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Muslim Satisfaction

 Motivators and Challenges in Contemporary Hetero-religious Romantic Relationships

 SOC 46 24-1

 Xavier University

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ities-and-Muslim-Student-Experience-in-the-Catholic-Academia.pdf

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TARBIYA: Journal of Education in Muslim Society, x (x), xxxx, x-x

The Experience of Muslim Students in the Catholic Academia

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No. Tlp/WA: xxx xxx xxx

Received: xxx; Revised: xxx; Accepted: xxx

Abstract

By promoting inclusive education, Catholic institutions can contribute to attaining the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 on fostering more inclusive and supportive learning environments. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by Muslim students, it is essential to consider the intersectionality of factors such as sex, age, extent of exposure to religious teachings, and individual interests to identify specific needs and develop targeted interventions to support Muslim students' academic and personal growth. This quantitative study investigated the experiences of Muslim students at Xavier University - Ateneo de Cagayan in the Philippines. A survey of Muslim students assessed the institution's effectiveness in supporting their religious identity and practices. Findings revealed a positive perception of the university's supportive environment, with high satisfaction levels in classroom, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. The study emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and addressing the diverse needs of Muslim students, fostering a culture of religious inclusivity, respect, and understanding not only in terms of the curriculum but also beyond.

Keywords: Muslim Students, Catholic University, Inclusive Education, Extra-curricular Activities

How to Cite : xxx

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Introduction

In an increasingly globalized society, educational institutions must foster environments that respect and embrace diversity while facilitating positive intergroup relations. This challenge involves not only understanding the nuances of religious diversity but also

ensuring that all students feel valued and included. The coexistence of various beliefs has been a defining feature of Mindanao's social landscape, with Islamic culture predating Spanish colonization of the Philippines that carried two major colonial legacies in the country: education and religion. Education serves as a crucial

context for identity development, where students negotiate their beliefs, values, and cultural backgrounds. By examining how diverse educational environments shape identity formation, the research highlights the importance of inclusivity and respect for varied religious backgrounds in fostering positive development among all students.

The Philippines presents a unique context for Muslim students in higher education. Historical factors, as documented by Villa et al. (2017) and Crailsheim (2002), highlight the complex relationship between Muslim and Christian communities in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao (Macapagal et al., 2018; Montiel et al., 2013). This social backdrop underscores the importance of universities fostering religious pluralism (Baring et al., 2020) and addressing the specific needs of Muslim learners (Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020).

Universities have a responsibility to support all students in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education (United Nations Statistics Division, n.d.). Durkheim (1956) emphasizes the role of education in fostering social cohesion, a crucial aspect of peacebuilding efforts in Mindanao (Raihan & Abubacar, 2023).

Studies by Naparan & Balimbingan (2020) and Morales & Morales (2022) highlight the challenges faced by Muslim students in predominantly Christian universities. These challenges can include a lack of understanding of Islamic practices and a need for inclusive Islamic education (Milligan, 2017). The case study by Al-Raschid-Arsa (2022) provides insights into

the development of Muslim education in the Philippines, suggesting a need for further institutional support within universities. Tatum's work (1997) on racial segregation in schools offers valuable insights for promoting inclusivity in universities. Universities can create spaces where Muslim students feel comfortable expressing their faith and identity, fostering a sense of belonging alongside academic success. Further research, as suggested by Naparan & Balimbingan (2020), is needed to understand the diverse experiences of Muslim students across different universities in the Philippines. Longitudinal studies (Montiel et al., 2011) could explore how Muslim students' needs evolve throughout their academic journeys.

Universities in the Philippines have a vital role to play in supporting Muslim students. By fostering religious pluralism, providing inclusive Islamic education, and addressing the specific needs of this student population, universities can contribute to a more inclusive and peaceful society, aligning with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and fostering peacebuilding efforts in Mindanao.

With a significant Muslim population in the region, it becomes essential to examine the level of satisfaction among Muslim students in a Catholic university setting and the experience of institutional formats on their practice and formation of their religious identity. In an educational landscape marked by increasing cultural, economic, and linguistic heterogeneity, multicultural education is a pivotal framework essential for equipping the university with the tools to effectively navigate the complexities of diverse environments that focus on

addressing the "how?" of religious pluralism content. Conversely, it explores the structural and contextual influences shaping students' educational experiences in a culturally diverse environment, addressing the "how?" Xavier University - Ateneo de Cagayan contributes to religious pluralism theory by investigating its role in supporting and enhancing Muslim students' religious identity and belief practices.

The importance of inclusive and equitable quality education for all aims to ensure that all individuals can acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, regardless of religion. The issue of diversity within a university environment, particularly about religious differences and religious "minority-zation," is a growing concern in today's educational landscape. This study describes Muslim learners' experiences and satisfaction levels with their interactions and engagement across classroom, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities, allowing for a nuanced understanding of their experiences and perceptions. Literature suggests that social identities, particularly religious and ethnopollitical identities, play a crucial role in shaping relationships between Muslim and Christian communities in Mindanao (Macapagal et al., 2018; Montiel et al., 2011). Tatum (1997) notes that understanding these identities is essential for promoting inclusivity and addressing conflicts. According to Tatum (1997), educational institutions should act as microcosms of society that provide students with equal opportunities to express their identities while being exposed to diverse perspectives.

Al-Raschid-Arsa (2022) highlights the importance of institutional development in Muslim education, emphasizing the need for quality education and inclusive policies. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (n.d.) stresses the significance of education in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). However, challenges persist, such as limited access to education and cultural sensitization (Milligan, 2017). Similarly, Raihan and Abubacar (2023) discussed peace reconciliation efforts in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) emphasizing the need for contextual understanding and inclusive approaches. Understanding the experiences of Muslim students in a Catholic educational setting contributes to a broader discourse on the intersections of education, identity formation, and religious diversity. This study contributes to social cohesion by offering insights into how religious diversity can enhance or hinder the educational experience. The study emphasizes the importance of effective teaching methods as a form of identity formation support through inclusive classroom discussions, the availability of religious accommodations, and participation opportunities in co-curricular and extracurricular activities. The significance of this study extends beyond the academic realm, impacting both the advancement of knowledge and societal development.

This paper presents a sociological perspective and sheds light on how institutions reflect societal norms and values, and how the dynamics within schools can either promote inclusivity or exacerbate divisions. This research

reinforces the notion that educational settings are pivotal in shaping societal attitudes and fostering understanding among different communities. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the role of educational institutions in promoting social justice, advocating for the need to address systemic inequalities related to culture, religion, and other identities within educational frameworks.

Naparan and Balimbing (2020) identify challenges faced by Muslim students in Catholic higher education institutions, including cultural and religious differences. Baring et al. (2020) discuss the importance of radical inclusivity in addressing religious pluralism. According to Göran C. (2011), the Pluralism Theory, as articulated in the context of multicultural education, emphasizes the acceptance and celebration of diverse beliefs, cultures, and identities within educational environments. This theory acknowledges the value of multiple perspectives and advocates for the coexistence of different cultural traditions and viewpoints harmoniously within society.

The growing acknowledgment of pluralism in educational systems emphasizes the necessity for institutions to not only provide academic excellence but also to address the unique needs and identities of students from various religious backgrounds and addressing this problem will provide insights into how educational institutions can create inclusive environments that respect and nurture individual identities. This study aims to describe the level of satisfaction of how the mechanisms through which a Catholic university, i.e., non-Muslim educational

institution, approaches its Muslim students in navigating their religious identity and practices. By embracing pluralism, educational institutions can establish inclusive learning spaces that honor and respect the individual backgrounds and experiences of students from various cultural, ethnic, and religious orientations.

Methods

This study uses quantitative approaches to examine how the university provides the mechanisms that help shape and strengthen the religious identity and practices among Muslim Filipinos by providing insight drawn from the level of satisfaction of the various areas of engagement. Online surveys using Google Forms were utilized. A snowball sampling of sixty (N=60) Muslim undergraduate and graduate and professional school students enrolled at Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan was used. Respondents in the study had completed at least one school year at the university. Data collection was done at the end of the school year around the end of June to early July 2024 and made sure that 1st year students completed a school year before taking part in the study. The study gathered the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants thereby recording their Age, Sex, Program/Course, Year Level, and Madrasah Attainment; level of satisfaction of the experience, and the support provided for identity practice and formation.

These surveys were structured and included questions about self-description, covering the extent one perceives concerning Islamic knowledge and how satisfied they are with their satisfaction

level with the following: (1) Supportive Mechanisms for Religious Identity & Practice (a) within the classroom, (b) co-curricular activities involvement and (c) extra-curricular engagements. Descriptive statistical methods were utilized including Kruskal-Wallis test with $\alpha = 0.05$ to ascertain how socio-demographic factors result to a variation in the Muslim students' satisfaction levels across these different areas. The reliability of the measures was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha was computed ($\alpha = .893$). ensure consistency and accuracy in the measurements taken.

The study protocol was submitted to the Research Ethics Office (REO) at Xavier University - Ateneo de Cagayan for expedited review and is at this time being processed.

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.

1. 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 below presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

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

	<i>f</i>	% of Total	Cum %
A. Distribution According to Sex			
Female	32	53.3 %	53.3 %
Male	28	46.7 %	100.0 %
B. Distribution According to Age Group ($\bar{x} = 21.01$, $md = 22$, $\sigma = 2.49$)			
Older (18-19 y.o.)	20	33.3 %	33.3 %
Younger (>20 y.o.)	40	66.7 %	100.0 %
C. 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 %
D. Extent of Exposure/Experience in School			
High	26	43.3%	43.3%
Low	34	56.7%	100%
E. Distribution According to School/College			
Agriculture	1	1.7 %	1.7 %
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.

2. 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 2.1 The Level of Madrasah Exposure of Respondents (N = 60)

	<i>f</i>	% of Total	Cum %
A. Distribution According to Madrasah Engagement			
No	18	30.0 %	30.0 %
Yes	42	70.0 %	100.0 %
B. Distribution According to the Extent of Madrasah Exposure			
High	42	70.0 %	70.0 %
Low	18	30.0 %	100.0 %
C. 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. The high mean satisfaction scores for classroom, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities suggest a supportive environment, echoing the principles of inclusive education. While no significant differences in support mechanisms were found based on sex, year level, Madrasah exposure, or perceived level of Madrasah knowledge, the age group variable showed a potential trend toward differences in support mechanisms. This finding aligns with pluralism theory, emphasizing the importance of inclusive environments and diversity.

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.

3. The Levels of Satisfaction. The study also considered looking into the satisfaction levels pertaining to various support mechanisms aimed at fostering religious identity formation experienced in the university. The findings are presented in Table 3 below.

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

	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.

4. The Variation in the Levels of Satisfaction. 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 generally attributable to the respondents' demographic characteristics and Madrasah exposure. However, satisfaction levels relating to support mechanisms in extra-curricular activities are found to be significantly attributable to respondents' age group ($\chi^2=2.93$, $p=0.09$). The findings suggest that as Muslim students get older, they are more critical of religious practice and identity support mechanisms in activities that cater to personal choice and interest and not very much in the structured activities of classroom and co-curricular organizations.

Conclusion

The findings provide valuable insights into the complexities of religious pluralism in university settings, aligning with pluralism theory. The results highlight the institution's supportive environment, with high mean satisfaction scores across classroom, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. The findings provide valuable insights into the experiences of Muslim students in a Catholic higher education institution, shedding light on the complexities of religious pluralism in educational settings. The findings emphasize the need for extracurricular activities to be more sensitive to various aspects that provide support for a variety of student groups and their interests and need for religious practice and identity support outside of the already structured settings. Thus, underscoring the significance of developing inclusive Islamic education programs,

enhancing support mechanisms, and fostering contextualized approaches to address diverse student interests.

The results support the contention of the Pluralism Theory, which emphasizes the importance of inclusive environments and diversity. The demographic profile of respondents and their Madrasah exposure reflects the diversity of social identities within the institution. The distribution across year levels and colleges indicates a broad range of experiences and exposures. This diversity is a crucial indicator of the need to foster inclusive environments, essential for religious pluralism (Baring et al., 2020).

The development of inclusive Islamic education programs is crucial in catering to diverse student needs, and promoting social cohesion and understanding. This recommendation is grounded in the notion that education plays a vital role in shaping societal values and norms. Fostering contextualized approaches to address diverse student needs is critical in recognizing the intersectionality of social identities. This recommendation emphasizes the importance of considering the complex interplay between religion, culture, and identity.

Inclusive education empowers diversity, fosters interfaith dialogue, and encourages mutual respect among students of different faiths. By acknowledging and addressing diverse needs, educational universities promote inclusivity, respect, and understanding, enriching students' educational journeys. Ultimately, this study highlights education's potential to nurture

students' religious identities, promote inclusivity, and cultivate a harmonious and diverse community, underscoring the significance of inclusive education that does not only relate to classroom and co-curricular mechanisms but target also those that are driven by students' interest outside of the structured formats and into extra-curricular areas.

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