialisations; eventual entry to Al-Azhar University and preparing its students for the GCE 'A' level examinations, which cater to those who would like to turn to a non-Islamic career path afterwards.

3.4.4 Madrasah Arabiah Al-Islamiyyah (MAI)

It was built in the year 1937. This school witnessed a horrifying incident on 26 July 1982 when it caught fire due to electric cable disturbances. After the fire, only 17 students returned to study, and classes continued at Masjid Haji Yusoff. Students sat on the floor to study together with their teachers. Without suitable buildings and functional classrooms and facilities, the student population further decreased. In a Berita Harian article in September 1982, it was estimated that \$30,000 was needed to rebuild the madrasah. This school was also part of the JMS system, hence, Madrasah Irsyad also acted as its feeder school. In most cases, the students in Irsyad who prefer to undertake a national post-secondary education in other fields would choose to continue in MAI as the school does not offer a slew of Islamic subjects but instead focuses on the academic subjects (Farah and Zalman, 2018).

3.4.5 Madrasah Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah

This school initially offered both primary and secondary education. However, in 1999, after the implementation of the CE system, it had to scrap the secondary education and now acted as a feeder school to both Aljunied and Al-Arabiah. Hence, the primary students in Irsyad could choose to enrol in either of the two schools for their secondary education. Moreover, its curriculum also integrates local and international educational content infused with Islamic values into the teaching and learning activities. English is the main medium of instruction, both in classrooms and in computer labs, science labs, and the library (Siti Noorasikin et al., 2011).

3.4.6 Madrasah Wak Tanjong Al-Islamiyyah (MWTI)

It was established in 1958 by Mohd Noor bin Taib. At that time, there were only 100 students and 4 teachers. In 1975, the madrasah registered as an official formal Islamic school in the Ministry of Education in Singapore. By 2011, the number of students had reached approximately 600, with 43 educators and education staff. Located at 589 Sims Ave, this madrasah provides education at the primary, secondary, and pre-university levels. The educational offerings at this madrasah aim to provide Islamic education and prepare students to be good Muslims who not only understand and practice Islamic teachings but also possess the knowledge to navigate worldly life. The institution's logo reflects the emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge, symbolized by "Nur" (light), serving as the primary orientation for the madrasah. Like the other five madrasahs, this school was also affected by the introduction of the CE system. In 2008, it failed to clear the PSLE benchmark and had to stop taking Primary 1 students for 3 years, starting from 2012. If this template is used when writing the full paper, header and footer will be set automatically.

4. METHODOLOGY

This article used a qualitative approach with a collection of data from journal articles, books and other authentic sources from the madrasah itself. Data then analyzes by using a thematic approach.

5. FINDINGS

Madrasah education was popular with Malay Muslim Singaporeans together with demands for a modern national education system, led to madrasah education being increasingly challenged to reform (Steiner Kerstin, 2010) Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah holds a significant place in Singapore's Islamic educational system. It was established in 1912 by Syed Mohamed b Ahmad Alsagoff. It is one of Singapore's oldest Islamic surviving schools. Madrasah Alsagoff has played an important role in the transmission of Islamic knowledge and principles throughout its lengthy history. Its conventional curriculum emphasized Quranic studies, Arabic language proficiency, and Islamic law and other core Islamic disciplines.

Madrasah Alsagoff's educational programmes have evolved over time, providing a blend of religious and secular disciplines to offer a well-rounded education. It emphasizes Islamic principles, it also incorporates mainstream subjects such as mathematics, science, and language arts. This method attempts to provide students with not only an in-depth understanding of their faith, but also the skills that are necessary for success in a variety of academic and professional activities. Madrasah Alsagoff, one of Singapore's ancient Islamic schools, continues to contribute to the preservation of Islamic heritage and values while altering its methods to meet the demands of modern education. It illustrates an ongoing dedication to Islamic education and the pivotal role it plays in shaping the lives of Muslim students in Singapore.

5.1 Founder

Alsagoff Arab School, or Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah, was founded by a prominent figure with an Arab lineage; Syed Mohamed bin Ahmed Alsagoff. He was responsible for spreading the influence of the Alsagoff family to both national and international area and had contributed to the development of the Muslim community in Singapore. Born in 1836, he was of noble lineage as his father, Syed Ahmed bin Abdul Rahman Alsagoff came from the rich and influential Alsagoff family. Syed Ahmed owned a trading business inherited from his father, Syed Abdul Rahman Alsagoff, which dealt with trading spices in the Malay Archipelago and Europe. Whereas his mother, Raja Siti binti Keraing Chanda Pulih, was from a royal family of Bugis descent from Sulawesi. Raja Siti's mother, Hajjah Fatimah, was a rich and famous entrepreneur from Malacca. The marriage between Syed Ahmed and Raja Siti resulted into five children. Syed Mohamed was known as 'Nong Chik' within his family members as he was the youngest in his family. The nickname originated from the Bugis tribe, with 'nong' meaning son, and 'chik' which means the youngest (Siti Noorasikin et al., 2011).

Syed Mohamed married with a Singaporean woman of the 'Syed' descent named Sharifah Alweah, and they had seven children: Syed Ahmad Alsagoff, Syed Hassan Alsagoff, Syed Ali Zainal Abidin Alsagoff, Sharifah Baheah Alsagoff, Sharifah Zain Asharoff Alsagoff, Sharifah Aminah Alsagoff, and Sharifah Fatimah Alsagoff. Originally, he worked as a trader (import – export) just like his father, grandfather, and great grandfather. After his father's death, he inherited the trading business as well as the wealth and riches of the Alsagoff family.

He was also known as an explorer or discoverer as he had successfully explored and discovered an area called Kukup located in Pontian, Johor which produced fine and rich agriculture such as patchouli, coffee, sago, rubber, pineapple, cocoa, and coconut. Initially, they were only

exported to Singapore, however, over time, his trade managed to enter the international market, mainly the Arab countries and Europe. Slowly, with his intelligence, he managed to spread the Alsagoff family's influence to countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Mecca, China, Turkey, and Europe.

He died on the third of July 1906, when he was 70 years old due to liver cancer. His place of death was at his own home located at Bukit Tunggul, Thomson Road in Singapore, and he was buried at the Alsagoff family's place of burial at Hajjah Fatimah Mosque, where he was buried alongside his parents and other family members. Throughout his life, he had made many meaningful and beneficial contributions, some of which lasted until today. Below, we list down some of them:

1. Raffles Hotels
2. Keramat Habib Nuh bin Muhammad al-Habshi
3. The Muslim Trust Fund Association (MTFA)
4. Syed Mohamed bin Ahmed Alsagoff Wakaff Fund (SMA Wakaff Fund)
5. Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah

Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah was built with the intention of providing Islamic and Arabic language education (PIPBA) in Singapore. This intention was that of Syed Mohamed's grandfather, Syed Abdul Rahman, who came to Singapore to trade and to also spread Islam through education. And it was made true by his grandson. In the beginning, a few years before his death, he conducted small classes at Kota Alsagoff, Java Road, with the students and teachers being only from the Alsagoff family. The first class was only attended by four students, and was done in an informal setting, with no fees attached. However, not long after, the venue was not able to fit the growing number of students from Arab countries, who attended with the intention of pursuing PIPBA in Singapore.

Therefore, Syed Mohamed came up with the idea of building a school with enough space to accommodate the students. Unfortunately, he passed away before managing to act on the idea, and the process of building was arranged and managed by Syed Omar bin Ahmed Alsagoff (1850–1927) who acted as an executor for Syed Mohamed Alsagoff.

5.2 Background History

Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah was built at Jalan Sultan 111, 1990006, near the Hajjah Fatimah Mosque, Istana Kampung Glam, and the Sultan Mosque, in 1912. It was officially opened by the Governor of the Straits Settlement in Singapore in 1913. When it was first built, it consisted of a two-story building with six classes.

Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah was built on a piece of wakaf land provided by Syed Mohamed bin Ahmed Alsagoff. He believed that the wakaf land should be used for the benefit of the Muslim community in Singapore, especially in terms of providing them the PIPBA education and to spread the dakwah of Islam in a country under the governance of a non-Muslim party (Siti Noorasikin et al., 2011).

5.3 Administration

From 1912 to 1954, the school's administration and management were subject to the supervision of Syed Abdul Rahman bin Taha Alsagoff, known as Engku Aman, who was also the trustee of the SMA Alsagoff Wakaff Fund from 1906–1954. Afterwards, the position of the chairman was taken by Syed Mohamed bin Hassan Alsagoff (1955–1983), Syed Abbas bin Mohamed Alsagoff (1984–2010), and Syed Muhammad Shafeeq bin Abbas Alsagoff (2011–present).

The principal's position was first held by Syed Abdul Rahman Alsagoff (1912–1942), Ustaz Jastan bin Abdullah (1943–1951), Ustaz K.H. Ahmad Zuhri (1952–1960), Ustazah Khamsiah

Ahmad (1961–1981), Ustazah Hajjah Latifah Haji Ishak (1982–1996), Ustazah Kamsinah Abdul Rahman (1997–2010), Syed Mustafa bin Ja'far Alsagoff (2011–2022), and Ustazah Asyunifar Abu (2023–present).

As of 2023, the Madrasah Management Committee (MMC) consists of nine important individuals: Syed Muhammad Shafeeq bin Abbas Alsagoff (chairman), Syed Mustafa bin Ja'far Alsagoff (secretary), Mohamed Nasser bin Ismail (treasurer), and the members, Syed Abu Bakar bin Mohamed Alsagoff, Firdaus bin Yahya, Syed Zulkeflee bin Syed Ahmad, Nurdiana Hanim binti Abdul Rahman, Muhammad Rafiuddin bin Ismail, and Hamidah Aidillah binti Mustafa (Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah, 2023).

5.4 Funding

The school is largely self-funded. In the first few years, for the financial administration, the school's main source was the SMA Alsagoff Wakaf Fund, and it still is today. As a result of investment, the fund managed to collect around 2 million dollars yearly. Hence, 8% of the fund was allocated for the management of the school as well as the teachers' pay, school textbooks, and many more. 3% was allocated for the management of Hajjah Fatimah Mosque since the mosque was the responsibility of the Alsagoff Family. And 21% was allocated to the Muslim Trust Fund Association (MTFA) (MUIS, 2009). The school also received its funding from the students' fees, zakat, donations from the public, and the Islamic Education Project known as Walkton Project (Muharram Project) that was launched every year. Aside from that, they also received occasional grants from the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS).

5.5 Teachers

As for the teachers, since years before, Madrasah Alsagoff never hires teachers from overseas. The school's teaching manpower is mostly the Malay Muslims in Singapore, some are the alumni, some are graduates from other madrasahs, whilst teachers who teach academic subjects are those who have worked in national schools before. One other interesting fact is that the teachers in this school are always dominantly female. As of 2023, there are only 2 male teachers and 3 male admin staff.

5.6 Students

From 1912 until the World War 2 (1939 – 1945), only male students were enrolled. In the period between the two world wars, there were neither necessity nor demand perceived for the enrolment of girls, as the policy of the British council discouraged the girls from attending schools (Siti Noorasikin Tumiran et al., 2011). After the Japanese Occupation in 1945, only then the girls came to be enrolled. In 1950, girls and boys were in separate schooling sessions and classes, and ten years later, the school witnessed a dwindling number of male students' enrolment. Eventually, after Singapore gained its independence, the school officially announced itself to be an all-female school.

Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah has approximately 300 students enrolled over the course of its 12-year educational programme. Students build a strong foundation in Islamic subjects during their first ten years in Primary and Secondary school, learning and memorizing the Qur'an and hadith, as well as other essential subjects such as tafsir, tauhid, fiqh, sirah (Islamic history), and akhlak.

Initially, this madrasah only accommodates students from the primary and secondary level. Such was the case until 2012. However, in 2013, with a new principal coming into play, it officially introduced a diploma program of two years, allowing its own students and graduates from other madrasahs to enroll. The Diploma in Islamic Studies (DPI) program aims to offer the students a chance to further develop their understanding of Islam with subjects like Usul Fiqh, Falak, Tarikh Tasyri', and more (Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah, 2023). At the end of the primary level, those at primary 6 are required to sit the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), and those at secondary 4 are required to sit the GCE 'O' level examination, as determined by the government (Helmiati, 2020).

Striving to instill discipline in its students, Madrasah Alsagoff implemented a uniform attire, bag, and shoes. The attire consists of a white inner scarf, long white hijab, white knee length blouse, and yellow loose-fitting skirt. The shoes must be kept white, pristine, and clean at all times. Bags were in the same form and size: green bag pack for the primary students, whilst the secondary students must use a black sling bag that could be carried on one shoulder. And all of these, except for the shoes, should be bought at the school. However, recently, the school has changed its policy and allowed students to use any kind of bags they prefer to as long as they are dark in color and do not adorn any inappropriate design. As for the DPI students, their uniform was a long yellow dress and a long white hijab, with black shoes. The bag policy was not as strict from the start: they could use any kinds of bags.

5.7 School Session

In 1912, there were two sessions: morning and evening, to accommodate the growing number of students who enrolled. The school only focused on the primary level: 1 to 6, and the subjects taught were just the Islamic subjects, and Arabic language. The morning session started at 8.30 a.m. and ended at 12pm, and the evening session started at 2pm and ended at 4.30pm. However, this changed when the secondary level was first introduced in 1963, as well as the inclusion of certain academic subjects such as science, history, and geography. Hence, the morning session changed to 7.40am until 12.50pm, whereas the evening session changed to 1.10pm until 5.30pm. (Siti Noorasikin et al., 2011). These sessions were in play until 2005, when the school abolished the separation of the schooling sessions and combined them into an eight-hour long session, starting from 7.30 am until 3.30pm for both primary and secondary students (Helmiati, 2020).

The schooling session is different for the DPI students. There is no set timing to end the session as it all depends on the classes, with the earliest class at 9 am, and the latest at 5pm. The school limits them to two classes per day, with each class running for 3 hours. Although the teachers are encouraged to use up all the three hours, they have free reign to end the class earlier whenever they see fit.

5.8 Vision and Mission

The current principal's (Ustazah Asyunifar Abu) message was stated at Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah's website:

“Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah will continue to be committed in providing the best Islamic education and experience to the students, who would be equipped with a strong foundation in the understanding of Al-Quran, Sunnah, the mastery of Arabic language, as well as acquiring other knowledge and skills. Our students are taught the essential needs to have Taqwa and Adab so that to fulfil our objectives to nurture pious Muslimah leaders with academic excellence, creative, and innovative potentials to serve our religion, family, the community and nation.”

As per this message, the mission and vision for the school are as follow:

Nurturing Noble Women Exemplary of the Ummahatul Mukminin (We emphasize on building a strong foundation in Arabic & Islamic traditions (Al-Quran and As-Sunnah) that nurtures pious Muslimah leaders with academic excellence, creative and innovative potentials to serve our religion, family, community & nation). (Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah, 2023).

5.9 Achievements

Firstly, Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah has been recognised as Apple Distinguished School (ADS). Being recognized in 2019 as an Apple Distinguished School is a significant achievement that reflects Madrasah Alsagoff's commitment to leveraging technology for educational excellence. Apple Distinguished Schools are institutions that demonstrate innovative uses of technology to inspire

creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking among students. Here clears that Madrasah Alsagoff has embraced technology as a tool to enhance the learning experience and foster a culture of innovation and academic achievement. The use of Apple devices in the classroom not only facilitates effective teaching but also empowers students to showcase and develop their skills under the guidance of competent teachers. This recognition underscores Madrasah Alsagoff's dedication to providing a dynamic and engaging learning environment. It also positions the school as a leader in educational technology adoption, showcasing how technology can be harnessed to surpass educational objectives and prepare students for the challenges of the future.

Apart from that, Madrasah Alsagoff was also the Champion at the 9th MUSLEH International Students Debating Championship. Musleh International Student Debating Championship (ISDC) is an annual debating championship with open invitations to schools all over the world. Madrasah Alsagoff won the 2018 Musleh ISDC, beating out many other international schools. Winning such a prestigious debating championship is a testament to the students' exceptional skills, teamwork, and intellectual prowess. Hence, this achievement reflects positively on the dedication and hard work of both the students and their mentors. It also highlights Madrasah Alsagoff's commitment to providing a well-rounded education that goes beyond academics and includes extracurricular activities that nurture important life skills.

Lastly, Madrasah Alsagoff's students demonstrated their artistic talent by winning the Madrasah Video Competition in 2018 organized by MUIS in conjunction with MUIS 50-year celebration, defeating the other Madrasahs. Participating in events like this not only allows students to showcase their artistic abilities but also encourages them to explore innovative ways of expressing themselves. All in all, these accomplishments paint a very positive picture of Madrasah Alsagoff as a dynamic and forward-thinking institution that provides its students with a diverse and enriching educational experience. They are nurturing well-rounded individuals who can excel in different areas, both within and beyond the classroom.

5.10 Prominent Alumni

Among the prominent alumnis are:

1. Sumah Bte Fadalee
She is the chairman of the Jejak Kasih Alumni Madrasah Alsagoff who has served in the community for 40 years. Today, she continues to serve the community and teach at the local mosques.
2. Nurdiana Hanim, Director, Corporate Communications & Services at Pergas
“A decade is long enough to shape a person’s character and if I have to point out one specific thing I have learned from my time as a student in Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah, it is definitely resilience.”
3. Raihanah Halid, President of Syariah Court
Ustazah Raihanah was seconded to Syariah Court in 2016 as President of the Syariah Court, where she presides over and conducts hearings by Muslim Law and the Administration of Muslim Law Act. Previously, she served with the Office of Mufti, MUIS, doing Fatwa research and dissemination, and formation of religious policy.

5.11 Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah Education System

Islamic education in Singapore is an integral part of the country's diversified educational landscape. It enables Muslim students to cultivate a strong Islamic identity while being part of a pluralistic society. Islamic education in Singapore is not just an isolated system, but rather an essential

component of the greater educational environment that contributes to the country's culture of multiculturalism, social cohesion, and individual development within a modern society.

Meanwhile, Islamic education in Singapore can be divided into two types: formal and informal. Informal Islamic education is normally attended through daily lessons and speeches from Muslim scholars at mosques or individual abodes. This includes forums and talks which do not require compulsory attendance and registration. On the other hand, formal Islamic education such as Islamic learning centres and madrasah provide certificates and formal courses for Singaporean Muslims which can be categorized into two: full-time and part-time Islamic education.

In providing sufficient education resources, each madrasah has taken its own measures in upgrading its facilities and enhancing the learning tools to ensure that madrasah students experience the same education environment as their peers in national schools. Madrasah Alsagoff has begun utilizing iPads as part of the learning resources provided to each student. Each class is also installed with a complete projector to maximize the interactive methods of learning. Madrasah Alsagoff, for example, has begun to inculcate problem-based learning even in their revealed knowledge areas, where students are given current Islamic challenges during lessons and will be asked to present the solution. From there, the usage of iPads is for them to do research on the spot and they will be guided by the teachers on distinguishing the right data available on the internet.

Currently, Madrasah Alsagoff has also started using the virtual books in some of the revealed knowledge subjects, moving away from traditional printed materials to digital formats. These virtual books are likely accessible via electronic devices such as computers, tablets, or e-readers. It enhances accessibility, flexibility, and the overall learning experience for students while keeping pace with advancements in educational tools and resources. Madrasah Alsagoff has received this prestigious award because it strives to be a hub for innovation, leadership and academic achievement through the extensive use of technology. The school utilises this technology to surpass educational objectives in creative and effective ways, enhancing students' abilities, teamwork and school spirit. This is done deliberately and methodically, with careful planning, implementation, and constant feedback.

In keeping up with the rigorous educational landscape of Singapore, Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah follows the Singapore national curriculum closely. Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah provides a comprehensive educational system that spans primary, secondary, and diploma levels, providing a holistic approach to Islamic education alongside secular subjects. Students acquire a firm foundation in Islamic topics during their first ten years in Primary and Secondary school, learning and memorising the Qur'an and hadith, as well as other vital courses such as tafsir, tauhid, fiqh, sirah (Islamic history), and akhlak. Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah extends its educational offerings to the diploma level, providing specialized studies in Islamic disciplines. The diploma level may also include practical applications of Islamic knowledge, research approaches, and chances for specialisation in specific areas of interest. This level aims to produce graduates who possess a comprehensive knowledge of Islamic sciences and are equipped to contribute as scholars, educators, or professionals in various fields while upholding Islamic principles.

Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah, a prestigious institution in Singapore, exemplifies a holistic approach to education by combining Islamic academics with modern learning approaches. Its dedication to excellence, technological integration, preservation of heritage, and community engagement establishes it as a significant institution in nurturing well-rounded individuals within Singapore's Muslim population. The educational system at Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah provides a well-rounded education that mixes Islamic teachings with secular knowledge, preparing students to flourish academically, morally, and spiritually at each educational level.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study provides insights into the enduring legacy of Madrasah Alsagoff al-Arabiah as a beacon for the development of the Islamic religion in Singapore. It is a prestigious institution in Singapore and stands out as a symbol of a holistic education approach, seamlessly integrating Islamic academics with modern learning methodologies. The institution's commitment to excellence is

evident through its incorporation of technology, preservation of heritage, and active community engagement.

Madrasah Alsagoff in Singapore stands as a venerable institution that has withstood the test of time, embodying a harmonious integration of Islamic traditions with contemporary education. By combining Islamic teachings with secular knowledge, Madrasah Alsagoff Al-Arabiah's educational system ensures a comprehensive and well-rounded learning experience. Its dedication to excellence, incorporation of modern learning approaches, preservation of cultural heritage, and active community involvement underscore its vital role in shaping well-rounded individuals within the Muslim community.

As Madrasah Alsagoff continues to uphold its commitment to providing a holistic education that encompasses academic, moral, and spiritual development, it remains a beacon of knowledge and a testament to the enduring significance of Islamic education in Singapore. The madrasah not only imparts knowledge but also contributes to the cultural and intellectual enrichment of the Muslim community, making it a valuable and respected institution in the educational landscape of Singapore. This approach prepares students not only for academic success but also fosters moral and spiritual development, contributing to the cultivation of versatile individuals within Singapore's Muslim community.

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