THE EXPERIENCE OF MUSLIM STUDENTS IN THE CATHOLIC ACADEMIA

Don Antonio Velez*, Taaliah Hajra Camilo

Xavier University -Ateneo de Cagayan, Cagayan de Oro City, 9000, Philippines

E-mail: dvelez@xu.edu.ph

Abstract

This study investigates Muslim students' experiences at a Catholic university in Mindanao, including their perceptions of institutional support for religious practice and identity construction. A quantitative approach was utilized to gather data via an online survey, employing a snowball sampling technique, which involved 60 Muslim students from diverse academic programs participating in the study. The study assesses satisfaction levels across three primary domains: classroom instruction, co-curricular activities, and extracurricular engagement. The results demonstrate that Muslim students typically report a strong sense of satisfaction regarding their classroom instruction and participation in co-curricular activities. Nonetheless, participation in extracurricular activities garnered lower satisfaction scores, underscoring a disparity between the institution's dedication to inclusivity and the actual experiences of students in more informal social environments. This discrepancy indicates a necessity for focused institutional initiatives aimed at improving inclusion outside of academic environments, especially in extracurricular activities where informal interactions significantly influence student experiences. The findings enhance the discourse surrounding religious pluralism in higher education, highlighting the necessity for organized support systems that reach beyond just academic and co-curricular environments. By enhancing its dedication to inclusive extracurricular programs, the university can cultivate a more comprehensive and fair learning atmosphere. Finally, while the university has demonstrated strengths in promoting religious inclusiveness, resolving extracurricular concerns is critical to ensuring that students from all faith backgrounds feel appreciated and involved..

Keywords: muslim students; catholic university; inclusive education; extra-curricular activities

Abstrak

penelitian ini menyelidiki pengalaman mahasiswa Muslim di sebuah universitas Katolik di Mindanao, termasuk persepsi mereka terhadap dukungan institusional terhadap praktik keagamaan dan pembentukan identitas. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data melalui survei daring dengan teknik snowball sampling, yang melibatkan 60 mahasiswa Muslim dari berbagai program akademik dalam penelitian ini. Studi ini menilai tingkat kepuasan dalam tiga domain utama: pembelajaran di kelas, kegiatan ko-kurikuler, dan keterlibatan dalam kegiatan ekstra-kurikuler.Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa Muslim umumnya melaporkan tingkat kepuasan yang tinggi terhadap pengalaman mereka dalam pembelajaran di kelas dan partisipasi dalam kegiatan ko-kurikuler. Namun, keterlibatan dalam kegiatan ekstra-kurikuler memperoleh skor kepuasan yang lebih rendah, menyoroti adanya kesenjangan antara komitmen institusi terhadap inklusivitas dan pengalaman nyata mahasiswa dalam lingkungan sosial yang lebih informal. Disparitas ini mengindikasikan perlunya inisiatif kelembagaan yang lebih terarah untuk meningkatkan inklusi di luar lingkungan akademik, terutama dalam kegiatan ekstra-kurikuler di mana interaksi informal memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap pengalaman mahasiswa.Temuan ini memperkaya diskusi mengenai pluralisme agama dalam pendidikan tinggi, dengan menekankan pentingnya sistem dukungan yang terstruktur dan mencakup lebih dari sekadar lingkungan akademik dan ko-kurikuler. Dengan meningkatkan komitmennya terhadap program ekstra-kurikuler yang inklusif, universitas dapat menciptakan suasana belajar yang lebih komprehensif dan adil. Pada akhirnya, meskipun universitas telah menunjukkan keunggulan dalam mempromosikan inklusivitas keagamaan, penyelesaian tantangan dalam aspek ekstra-kurikuler sangat penting untuk memastikan bahwa mahasiswa dari semua latar belakang keagamaan merasa dihargai dan terlibat sepenuhnya.

Kata kunci: mahasiswa muslim; universitas katolik; pendidikan inklusif; kegiatan ekstra-kurikuler

*Corresponding author

Introduction

Applied in the framework of multicultural education, the Pluralism Theory (Göran, 2011) underlines the acceptance and celebration of many ideas, cultures, and identities inside educational environments. This idea supports the coexistence of several cultural traditions and viewpoints peacefully inside society and recognizes the need of several points of view.Relationships between Muslim and Christian groups in Mindanao (Macapagal et al., 2018; Montiel et al., 2011; Tatum, 1997) are much shaped by social identities, especially religious and ethnopolitical ones. Within multicultural schools, educational pluralism encounters several challenges mostly related to balancing unity and diversity. Encouragement of a shared identity while honoring and recognizing the unique cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds of pupils presents a major difficulty (Ahimsa-Putra, 2021). This conflict can show up in discussions over curriculum material and experiences where the inclusion of many points of view is crucial but must be carefully controlled to prevent fragmentation or the impression of giving some stories higher priority than others (Nurman & Hamim, 2022). Furthermore, in a pluralistic setting, the purpose of religion in education frequently causes strife. Universities have a responsibility to help every student (UN Sustainable Development Goal 4), thus it can be challenging to strike a balance between allowing the religious practices of many groups and preserving a secular or neutral learning environment especially in nations where religion plays a major role in individual and communal identity (Wargo et al., 2024).

A significant point of debate centers on the notion of intergroup relations. Pluralism recognizes the presence of diverse groups; however, it is essential to consider the possibility of conflicts arising between these groups (Tajfel et al., 1979). Merely acknowledging diversity falls short; educational institutions need to foster understanding, respect, and collaboration among students hailing from various backgrounds (Göran, 2011). This may entail establishing avenues for cross-cultural engagement, nurturing understanding, and confronting bias and inequity.

In a world that is becoming more interconnected, educational institutions create spaces that honor and welcome diversity, promoting constructive interactions among different groups. This challenge requires a deep comprehension of the complexities surrounding religious diversity while also guaranteeing that every student feels appreciated and included. The challenge is to progress from simple tolerance to authentic integration, ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds experience a true sense of belonging and are encouraged to engage fully in the school community. Ultimately, the effectiveness of educational pluralism in multicultural schools hinges on skillfully addressing these challenges, fostering an inclusive atmosphere where both personal identities and a collective sense of belonging are appreciated and cultivated.

Recent studies provide essential insights into the significance of inclusive practices for Muslim students in Catholic universities. Baas and Thomas (2023) contend that higher education ought to transcend mere academic training; it should serve as a transformative experience that enables all students to flourish. They imagine universities as environments where individuals from diverse backgrounds experience a sense of inclusion and receive the necessary support to achieve their utmost potential. This viewpoint emphasizes that establishing inclusive settings for Muslim students goes beyond merely accommodating religious practices; it also involves nurturing a sense of community and guaranteeing fair access to opportunities. Benediktsson (2023) examines the difficulties encountered by student teachers in addressing cultural and linguistic diversity within educational settings. The findings illustrate the intricacies involved in implementing inclusive ideals, emphasizing the necessity for continuous

professional growth and institutional backing. This indicates that even within institutions that advocate for pluralism, discrepancies may exist between the professed values and the actual experiences of students, especially in extracurricular environments. Benediktsson's work highlights the significance of grasping the complexities of student needs and fostering environments where every student feels acknowledged, listened to, and appreciated. The dynamics of inclusion and intergroup relations significantly influence student experiences (Tajfel et al., 1979). To cultivate a genuinely inclusive campus, it is essential to engage in ongoing reflection and remain dedicated to meeting the changing needs of a diverse student population (Al-Raschid-Arsa, 2022; Crailsheim, 2022).

The Philippines offers a distinctive environment for Muslim students pursuing higher education. Historical factors, as documented by Villa et al. (2017) and Crailsheim (2002), underscore the intricate dynamics between Muslim and Christian communities in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao (Macapagal et al., 2018; Montiel et al., 2013). The social context highlights the necessity for universities to promote religious diversity (Baring et al., 2020) and to cater to the unique requirements of Muslim students (Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020). The presence of diverse beliefs has significantly shaped Mindanao's social environment, with Islamic culture existing prior to the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, which introduced two major colonial influences in the nation: education and religion.

Formal education plays a vital role in shaping identity, as students navigate their beliefs, values, and cultural backgrounds. Through an analysis of how varied educational settings influence identity development, the study underscores the significance of inclusivity and respect for different religious backgrounds in promoting positive growth among all learners. Education is essential in promoting social cohesion, especially in areas impacted by conflict such as Mindanao (Durkheim, 1956; Raihan & Abubacar, 2023). Challenges emerge for Muslim students in predominantly Christian university environments, such as a limited comprehension of Islamic practices and the necessity for inclusive Islamic education (Milligan, 2017; Morales & Morales, 2022; Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020). Al-Raschid-Arsa's (2022) case study on Muslim education in the Philippines indicates a necessity for enhanced institutional support within universities to tackle these challenges. Tatum's (1997) exploration of racial segregation provides important perspectives for fostering inclusivity, emphasizing the need to establish environments where Muslim students can comfortably express their faith and identity while also pursuing academic excellence. Additional investigation, especially longitudinal studies, is essential to comprehensively grasp the changing requirements of Muslim students during their academic experiences (Montiel et al., 2011; Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020). Philippine universities play an essential role in aiding Muslim students and fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society. In a progressively varied educational environment, the importance of multicultural education becomes evident for effectively managing these complexities, especially in exploring the "how" of religious pluralism (Macapagal et al., 2018; Montiel et al., 2011).

Naparan and Balimbingan (2020) highlight the obstacles encountered by Muslim students in Catholic higher education institutions, particularly focusing on cultural and religious disparities. Baring et al. (2020) examine the significance of radical inclusivity in tackling issues associated with religious pluralism. Educational institutions ought to reflect society in miniature, providing equal chances for individuals to express their identities while introducing students to a variety of viewpoints (Tatum, 1997). Al-Raschid-Arsa (2022) highlights the significance of institutional development within Muslim education, promoting the need for quality education and inclusive policies. Obstacles persist, such as restricted access and the need for cultural awareness (Milligan, 2017). Emphasizing the need of

institutional growth in Muslim education, Al-Raschid-Arsa (2022) supports inclusive policies and quality education. Still difficult are limited access and the need of cultural knowledge (Milligan, 2017). In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Raihan and Abubacar (2023) underline the need of contextual understanding and inclusive methods in the efforts at peace reconciliation.

The notable presence of Muslim students in Catholic schools in Mindanao demands research on their satisfaction with the university experience, especially in how it supports their religious practices and identity development through academic instruction, co-curricular participation, and extracurricular engagements.This study emphasizes the case that everyone, especially minority groups in many spheres of student involvement, depends on educational environments for basic assistance; so, they are quite important in forming society attitudes and advancing understanding among different groups.

Method

This research used a quantitative methodology to assess the satisfaction levels of Muslim students across multiple engagement domains inside a Catholic university in Mindanao. A structured online survey served as the principal data gathering tool, utilizing a snowball sampling methodology (Babbie, 2020). The intended respondents were members of a reputable Muslim student organization at the institution, who were solicited to motivate their colleagues to engage in the study.

To be eligible as a respondent, participants were required to be enrolled in any undergraduate, graduate, or professional program at the university and to have completed a minimum of one academic year to guarantee adequate experience with institutional participation. Data gathering occurred from late June to early July 2024, permitting the inclusion of first-year students who had completed one full year of study in the research. The survey was administered through Google Forms, enabling effective data dissemination and collecting (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014).

Upon completion of the data collecting phase, responses were anonymized and assessed for data quality assurance. Following the exclusion of incomplete or invalid responses, a total of sixty (60) valid responses were used into the study. The research gathered socio-demographic data, encompassing age, gender, academic program, year level, and proficiency in Madrasah/Islamic studies. The principal dependent variable was student satisfaction about diverse participation domains within the university. The study specifically examines three key areas of student engagement within the university. Classroom instruction focuses on the facilitation of religious identification and practice, ensuring that students feel supported in expressing their faith within academic settings. Co-curricular activities involve participation in structured academic and student development initiatives that complement classroom learning, providing additional opportunities for skill-building and community involvement. Meanwhile, extracurricular participation encompasses social interactions and engagement in non-academic pursuits, which play a crucial role in shaping students' overall university experience and sense of belonging. The survey instrument comprised self-assessment items evaluating perceived Islamic knowledge and satisfaction with institutional support for religious identity and practice. The instrument's internal reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (α = .893), signifying strong internal consistency (Field, 2018).

Descriptive statistical methods used to encapsulate the replies. The Kruskal-Wallis test was utilized to assess significant differences in satisfaction levels according to socio-demographic characteristics (Gibbons & Chakraborti, 2020). This non-parametric test was selected because non-probability sampling restricts the assumption of normally distributed data. The Kruskal-Wallis test, while ideally predicated on probability sampling, is advantageous for identifying group differences due to its ranking methodology, especially in social science research where probability sampling is frequently impractical (McKnight & Najab, 2010). The study recognizes the constraints concerning generalizability stemming from the sample methods and takes these aspects into account when evaluating the results.

The study protocol has been submitted for expedited review to the Research Ethics Office (REO) at Xavier University - Ateneo de Cagayan and is presently undergoing evaluation. Participants were assured of the anonymity of their responses, and informed consent was secured before to participation in compliance with research ethics principles (Resnik, 2020).

Results and Discussion

The information below pertains to the variables considered in this study. The socio-demographic characteristics and levels of satisfaction are presented in tables.

The Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

There are a total of sixty (60) respondents. The extent of university experience among respondents report that 43.3% (n=26) of respondents have a high extent of exposure to experiences in school activities, processes, and mechanisms while a higher proportion (56.7%, n=34) reported a low extent of exposure. It will be interesting to know that this dichotomized grouping is solely based on perception. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 60)

	f	% of Total	Cum %
Distribution According to Sex			
Female	32	53.3 %	53.3 %
Male	28	46.7 %	100.0 %
Distribution According to Age Group ($\bar{x}$ = 21.01 , md = 22 , σ = 2.49)			
Older (18-19 y.o.)	20	33.3 %	33.3 %
Younger (>20 y.o.)	40	66.7 %	100.0 %
Distribution According Year Level			
1st Year	9	15.0 %	15.0 %
2nd Year	15	25.0 %	40.0 %
3rd Year	17	28.3 %	68.3 %
4th Year	19	31.7 %	100.0 %
Extent of Exposure/Experience in School			
High	26	43.3%	43.3%
Low	34	56.7%	100%
Distribution According to School/College			
Agriculture	1	1.7 %	1.7 %

	f	% of Total	Cum %
Arts & Sciences	13	21.7 %	23.3 %
Computer Studies	2	3.3 %	26.7 %
Engineering	10	16.7 %	43.3 %
Law	7	11.7 %	55.0 %
Nursing	8	13.3 %	68.3 %
Medicine	6	10.0 %	78.3 %
Business & Management	12	20.0 %	98.3 %
Education	1	1.7 %	100.0 %

A little over half (53.3%) of the respondents are female, whereas 46.7% of respondents (n = 28) are male. The study population is predominantly younger, with 66.7% (n=40) falling into the younger age group and 33.3% (n=20) categorized as older students. The respondents' age (19 y.o and below and 20 y.o. and greater) were the basis for the dichotomized grouping. The data shows that most of those who responded to the survey were 3rd year students (28.3%), followed by 4th year students (31.7%), 2nd year students comprising 25.0% of the total number of respondents, while the 1st year students at 15.0% (n=9). The respondents are affiliated with various colleges in the university. Most of the respondents come from the College of Arts and Sciences (21.7%, n=13), followed by the College of Business and Management (20.0%, n=12). The College of Agriculture (1.7%, n=1) and School of Education (1.7%, n=1) have the least representation.

The Madrasah Exposure of Respondents

Madrasah experience plays a crucial role in shaping the religious identity and knowledge of Muslim students. This exposure to Islamic teachings helps students develop a strong foundation in their faith and understand its principles and practices. Table 2 presents the respondents' extent of exposure to Madrasah environments, and their perceived level of Madrasah knowledge. There are three (3) key characteristics of Level of Madrasah Exposure of respondents: Engagement with Madrasah, Extent of Madrasah Exposure and Perceived Level of Madrasah Knowledge.

Table 2. The Level of Madrasah Exposure of Respondents (N = 60)

	f	% of Total	Cum %
Distribution According to Madrasah Engagement			
No	18	30.0 %	30.0 %
Yes	42	70.0 %	100.0 %
Distribution According to the Extent of Madrasah Exposure			
High	42	70.0 %	70.0 %
Low	18	30.0 %	100.0 %
Distribution According to the Perceived Level of Madrasah Knowledge			
High	20	33.3 %	33.3 %
Low	40	66.7 %	100.0 %

Table 2 shows that 18 respondents (30.0%) reported no engagement with Madrasah activities and 42 respondents (70.0%) indicated active engagement. Likewise, 18 respondents (30.0%) experienced high exposure to Madrasah environments. A significant majority (n=42) of respondents (70.0%) reported low exposure to Madrasah. When considering respondents' perceived level of madrasah knowledge, 20 respondents (33.3%) perceived themselves to have a high level of Madrasah knowledge. However, a majority (n=40) of respondents (66.7%), report they had a low level of Madrasah knowledge.

Al-Raschid-Arsa (2022) underscores the significance of inclusive education in promoting social cohesion and addressing diverse learner needs. Aligned with this, the majority of respondents (70.0%) reported active engagement in Madrasah activities, reflecting a strong desire to maintain Islamic practices within a Catholic institution. However, a significant portion (66.7%) perceived a low level of Madrasah knowledge, highlighting the need for inclusive Islamic education and cultural sensitization. This finding resonates with Al-Raschid-Arsa's (2022) call for institutional development in Muslim education and Morales and Morales' (2022) emphasis on the importance of cultural and religious learning institutions in promoting inclusive education.

As Raihan and Abubacar (2023) note, inclusive education is essential for promoting peace and understanding among diverse communities. By acknowledging and addressing the diverse needs of Muslim students, Catholic institutions can foster a culture of inclusivity, respect, and understanding. This study underscores the importance of inclusive education in promoting religious pluralism and contributing to peacebuilding efforts.

The Levels of Satisfaction

The high mean satisfaction scores for classroom, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities suggest a supportive environment, echoing the principles of inclusive education. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Satisfaction of Identity Formation Support (Cronbach's α = 0.893)

	N	Mean	Median	SD
Support Mechanism in Classrooms	60	4.13	4.17	0.71
Support Mechanism in Co-Curricular Organizations	60	4.21	4.17	0.73
Support Mechanism in Extra-Curricular Activities	60	4.07	4	0.80
Overall Rating of All Support Mechanisms	60	4.13	4.17	0.62

The study reports a high satisfaction rating (4.13 out of 5) of the rating of all support mechanisms. The mean satisfaction score for classroom experience (4.13), co-curricular organizations (4.21), and extra-curricular activities (4.07) were all reported high. These high ratings on a five (5) point scale indicate a generally high level of satisfaction among students with the religious identity support mechanism provided by the university. Interestingly, the mean satisfaction score for extra-curricular activities as a form of religious practice and identity support is seen as the lowest at 4.07 on a 5-point scale with a median of 4.00 and a standard deviation of .80. This suggests that there is greater dispersion and thereby variability in this particular area of evaluation. The same can be observed in lesser values in the other areas.

It would be interesting to note that the mean satisfaction for extra-curricular activities is found to be the least among the areas evaluated. The findings suggest that as Muslim students may be satisfied but not as satisfied in this aspect compared to the other two (2) areas. This indicates that although the

university excels in fostering a supportive atmosphere within the classroom and through co-curricular activities, it appears to be less effective in promoting extra-curricular engagement. When students express dissatisfaction with the support for religious identity and diversity in extracurricular activities, it may indicate several deeper issues within the institution. This may indicate a possible discrepancy between the institution's professed dedication to pluralism and the actual experiences of its students (Ahimsa-Putra, 2021). Students might sense that although diversity is recognized, it is not truly appreciated or woven into the core of the school community, especially in areas beyond the academic environment. Failure to address this issue may result in feelings of marginalization and a perception that their religious identity is neither fully accommodated nor respected (Göran, 2011). This sense of dissatisfaction can be especially pronounced for religious minorities, who might perceive exclusion from the prevailing culture or encounter nuanced forms of discrimination in extracurricular activities (Wargo et al., 2024).

Secondly, insufficient satisfaction with support for religious identity in extracurricular activities may highlight the necessity for enhanced institutional initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive practices. This may include an evaluation of current programs to guarantee they are inclusive for students of all faiths, alongside the development of new initiatives that honor religious diversity and foster opportunities for interfaith dialogue and comprehension (Nurman & Hamim, 2022). The lack of religiously relevant clubs or organizations, along with insufficient accommodation for religious observances during extracurricular events, can lead to student dissatisfaction. Furthermore, understanding how intergroup dynamics manifest in extracurricular contexts is essential. When students sense bias or a deficiency of respect for their religious identity from peers or faculty during these activities, it can strengthen feelings of exclusion and adversely affect their overall sense of belonging (Tajfel et al., 1979). To effectively tackle these challenges, it is essential to adopt a proactive strategy that transcends mere tolerance of diversity, focusing instead on the active promotion of inclusion and respect for all religious identities within the extracurricular activities of the school.

The Differences in Levels of Satisfaction for Identity Formation Support

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis tests found that variation in the levels of satisfaction for religious practice and identity support mechanisms experienced in classrooms, co-curricular organizations, and extra-curricular activities cannot be attributable to the respondents' demographic characteristics, and the levels of Madrasah/Islamic knowledge ($\chi^2=2.93$, p=0.09). There is no significant differences in found in the levels of satisfaction of support mechanisms in the classrooms, co-curricular engagements, extra-curricular activities and the overall university experience of the when considering respondents' age group, sex, year level, level of Madrasah/Islamic knowledge. The findings aligns with pluralism theory, emphasizing that this particular Catholic university is an inclusive environment respectful and mindful of diversity. The findings suggest that Muslim students in this Catholic university generally feel welcomed, respected, and understood. Furthermore, the university spaces and spheres of engagements with students could be considered by the respondents to be fostering a sense of belonging, which is essential for academic success (Göran, 2011). The respondents' experiences at this university are predominantly positive, fostering students' social and emotional growth, enhancing self-esteem, and encouraging favorable intergroup connections (Tajfel et al., 1979).

The happiness of Muslim students may indicate the significant function of the educational institution in fostering pluralism and social cohesion within the school community (Ahimsa-Putra, 2021). The acknowledgment and respect for Muslim students' religious and cultural identity fosters a

more inclusive and pleasant educational atmosphere. This can cultivate mutual understanding and respect among students from diverse origins, diminishing prejudice and encouraging intercultural discourse (Nurman & Hamim, 2022). The findings indicate that the university may offer culturally sensitive teaching practices, accommodate religious observances, and address instances of discrimination or bias (Wargo et al., 2024), thereby cultivating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students, promoting individual success and broader social harmony.

Discussion

This study provides a nuanced analysis of the experiences of Muslim students at a Catholic university, highlighting both the strengths of the institution and the challenges that must be confronted to foster a more inclusive environment. While the university has demonstrated significant support for Muslim students in both academic and extracurricular domains (Al-Raschid-Arsa, 2022), the relatively low satisfaction regarding extracurricular activities indicates a necessity for a more comprehensive strategy towards inclusivity that goes beyond formal educational settings.

The study highlights a critical concern: the gap between institutions' genuine commitment to diversity and their willingness to implement it in extracurricular activities. While students may show diminished enthusiasm for extracurricular activities, they recognize and appreciate the importance of inclusive events within structured environments such as colleges and co-curricular programs. This suggests that the informal areas of the university designated for social engagement, apart from academic pursuits, failed to foster a welcoming or inclusive environment. The gap between stated institutional values and the actual experiences of students underscores the challenges highlighted by Göran (2011) in the pursuit of genuine plurality in education.

The study highlights the importance of colleges implementing more structured and effective strategies to enhance support for Muslim students in extracurricular activities, thereby promoting a seamless integration of inclusivity in both social and academic environments. Possible approaches encompass student-led interfaith initiatives, the integration of religious accommodations into extracurricular activities, and intentional institutional measures aimed at fostering an inclusive student community. These initiatives align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education, ensuring that every student can participate equally, irrespective of their religious or cultural background (Education | Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.).

Catholic colleges in the Philippines ought to establish formal guidelines that explicitly promote religious inclusivity in extracurricular activities. Organized frameworks that ensure equitable involvement—encompassing spaces for prayer and cultural interaction, modifications in dietary practices, and the integration of interfaith dialogue within student governance—facilitate this objective. This may involve assessing policies of student organizations, ensuring equitable access to resources for religious groups, and providing training in cultural competency for both staff and student leaders. Additionally, institutional policies might incorporate regular assessments of student satisfaction regarding inclusivity initiatives through the use of advisory committees, student focus groups, and ongoing surveys to ensure that inclusivity strategies continue to be responsive and effective over time.

The findings highlight the importance of equipping scholars and officials with skills in intercultural competency. The experience of students beyond the classroom is significantly influenced by educators and professionals in student affairs. Through targeted professional development initiatives centered on interfaith understanding and inclusive leadership, educators and staff can enhance their ability to effectively support Muslim students in a holistic manner.

The primary emphasis of future studies should be on analyzing the long-term effects of inclusion initiatives within Catholic colleges. Monitoring the experiences of Muslim students across multiple academic years may yield valuable insights into the development of support systems and their effectiveness in promoting sustained improvements in student well-being and engagement (Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020).

Finally, while the school has made significant progress in fostering an inclusive academic atmosphere for Muslim students, it is crucial to rectify the shortcomings in extracurricular activities to cultivate a genuinely inclusive university culture. By aligning its policies with global educational frameworks such as SDG 4, incorporating best practices from other institutions, and strengthening its institutional policies on religious inclusivity, Xavier University - Ateneo de Cagayan can enhance its commitment to a truly diverse educational experience. Addressing these challenges would benefit not only Muslim students but also foster a more equitable and inclusive academic environment for everyone.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the significance of inclusive education in facilitating interfaith dialogue and cultivating mutual respect among students from various religious backgrounds. Universities play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment by addressing diverse needs, thereby enhancing students' educational experiences. Muslim students exhibited high satisfaction levels in classroom and co-curricular environments; however, the comparatively lower satisfaction in extracurricular activities indicates potential areas for enhancement. This underscores a possible discrepancy between the university's official dedication to pluralism and the actual experiences of Muslim students in informal environments (Ahimsa-Putra, 2021; Arslan & Raţă, 2013; Baring et al., 2020; Ciocan, 2024; Göran, 2011).

Universities should enhance inclusivity in extracurricular activities by assessing existing programs, introducing interfaith initiatives, and ensuring that all students feel valued beyond academic settings (Nurman & Hamim, 2022). The findings align with the broader discourse on religious pluralism in education, emphasizing the need for institutions to create environments that enable students to freely express their religious identities while engaging in social and academic activities (Tajfel et al., 1979; Crailsheim, 2022). Although the Kruskal-Wallis test indicated no statistically significant difference in satisfaction levels based on demographics or Islamic knowledge, the nuanced findings regarding extracurricular engagement suggest that institutional development plays a key role in shaping the experiences of Muslim students.

In addition, the results reinforce the principles of Pluralism Theory, highlighting the necessity of incorporating diversity into every facet of institutional existence. Creating inclusive extracurricular programs and reinforcing support systems will not only improve student satisfaction but also foster social cohesion and enhance intergroup understanding. These efforts should be guided by a nuanced

understanding that takes into account the relationships among religion, culture, and identity. Crailsheim (2022) emphasizes that the historical context of interreligious relations in Mindanao is intricate, and nurturing positive interactions demands continuous effort.

This study underscores the importance of education in shaping religious identities and promoting inclusivity. Although the university has progressed in its support for Muslim students, focused initiatives to improve extracurricular inclusivity are still crucial. Enhancing these initiatives will bolster the university's position in fostering interfaith harmony, guaranteeing that its dedication to pluralism reaches beyond organized academic and co-curricular activities to thoroughly include the wider student experience. Creating inclusive spaces where all students feel valued is crucial for fostering positive intergroup relations. A Catholic university's commitment to such spaces will not only benefit its students but also contribute to a more just and peaceful society. By acknowledging and addressing the nuances of Muslim student experiences, particularly in extracurricular activities, the university can further its mission of fostering a truly inclusive and equitable learning environment for all.

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