

Education in the Muslim Regions

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The education of the Muslims may be divided according to the political periods of the country. During the pre-Spanish period, education was based mainly on the Koran. The materials of instruction were confined to the "Three R's" – reading, writing, and religion in Arabic – taught by *goros* who were the religious elders. There was no systematic and organized educational system. All these years, therefore, Muslim education was narrow since it was primarily intended for a better understanding of the religion.

The coming of the Spaniards did not change the educational situation in the Muslim areas, although in Luzon and the Visayas a Christian-oriented education was making longer strides to progress. While it was true that the Spanish administration did not introduce any extensive program until the Educational Decree in 1863, education nevertheless was undertaken systematically by the religious orders. The main work of the Spanish missionaries was to spread the Christian tenets. By this process the people became literate while learning the Christian doctrines. The numerous missionaries sent to the different parts of Luzon and the Visayas undertook their mission with zeal and devotion. They built schools where they taught the children the western three R's together with the prayers. Not contented with just the basic schooling, they also founded institutions like the College of San Carlos, San Juan de Letran, Sta. Isabel College, and the University of Santo Tomas for higher education.

Similar favorable conditions did not exist in Muslim communities and, therefore, opportunities for intellectual advancement were considerably less. The Muslim missionaries were fewer and had less variety of courses to teach than their Christian counterparts. In fact higher courses in Arabic such as mathematics, medicine, and engineering have never been taught to the local Muslims. The communities were isolated in the wilderness and roads were practically non-existent. The condition of peace and order was so bad that continuous and well organized education was difficult. The inhabitants were continually preoccupied with the protection of their native



lands against the persistent invasions of the Dutch, the English, and the Spaniards. Oftentimes, in retaliation, the Muslim also sent thousands of warriors to Luzon and the Visayas. This preoccupation did not leave much time for the Muslim population to acquire and cultivate adequate education.

With the shift of administration from the Spaniards to the Americans, education was not immediately attended to. The early American period was characterized by military struggles and bloodsheds as the new rulers continuously engaged in civil and military campaigns to bring the Muslim within the control of the government. Of course, American teachers assigned in Mindanao tried to educate the people in much the same way as the Thomasites did in Christian communities. However, their efforts, no matter how sincere, largely failed. Memories of foreign attempts at conquest made Muslims wary of the intentions of the Americans, and suspected that education was only a device to alienate them eventually from their Islamic faith and convert them to Christianity. A military order making education compulsory did not have much effect. Oftentimes only some slaves, in place of the datus' children who safely stayed at home, were sent to the American school. This problem was compounded by lack of school facilities and poor economic conditions which made it doubly hard for Muslim youth to study.

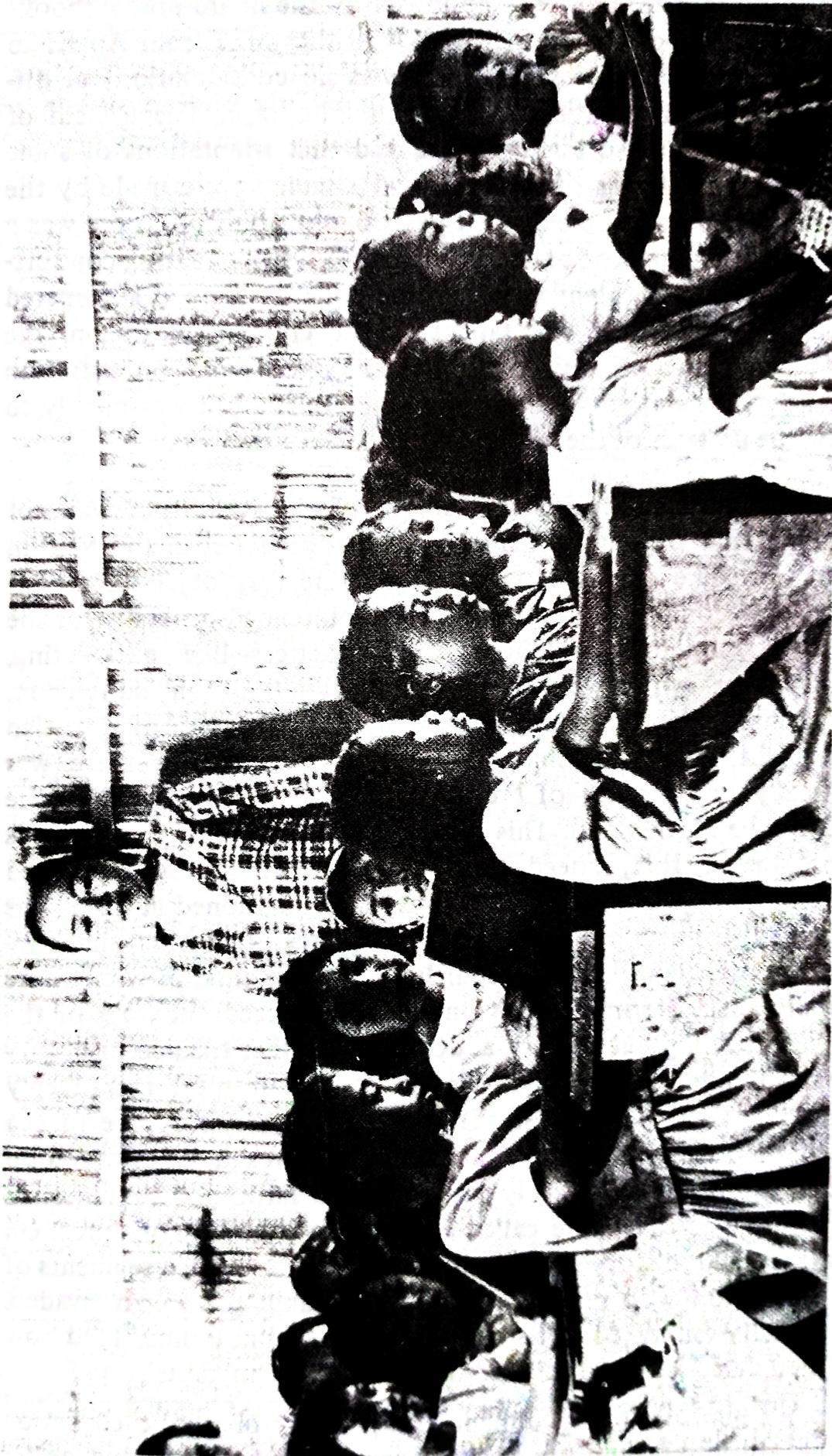
During the Commonwealth period the same situation persisted. While public education in Christian communities greatly improved due to President Quezon's interest in the masses, the Muslims continued to lag behind educationally. The Constitution provides that the government shall establish a complete and adequate system of

public education with at least free primary instruction. Accordingly, the national government tried to implement the provision but, unfortunately, the available funds were not enough to educate all the children of school age. As a result, the Quezon administration approved the Educational Act of 1940 which eliminated Grade VII and provided for the double-session plan in the elementary schools in which two classes, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, were handled by one teacher. With the implementation of the Act, the pupils had to content themselves with only half of their original load and their elementary schooling reduced from seven to six years. The rationale behind the Act was to accommodate, even to such unsatisfactory extent, the growing demands of popular education. The limited resources of the government for buildings, textbooks, and salaries of the teachers had to be spread over to a larger number of children no matter how thinly.

If the schooling of the children in Luzon and the Visayas was limited by the available resources, the situation in the Muslim communities was even worse. As a government policy, Mindanao and Sulu have always been relegated to the background and provisions for their educational advancement were more scanty than elsewhere. There were fewer teachers, less school buildings, and poorer instructional materials.

With the inauguration of the Republic of the Philippines, educational opportunities could not still cope with the needs of the increasing population. This already deplorable situation was aggravated by the damages that the country suffered during World War II. Thousands of school buildings and libraries were bombed; thousands of textbooks and reading materials, burned. Necessarily, to fill up the inadequacies, numerous teachers had to be recruited anew and teacher-training programs had to be accelerated. But this was very difficult in a newly independent nation where expenditures for other countless programs had to be met. Although the allocation for education — constituting about 30 per cent of the total government expenditures — was the second largest item in the national budget, it was still insufficient to meet all the essential demands of education. The program of the government concentrated more on economic development and the construction of basic infrastructures designed to help improve the economic state of the country. The whole system of education, for both Christian and Muslim, had to suffer financial inadequacies.

In the Philippines, the educational policy and the highly centralized administration did not function effectively among the Muslims. The educational policy was to give a uniform curriculum and instructional materials to pupils throughout the country. So



A somewhat crowded classroom (Lanao del Sur)

that the adopted textbooks – approved by the Board on Textbooks and the Bureau of Public Schools—were the same from Aparri to Jolo, for Juan and Abubakar. There was no consideration for differences in social conditions or cultural heritage. The system of administration was so highly centralized that adaptations of some materials in the forms of bulletins and circulars were made by the General Office and applied in all parts of the country. There was a time when the Director of the Bureau of Education, sitting comfortably in his office in Manila, could tell by just looking at a prepared course of study what was taught to the children in Luzon, the Visayas, and Sulu at any given time. The rigidity of administration took away the initiative of teachers since their work was merely to follow the dictates of the higher authorities of the Bureau.

Under this policy and system of administration, it was not surprising that the public school system should fail in the Muslim region. To some extent, it even negated the very objective it purported to accomplish. For the textbooks, intended generally for the Christian Filipinos, contained some practices—like pork-eating, wine-drinking—which were contrary to Muslim tradition and religion. Furthermore, the textbooks were replete with stories of Christian heroes—like Rizal, Mabini, Bonifacio, and Luna—but there was practically no mention of Muslim leaders who contributed to the cause of the Motherland. This only served to reinforce in the minds of the Muslims that, indeed, this was a Christian education imposed on them. And worse, if the Muslims were mentioned at all, it was usually in connection with banditry, piracy, and smuggling. Influenced by the Spanish chronicles whose points of view were naturally biased, some books unduly emphasized the role of the Muslims in Philippine history as destructive rather than contributory to nation-building. The Muslims found this ironical and deeply resented it. Their ancestors steadfastly resisted every foreign effort to occupy their native soils; they sacrificed their lives in the preservation of their heritage; they bravely defended their faith. For this nationalistic sentiment, they were called pirates and blood-thirsty Moros. On the other hand, history and literature textbooks glorified segments of the population who readily gave up their lands to foreign invaders and proudly embraced Christianity. They could not understand how such people could be considered heroes or ideal citizens.

This has been the unhappy impression of public education in the Muslim regions. Instead of promoting harmony and better understanding, the instructional materials tended to subordinate the Moros to the Christians. At times, they even think that because

they belong to the so-called cultural minority, they are considered second-class citizens.

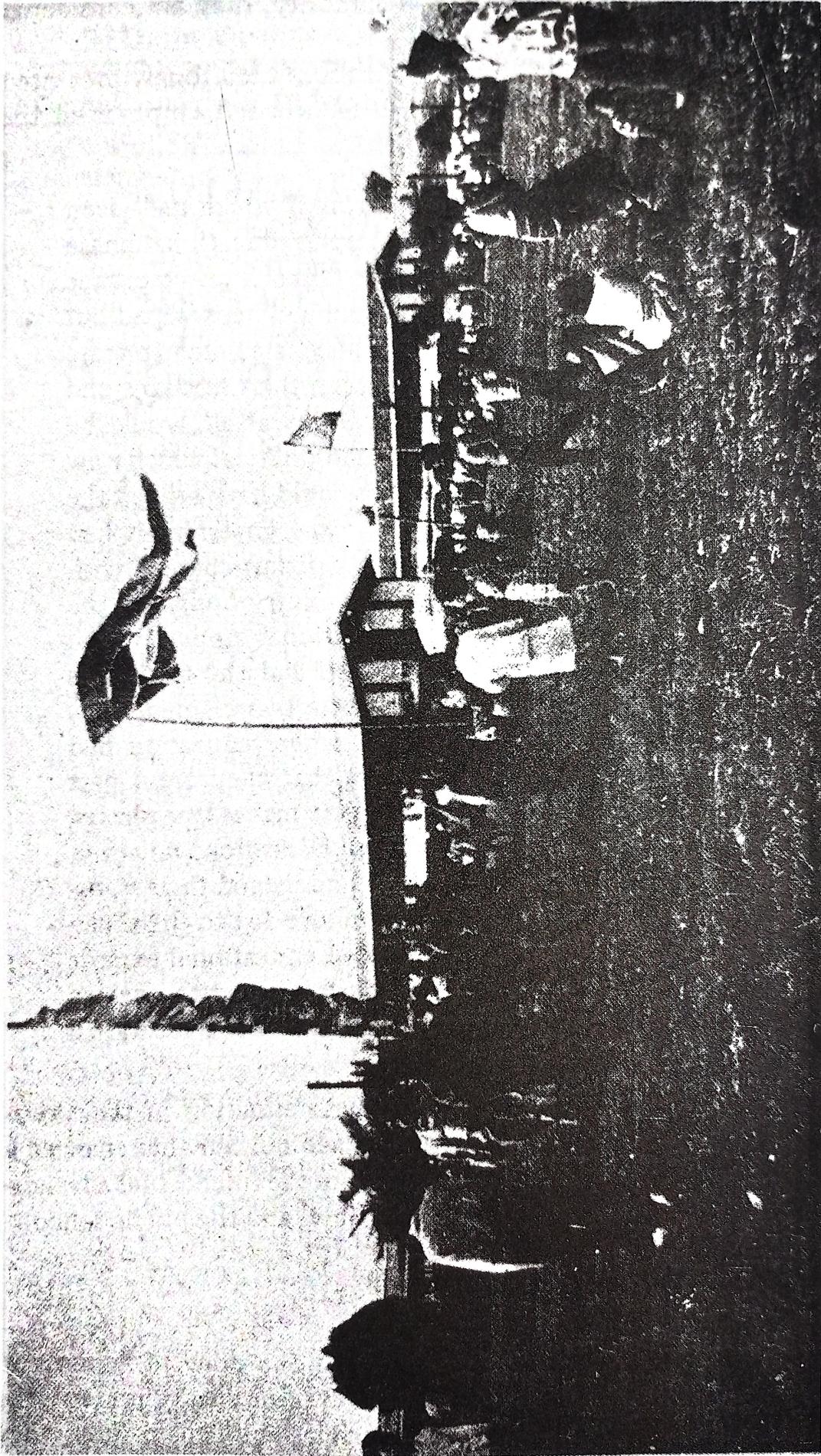
This indictment against public education was strongly presented by the Congressional Committee of 1954 when it emphasized the following:

More than any other factor involved which had given rise to the so-called Moro problem is the educational phase for if the Muslims had been prepared and their ignorance which is the root cause of the problem had been wiped out by education and an educational policy calculated to erase and do away with all barriers between the Christians and the Muslims of the country, little if any at all, would be such problems as economic, social and political which now face the government . . . Education could have nipped the whole problem in the bud . . . but the government had failed to educate the Muslims. The officials charged with the education of the people of the country bungle in the formulation of an adequate educational policy which had, instead of drawing the Muslims and the Christians together, driven a wedge between these two elements . . . The most important failure is that where education had failed to make these people realize that they are a part of the country . . . Of course, this failure makes two phases, the political and educational ones. Education, however, which was supposed to make them understand their status in our way of life had been such a failure due to the short-sightedness of some of our supposed educational experts who have left our traditions, the customs, and the beliefs of these people in the implementation of our educational policies.

From 1954 to 1966, the educational situation in the Morolandia—that is, in Cotabato, Sulu, and Lanao del Sur—had changed a bit. Three types of school joined together in the intellectual advancement of the people: the Madrasah, the private, and the public schools.

Madrasah Schools

The Madrasah schools—equivalent to the convent schools in Christian communities—are sectarian schools designed to preserve the Islamic faith. Believed to have been first established in Sulu, they offered six-month and one-year courses in Muslim catechism, prayers, and rituals to the students, irrespective of age and grade. The teachers were local religious leaders who received their subsistence from the



Physical Education Day at M.S.U.

people contributing money, food, and services. Recently, the facilities of the Madrasah schools have been improved and the curriculum equally upgraded to meet the diversified needs of the people. Better teachers are trained; the course, as in the public and private schools, are now adjusted to different grade levels: a six-year elementary education, a four-year secondary course, and a two-year collegiate course. The curricular offerings are broadened with the addition of more subjects. Arabic, reading and writing, pronunciation, arithmetic, current events, history, and government. Like in any institution, tuition fees of P 30 or more and miscellaneous expenses are required. However, because of the keen competition that the private and public schools offer the enrolment in Madrasah schools has been going down.

The importance of the Madrasah schools to the propagation of the Islamic faith did not escape the attention of many Muslim leaders and organizations which now contribute for their improvement. The Kamilol Islam Society in Marawi supports the establishment of the Moopamarol Islamic Academy in Bayang, Lanao del Sur. The Hidayatol Islam Society and the Maahadul Islam Society have their Madrasah schools. The Agama Islam Society operates the Mindanao Arabic Institute. Many other religious societies are now active in the development of the Madrasah schools which may yet develop into an effective instrument for the education of the Muslim masses if revitalized with modern course offerings.

A large number of the Madrasah schools teachers graduated from the institutions in Cairo and Mecca. It must be mentioned here that the United Arab Republic has been active in the spread of Islam. It provides scholarships for the Muslim youth who, after graduation, proceed to the teaching field. In 1966, the UAR secretary general visited Marawi and pledged support for the continued maintenance of Islamic teaching. During the recent trip of the MSU President to Cairo, just before the Arab-Israeli clash, he was informed by Secretary-General Oweida that there were 20,000 foreign scholars in Cairo, 300 of whom came from Muslim provinces in the Philippines. The scholars were given substantial allowance and were trained in the lore and culture of Arab civilization. Upon their return to their respective countries, they were expected to spearhead movements for a better recognition of the importance of Islam and the Arab culture in world civilization.

The UAR government contributes actively to the cultivation of Islam and the Arab culture also by sending Arabic teachers to different Muslim regions of the world. In Marawi, there are three or four Arabic teachers who live with the people and teach in the

Madrasah schools to strengthen Islam and to give a better understanding of the traditions and culture of Arab civilization. These teachers also lecture about adjustment to modern life which similarly affects Muslims of the Middle East.

Private Schools

The schools under the Bureau of Private Schools are contributing much toward the education of the people in Mindanao and Sulu. They are usually run by corporations, private citizens, or religious organizations. Found in cities as well as in remote towns, the private schools zealously pioneer in the dissemination of education in the elementary, secondary and collegiate levels. This is particularly true with sectarian schools which consider it a part of their mission to give the benefit of education to the people of the hinterlands. The private schools perform a great service to the people of Mindanao and Sulu. In isolated communities particularly, where public education is not available, the private schools solely fill up the educational needs. For example, all over Cotabato most private secondary schools are established by one religious order. It is therefore to the credit of the various religious organizations, private citizens, and corporations that most of the people in this area are accorded the necessary education which otherwise would have been denied them.

Public Schools

Based on the assumption that the stability of a democratic government depends upon an enlightened and educated citizenry, complete and adequate system of education is organized. Accordingly, therefore, various educational measures were adopted by the administration including the Educational Act of 1940 and the Elementary Education Act of 1953 providing for compulsory primary education. However, the intention of the constitutional framers was not faithfully fulfilled especially in the Muslim region. In 1959-60, the national estimate of children between the age of seven and 13 years in public schools was 5,051,867, representing 78.6 per cent of children of school age. The percentage of children in school varied from region to region; in the Ilocos and Mountain Province, 78 per cent of the children of school age were in public schools; in Cagayan Valley and Batanes 81 per cent; in Central Luzon, 78.3 per cent; in Western Visayas, 85.7 per cent; in Eastern Visayas, 80.5 per cent; in Cotabato 63.2 per cent; in Sulu 66.73 per cent; and in Lanao del Sur, 17.7 per cent. From the preceding data, it is obvious that the number of Muslim children in public schools is deplorably small. The situation

calls for a re-examination of the educational facilities and opportunities in the Morolandia if the constitutional provision for free elementary education is to be fulfilled.

In 1966, the total enrolment in the public schools – both elementary and secondary – found in Cotabato, Sulu and Lanao del Sur was 245,612. This was broken down as follows: 176,438 or 80 per cent in the primary; 62,114 or 18 per cent in the intermediate; and 7,060 or 2 per cent in the high school. The percentage of high school students should be carefully noted because it is negligible compared to the total enrolment in private secondary schools. The enrolment of more than 7,000 public high schools students was only one third of the enrolment in the private schools of Cotabato alone. Cotabato with a population of more than 1,000,000 had only two public secondary schools; Sulu with more than 360,000 population had only one; Lanao del Sur with more than 350,000 population had none. These data underscore the extreme inadequacy of educational opportunities in the Muslim provinces compared to those in Luzon and the Visayas.

In Marawi, high school students have to depend on sectarian schools until Mindanao State University established preparatory high school at its expense. The same was true in Sulu where the only available public high school was in Jolo and the youth living in the far-flung islands had to depend upon the Notre Dame branch, a Catholic institution, for their secondary education.

The low percentage of enrolment in public elementary schools in the Muslim provinces was made more lamentable with the high percentage of drop-outs. The national retention rate was 44.7 per cent, while Manila had the highest with 80 per cent. In other words, out of five students who entered the elementary school, four successfully finished it. Other places in Luzon like Rizal, Pangasinan, La Union, and Catanduanes had retention rates which were above the national average. For the entire country, the schools at the bottom with the lowest retention rates inevitably come from the Muslim region. Sulu ranked 54th place with 22 per cent retention rate and Lanao del Sur ranked last with 20.9 per cent. Expressed differently, in Sulu and Lanao del Sur only one out of every five children who entered Grade I ever completed Grade VI. Cotabato, of course, fared better with its 52.6 per cent – a rate higher than the national average

but then in Cotabato a sizeable number of the population are Christians.

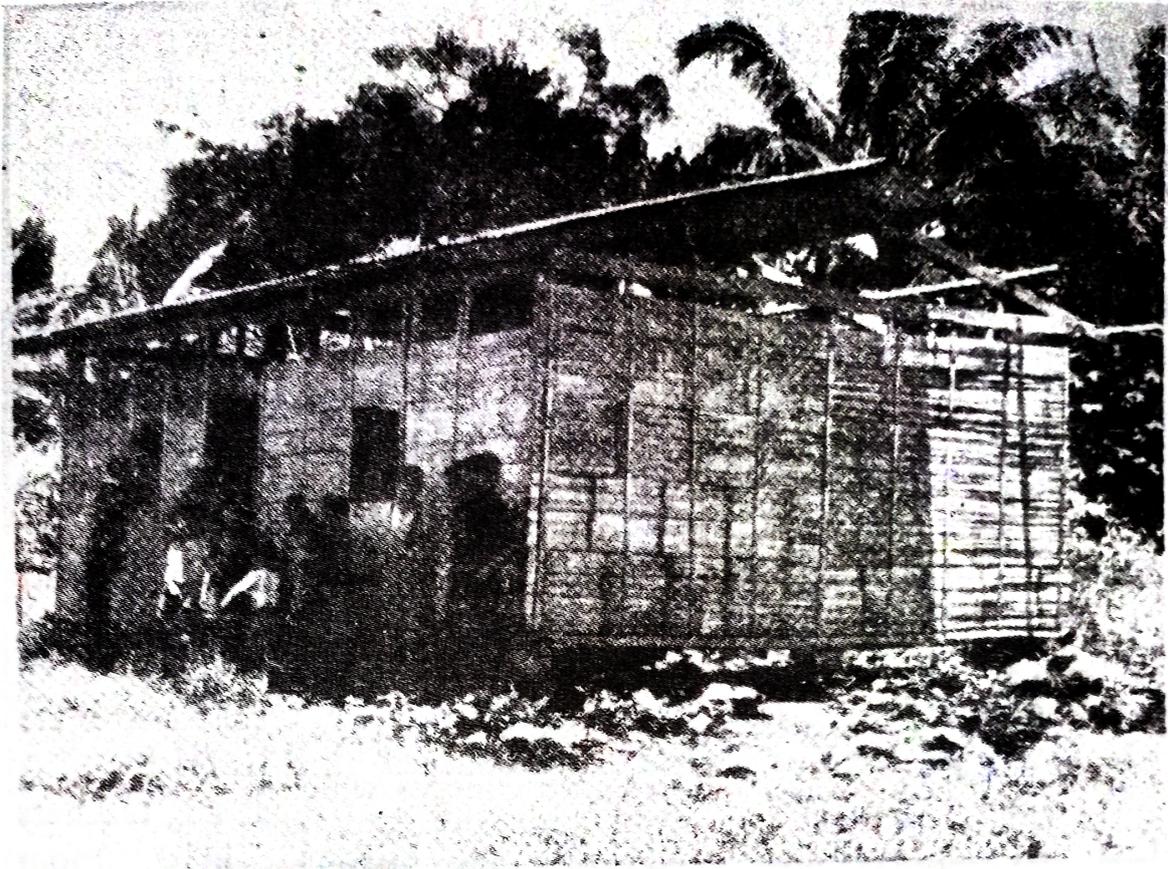
There were numerous factors that contributed to the high rate of elimination. For one thing, the average Muslim family was financially handicapped. As soon as the children became of age, they were withdrawn from school to work full-time to augment the family

income. The roads were either impassable or non-existent and since most public schools were located in larger towns, those living in the barrios had to hike to the school, which was hard, or had to earn extra transportation money, which was just as difficult. For example, in Lanao del Sur there are 20 municipalities scattered around Lake Lanao with no good roads connecting them. Subsequently, the chief means of transportation are the boats which ply between towns along the lake at irregular intervals.

Another factor that contributed to the sad state of education in the Muslim region was the inadequacy of facilities. For a total enrolment of 300,000 elementary pupils, there were only 11 permanent public school buildings representing about one per cent of the total building facilities in the three Muslim provinces; semi-permanent buildings, temporary buildings, 47.69 per cent; rented buildings, 3 per cent; and borrowed buildings, 6 per cent. Most of these semi-permanent and temporary buildings were constructed with the assistance of the school PTA's. In fact, this kind of organization is now known for collecting contributions. Because of the poor nature of construction, many of these buildings were not ideally fit for classroom purposes. Some had no walls separating one class from the other; some had leaking roofs which made instruction during rainy days impossible. Classrooms were also equipped with improvised desks and benches due to the lack of seating facilities.

Moreover, there was also a lack of textbooks, reference materials, teaching devices, and laboratory apparatus. As a result, the most common teaching method was spoon-feeding. The teachers would give the materials to be learned orally or they would let the pupils copy important notes written on the blackboard. With the lack of textbooks which the pupils could bring home and study, it was no wonder that the children gained so little from school. They could not develop effective reading habits, for instance, because they had nothing to read and whatever skills they managed to develop were soon forgotten once they were out of the classroom.

Inadequate education in the Muslim region was also due to the poor preparation of the teachers. In 1966, there were 10,343 elementary school teachers in the three Muslim provinces, of whom 43.32 per cent were holders of the two-year Elementary Teachers' Certificate and 12 per cent were only high school graduates. In other words, 55 per cent of the teaching force had qualifications no higher than an ETC, a requirement which was given up two decades ago in Luzon and the Visayas. The present standard requirement for teaching in the public elementary school is a four-year Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. Of the total teaching force, only



A SCHOOL BUILDING IN LANA DEL SUR. Maranao pupils before their makeshift school building as background.



A MARANAO CLASS IN READING. Lack of textbooks have compelled teachers to allocate one copy for four pupils.

13.8 per cent satisfied this requirement. The rest had other qualifications; three per cent were Bachelor of Science in Education holders, 14 per cent were Bachelor of Science in Education (inverted course) graduates, and 10 per cent held other four-year certificates. From the above data, hardly 14 per cent of the 10,343 teachers in the public elementary schools had the necessary qualifications.

The entire picture, therefore, of the contemporary educational scene is one that holds little for a bright future of the region. To bring the Muslim population, at least, to the same level of educational advancement enjoyed by their Christian brothers, it is imperative that the government should provide greater appropriations and map out broader educational programs. There should be more decentralization in the system of administration and revisions in the contents of textbooks and instructional materials to reflect the history, culture, and tradition of the locality. There should be more school buildings and better classroom facilities and more teachers who are adequately prepared as well as more colleges which offer the kind of pre- and in-service training to prospective or practising teachers that can improve their competence and efficiency in classroom instruction.

It is, therefore, in this context that Sulu Congressman Salih Ututalum appealed before his colleagues in the House for more and better educational facilities and opportunities for the people of Mindanao and Sulu. His stirring speech revealed the pathetic situation of his people and the urgency of government support to ameliorate the conditions in the Muslim region. Congressman Ututalum said:

The percentage of illiterary of these people is high. Socio-economic problems among them are serious, even bordering on hopelessness. They are too far behind in many things in education, with all the concomitant benefits that go with it, like economic sufficiency, political maturity, and general progress. They have practically nothing of these benefits to speak of. This is so as a consequence of the stubborn but patriotic resistance of these so-called minorities to all foreign invaders, even against insurmountable superior force. Naturally, all the benefits that the foreign powers that occupied our country brought with them were enjoyed only by those who had accepted their authority and sovereignty. It is, therefore, my stand that our people, the so-called Cultural Minorities, who now suffer for their patriotism and loyalty to the Fatherland should rate a kinder treatment than they are now getting

from the government.

Can you, my colleagues, blame some of your brothers and sisters of the Cultural Minorities when they answer negatively if asked whether they are Filipinos and would rather identify themselves instead as Taosug (Suluano), Maranao, or Maguindanao, depending on what province the person asked comes from? Can you blame some of these less enlightened brothers of yours for this feeling of "unbelongingness" since it is seldom, if ever, that they see any tangible manifestations of the concern of the government for their lot?