Exploring the Unseen: Muslim Students' Journeys in Catholic Religious Education Classes

Arjie B. Barihasion, Grace Mae Donque, Nica Leslie Mediana, Alfer Jann D. Tantog (iD), *& Rovelyn E. Cerdiña*
College of Teacher Education, Arts and Sciences, Saint Columban College, Pagadian City, Philippines
✉ rovelyncerdina@sccpag.edu.ph

Abstract

Muslim students who attend Catholic institutions engage with Catholic religious education classes by bringing a variety of narratives to the fore. The aim of this study employs how these students contribute diverse narratives to the classroom, which intertwine with a range of challenges and struggles. Through an in-depth examination of the experiences of ten (10) participants enrolled in Catholic institutions, the researchers employ qualitative research techniques, including interviews and verbatim transcriptions. They identify significant patterns, behaviors, and distinguishing characteristics essential to the case's setting through a careful categorizing procedure. Positive experiences, such as a sense of happiness and inclusion, fostering interfaith connections, and promoting a broader comprehension of Catholic religious beliefs and practices, emerge from the findings. Conversely, negative encounters, including unmet accommodation needs, challenges in understanding unfamiliar doctrines, academic struggles, and limited class participation, prompt the development of coping strategies. The findings of this study offer valuable insights for educators, school administrators, and policymakers within Catholic institutions. By recognizing and addressing the challenges encountered by Muslim students, these results foster the establishment of learning environments that are inclusive and provide meaningful support. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of interfaith dialogue within educational settings, contributing to a more harmonious and enriching experience for all students involved.

Keywords: *Catholic Institutions; Muslim Students; Qualitative Approach; Verbatim Transcriptions*

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly known that education has a critical role in determining both academic and personal development (Abu-Nimer & Smith, 2016; Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), and that it is a priceless asset that cannot be replaced (Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020). Through a holistic approach incorporating faith, education, and social responsibility, the Catholic Church emerges in this educational landscape as a significant non-governmental provider on a global scale (Lapsley & Kelley, 2022; Wodon, 2022), helping to develop students' identities, values, and societal contributions.

Catholic institutions have made a name for themselves by encouraging academic excellence, producing a sizable proportion of graduates with global competency (Elder & Jepsen, 2014; Dallavis et al., 2021; Wodon, 2022). Catholic education is accessible to all students, regardless of their religious affiliation, according to the open inclusion principle (Donlevy, 2007; Baatsen, 2017; Meehan, 2023). Thought must be given to the coexistence of other faiths, especially Christian and Muslim, inside these organizations. Along with the possible difficulties Muslim students could encounter in the context of Catholic religious education, there is the opportunity to enhance interfaith conversations (Baatsen, 2017; Larson, 2022; Amatullah & Dixit, 2023).

Muslim students' complex experiences in Catholic institutions have both positive and negative aspects. Religious education provides students with the chance to consider their spiritual development and life's purpose, which is consistent with Catholic teaching (Bravo et al., 2016; Estrada et al., 2019; Saleem et al., 2021). Contrasting personal values with organizational principles, however, may cause dissonance (Pike, 2019). As shown in Indonesia, where Muslim intellectuals seek to bridge religious divides without compromising their own religion (Hamid et al., 2023), this phenomenon is not unique to a particular geographic region.

This dynamic highlight a key goal: promoting values like tolerance, respect, and interfaith cooperation, which are seen as possible outcomes of such educational intersections (Giess et al., 2020). Discussing opposing viewpoints can help Muslim students expand their minds, strengthen their critical thinking, and broaden their understanding of religion. However, these initiatives come with subtle modifications and difficulties (Ahrari et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2019; Haider, 2018; Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020), covering academic, social, and belief-related dimensions.

Catholic institutions have a duty to foster diverse work cultures that support Muslim students' academic and spiritual growth while protecting their religious identity in light of these imperatives (Chen et al., 2019; Abu Khalaf et al., 2022; Erken et al., 2023). Herein lies the opportunity for educational experiences that are meaningful and characterized by inclusive discussions, an understanding of other religions, and cultural insight. Therefore, the study's primary goal is to investigate Muslim students' lived experiences in Catholic religious education classes, revealing their successes and difficulties and the methods they use to overcome these complex difficulties.

METHOD

Research Design

Merriam's (2007) case study technique served as the framework for the qualitative case study approach used in this study. This method is used to obtain an understanding of a particular phenomenon, in this case, the experiences of Muslim students enrolled in religious education programs. By examining and comprehending this phenomenon within the framework of Catholic Institutions, the study seeks to gather comprehensive data. This layout makes it easier to do in-depth research on the difficulties and coping techniques faced by Muslim pupils.

Research Environment

The study is conducted within a college in Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines. This particular institution is selected due to its notable societal role and its significant enrollment of Muslim students. The researchers find this environment suitable for the study's objectives, given the high number of enrolled Muslim students within the college.

Research Participants

The participants of the study are Muslim students enrolled in Catholic institutions. These participants are purposively selected to represent a range of challenges and coping mechanisms experienced by Muslim students in religious education classes. Interviews were conducted with a total of 10 participants, each of whom had already taken religious education subjects. The participants' willingness to share their experiences contributes to the collection and interpretation of the necessary data.

Table 1.

Research participants' grade level and age

Participants	Grade Level of Muslim Students	Age
Muslim student 1	Second year college	20
Muslim student 2	Second year college	21
Muslim student 3	First year college	19
Muslim student 4	Third year college	20
Muslim student 5	Fourth year college	23
Muslim student 6	Third year college	22
Muslim student 7	Second year college	20
Muslim student 8	First year college	19
Muslim student 9	Fourth year college	23
Muslim student 10	Third year college	21

Source: Primary data.

Research Instrument

The researchers used interview guide questions in this study. The interviews' objective is to provide an opportunity for the respondents to tell their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanism in attending religious education classes. The interview guide was designed using English with open-ended questions and conducted in-person interviews. Participants are expected to respond in English however, if they respond in native languages like Filipino and Cebuano will translate it into verbatim transcriptions to English.

Data Gathering Procedure

Interviews were conducted with respondents, who participated in sessions that lasted one and a half hours under the direction of an interview guide. Notably, these interviews were conducted in English. The interviews were performed in private settings after obtaining the participants' permission to protect the participants' confidentiality. The researchers delivered a consent letter to the participants asking for their permission to participate in the study. These interviews were audio-recorded to capture participant responses and enable an in-depth study of their experiences and viewpoints.

Data Analysis

The creation of categories served as the foundation for the study's data organization and analysis, which strengthened the accuracy and legitimacy of the results. Using Merriam's (2007) method, researchers painstakingly absorbed the interview data, creating discrete categories that permitted effective sorting, in-depth analysis, and insightful comparison. By encouraging a methodical approach to analyzing participants' experiences, this methodological framework made sure that analytical insights were firmly rooted in the information gleaned from the interviews. Importantly, the

interviews were audio recorded in order to maintain the authenticity of the participants' comments, and they were afterwards transcribed. This thorough approach upheld strict norms of reliability and validity, which strengthened the research's credibility and supported the accuracy of the research findings.

Ethical Considerations in Conducting Research

When appropriate ethical norms are used, safeguarding participants' identities and responses in the research process is a fundamental part of any research study. Ethical considerations are vital in conducting research in a qualitative study, particularly in the face-to-face interview with the participants. Below are the essential moral issues considered in this study.

Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation. Participants were fully told about the research study so they could understand its nature and aim before electing to participate or decline, which helped to ensure ethical participation. This procedure followed the rules of informed consent, allowing participants to make a decision voluntarily. Both the participants and the school administration received formal informed consent forms from the researchers, detailing the study's specifics and offering a thorough explanation of their responsibilities and rights in the research.

Confidentiality. In order to maintain confidentiality, the participants' names and identities were kept private throughout the entire research process, including data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings. Their private information was protected as a result. The dedication to maintaining secrecy was further underscored by the strong precautions that were taken to protect privacy within the interview setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The experiences of Muslim students enrolling in a Catholic institution are explored in this section. Muslim students have had various backgrounds, including both positive and negative ones.

Positive Experiences

Most participants shared positive experiences upon enrolling in this institution, highlighting different aspects. These include *feelings of happiness, developing a sense of belongingness, minimal adjustment difficulties, promoting interfaith connection and understanding, experiencing Catholic religious practices and events, understanding different religions and cultures, and the approachability and openness of teachers in religious education.*

Feelings of Happiness

The Muslim students enrolled in this institution are experiencing a feeling of happiness. This indicates they have positive feelings and satisfaction with their educational experience. The institution's environment, teaching methods, and interactions contribute to students well-being and enjoyment (Oades et al., 2013; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). In the context of the Muslim students in this study, these were evident in the following statements:

> *"Para sa akoa, so far, malipayon biya gyud ko sa akong pag eskwela dinhi ron"* [For me, so far, I am really happy with my schooling here now. All is going well.] (Ahmir,1)

Another four participants added that their experience in studying at this institution was great.

> *"My schooling here was great, and I learned a lot of things in this institution."* (Bensar, 2)
>
> *"Ok ra baya akong pag eskwela dinhi, even though catholic siya nga school pero nabati gihapon nako nga part ko sa community."* [My schooling here is okay, even though it is a Catholic school, but I still feel like I'm part of the community.] (Calihma, 3)
>
> *"I am good and happy studying here at this institution."* (Fatimah, 6)

> "*It is great to experience such new things in my life. Enrolling in this institution was one of the best decisions I have ever made.*" (Ianah, 9)

Sense of Belongingness

A sense of belongingness is a feeling of being accepted by a certain group or community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Nuñez, 2009; Carter et al., 2013). Muslim students attending Catholic institutions are developing a strong sense of community and forming enduring relationships with classmates from various backgrounds (Blau et al., 2023). This sense of belonging encompasses a sense of connection, acceptance, and affiliation within the Catholic school environment. The following statements make this sentiment clear:

> "*Maganda naman yung experience ko dito. Masasabi mo talagang open institution ito, kasi kahit na Muslim kami hindi ko nararamdaman na iba ako sa kanila.*" [I had a good experience here. You can say that this is really an open institution because, even though we are Muslims, I don't feel that I am different from them.] (Gaudianah, 7)
>
> "*Nagkaroon ako nang mga kaibigan na Catholic din, so parang open lang sa'kin na okay naman pala makipaghalubilo sa iba, tinanggap nila kun ano ang aming culture.*" [I have gained friends who are also Catholic, so it's like I am open to the idea that it's okay to interact with others, they are not that bad after all.] (Hamsah, 8)

Two of the participants experience a sense of belongingness. A sense of belongingness is essential as it positively impacts their overall well-being, academic performance, and interfaith understanding. However, its significance concerning the experiences of Muslim students in dedicated Islamic institutions remains relatively unexplored (Khan & Imam, 2022). For students enrolled in higher education institutions, cultivating a sense of belonging is crucial for their personal growth, identity formation, and spiritual and religious development (Quiñónez, 2001; Kim et al., 2016).

Promotion of Interfaith Connection

This data indicates that Catholic school fosters unity and diversity among different cultures. This institution's active encouragement of interfaith connection plays a crucial role in nurturing a harmonious and respectful atmosphere among students of various faith traditions. These were evident in the following statements:

> "*This institution encourages interfaith connection among students with various religions.*" (Bensar, 2)
> "*Ok, ra kaayo. Feeling welcome ra kaayu ko and naga-promote ra ang school og diversity.*" [It is so good. I feel very welcomed, and the school actively promotes diversity.] (Fatima, 6)

Promoting interfaith connection and understanding among Muslim students in Catholic institutions creates an inclusive and welcoming environment. Interfaith dialogue facilitates the exchange of knowledge and experience among individuals from various religious backgrounds (Pope, 2021). This fosters empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for religious diversity, helping Muslim students gain a broader perspective and a sense of unity with their peers (Aderibigbe et al., 2023). Through this interconnectedness, Muslim students can fully participate in Catholic institutions' rich social and educational experiences while maintaining their unique religious identity (C. Wang et al., 2022).

Understanding Catholic Religious Beliefs and Practices

Muslim students enrolling in Catholic institutions often witness Catholic religious rituals and religious practices. Three of them shared their deeper understanding of Catholic beliefs. These were evident in the following statements:

> "*Lumalim yong understanding naming sa iba't-ibang beliefs, mas lalo pa naming na accept ang different religions and it strengthen my faith.*" [Our

understanding of different beliefs deepened, and we became more accepting of different religions, strengthening my faith.] (Hamsah, 8)

"*Nakatabang sya to help nga ma develop ang akong pananaw sa ubang religion.*" [It helped me develop my understanding of other religions.] (Jamel, 10)

"*It helps me to be wise and open-minded to learning more about Religious Education classes. I have become more open about the Christian life over time. I can understand more about the other faith.*"(Bensar, 2)

Another two participants added about attending first Friday masses, which become compulsory due to the attendance requirement, lead them to understand catholic practices.

"*Dinhi ra sab nako na experience like kanang sa misa bitaw, kanang sa every friday mass og uban pa nga mga events kay wala man gud na sa amoa.*" [I only experienced it here, like in the mass, specifically in the Friday masses and other events, because we do not have that.] (Ahmir, 1)

"*Like kanang mga misa, diba bawal man gyud mosulod sa simbahan, mangutana akong parents "nganong mo attend man ka nga bawal man? Usahay dili nalang ko mag ingon, para maka attendance lang*". [Like those Masses, we are not allowed to enter the Church, my parents would ask: Why are you attending when it's not allowed? Sometimes I just don't say anything and attend to get my attendance.] (Jamel, 10)

The experience of Muslim students in attending Catholic Masses can foster inclusivity and respect. Some of them are hesitant because this activity is contrary to their beliefs and practices. However, it provides an opportunity for connection with fellow worshippers and contributes to a more inclusive and diverse religious landscape on campus (Duric, 2021).

Negative Experiences

Despite the positive responses from Muslim student participants mentioned above, some participants stated negative experiences they encountered when enrolling in this Catholic institution.

Unmet Accommodation Needs

One of the negative experiences reported by Muslim students is unmet accommodation needs. Participants have faced difficulties adjusting to the environment in the Catholic institution where they enrolled. These were evident in the following statements:

> *"Required gihapon mih mo attend sa mass man, which is possible na makasala sa among kaugalingon nga religion."* [We are still required to attend the Mass, which is possible that we can sin against our religion] (Datu, 4)
> *"Dili lagi inforce ang pag-apil pero naa man goy attendance."* "Participation is not enforced, but attendance is still required.] (Ahmir, 1)
> *"I can describe my schooling in this institution as lacking because of the lack of respect and space given to us Muslim students."* *"We Muslims are forced to participate in the Holy masses."* (Esnaira, 5)

It is disheartening to learn that some Muslim students have faced challenges adapting to their educational environment, especially in an institution that advocates for equality and diversity. Studies indicate that the academic performance of Muslim students is negatively impacted by the bias they face, resulting from a lack of understanding and cultural differences. This bias originates from a mix of limited knowledge and differences in cultural backgrounds (Chen et al., 2019).

Unmet accommodation needs are crucial for creating a supportive and nurturing atmosphere that allows all students to thrive and reach their full potential. Muslim students often experience being strangers on campus because some students and faculty do not know their religious practices.

Struggles in Understanding Unfamiliar Doctrine

Muslim students may have limited exposure to Catholicism and its teachings before attending Catholic religious education classes. The unfamiliarity with Catholic rituals, practices, and historical context can make it more difficult for them to engage with and comprehend the subject matter. The participants may struggle to understand Catholic teachings to their own beliefs. Analyzing and understanding

religious concepts from a comparative perspective requires critical thinking skills and a deep understanding of both faith traditions, which may pose challenges for Muslim students. These were the statements by the Muslim students:

> *"There are certain topics that I don't know about, and I find it hard to understand."* (Bensar, 2)
>
> *"Sometimes, I find it hard to understand some of the topics and lessons, samot nag sa mga saints, or mga tawo nga involve sa history sa Catholic church."* [Sometimes, I find it hard to understand some of the topics and lessons, especially when it comes to saints or individuals involved in the history of the Catholic Church] (Calihma, 3)
>
> *"I experienced difficulties in understanding some of the catholic beliefs."* (Fatima, 6)
>
> *"Challenge kaayo sa akoa like kanang mag exams tas naay essays. Maglibog ko unsa akoang itubag, kung akoa bang beliefs or ang gitudlo sa amoa."* [I find it very challenging, especially when taking exams with essays. I get confused about what to answer, whether to express my own beliefs or what is taught to us] (Ahmir, 1)

Muslim students attending Catholic religious education classes experience difficulties in understanding the lesson. They find it hard because the topics were unfamiliar. Muslim students may find it difficult to reconcile their knowledge about their faith with Catholic teachings. Doctrines such as the Trinity, Resurrection, Veneration of the Cross, and other significant topics that a Catholic must know. In taking religious education subjects, Muslim students experienced that sometimes the schools' ideology contrasts with their religious beliefs (T. Wang, 2018). Thus, the participants must possess the values such as respect and understanding of the educational institution in which they are enrolled. However, Muslim students lived experiences should be heard and recognized for the purpose of creating an inclusive environment to allows each student to express their faith. From the document of the Catholic Church, in Dignitatis Humanae, the Second Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right

to religious freedom (Paul VI, 1965). Therefore, no one is to be forced to act contrary to his or her beliefs.

Difficulties in Achieving Higher Grades

Muslim students may struggle in religious classes due to a lack of foundational knowledge. This can have a negative impact on academic performance as it can impede active class participation. Muslim students lose their confidence to share their ideas and opinions due to the stark contrast with their religious teachings. These are the statement of Muslim students:

> "*Super hard kaayo kay apil biya siya sa pag average sa akong mga grado. Challenge gyud kaayo sa akoa ang pag pasar.*" [It's super difficult because it affects the overall average of my grades. Passing is a big challenge for me] (Ahmir, 1)
> "*Ma challenge ko sa akong grado kay dako kaayo siyag epekto sa akong mga grades performances.*" [I struggle with my grades because they have a significant impact on my overall performance] (Calihma, 3)
> "*I can't relate to some topic. Gina apas nalang kay basta maka pasar lang sa mga subject bahalag di na dako ang grado.*" [I can't click to some issues. I just try to get through the subjects as long as I can pass, even if I don't get high grades] (Fatima, 6)

Attending religious education classes poses challenges for Muslim students, particularly those who strive to be Dean's Lister. Participation in the class actively becomes difficult for them since they were not familiar with the terminology used in Catholicism. However, Muslim students need to overcome these challenges to attain the distinction of being a Dean's Lister, as it can notably impact their overall academic performance. The challenge pertains to students' experiences attending classes for religious education subjects. Most of them struggle with the issue since they are unfamiliar with Catholic ideas (Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020).

Lesser Class Participation

Muslim students will be hesitant to participate in class discussions if the topic isn't familiar to them. Islamic students choosing to keep quiet and listen only to the course discussion will be safer to avoid conflict within their faith. This is the statement of one of the Muslim participants:

> *"Struggle sab kaayo samot na sa mga oral recitation, kay murag maulaw ko mo sagot kay basin makaingon unya sila nganong mag answer-answer man ko sa ila religious lesson nga muslim man ko."* [I also struggle a lot, especially during oral recitations, as I feel embarrassed to answer when they ask why I, being a Muslim, am answering questions related to their religious lessons]. (Ahmir, 1)

For Muslim students, getting called into class and speaking in front of their classmates can be terrifying (Ahmad, 2021). This is possible when students need more preparation to answer the question and fear that their answers might be wrong and be despised by their classmates. In addition, Muslim students may be self-conscious about their opinions and fearful that others will not be able to understand what they are saying (Ahmad, 2021).

Reporting is the students' task given to the teachers as their performance and oral participation. Reporting a topic in religious education classes is difficult for Muslim students. One of the Muslim participants responded:

> *"Challenge sab kaayo inig reporting, kay lisod kaayo mag discuss sa atubangan about sa religious education nga klase."* [Reporting is also a challenge because it's difficult to discuss religious education topics in front of the class] (Calihma, 3)

For Muslim students, delivering a report on Catholic teaching can vary depending on the lenses they are using. Muslim students may have limited prior knowledge of Catholic teachings. This can be a tough experience to grasp certain concepts accurately. To discuss in front of the class can be intimidating for Muslim students in the midst

of Catholic classmates. Muslim students may lose their confidence when speaking about unfamiliar topics.

Coping Strategies in Religious Education Classes

In response to the challenges faced by Muslim students attending religious education classes, they outlined various approaches and strategies they employ to overcome these encountered difficulties. These coping strategies include*: Listening to the class discussion, reading and reviewing the lessons, asking for clarification from knowledgeable individuals, and self-motivation.*

Listening to the Class Discussion

Most of the participants' responses are listening to the class discussion. Listening during class discussions allows Muslim students to enhance their learning, deepen their understanding, and avoid any conflict between Catholic and Muslim teachings, beliefs, and practices. These were evident in the following statements:

> *"Just listening to class discussion and asking questions to our instructor, and classmates about the lessons for clarification."* [I listen to the teacher's discussion and ask questions to our instructor and classmates for clarification about the lessons] (Bensar, 2)

Three of the participants similarly said that they remain silent and listened.

> *"Hilom lang gyud ko sa klase, tas maminaw. Motubag lang pud og yes or no kung naay mga pangutana."* [I remain silent in class and just listen. I only answer with a simple "yes" "no" if there are questions] (Ahmir, 1)
>
> *"Maminaw ra sab sa discussion sa teacher, and mutubag ra sab kung pangutanon."* [I simply listen to the teacher's discussion and respond when asked] (Calihma, 3)
>
> *"Maminaw and dili nalang nko e pressure akong kaugalingon."* [I choose to listen and not put pressure on myself] (Datu, 4)

Active listening during class discussions is a crucial skill enabling students to engage effectively with the subject matter and contribute meaningfully to the learning process. According to

responses from many Muslim students, they employ attentive listening in class discussions as a strategy to avoid potential conflicts or debates, while also internalizing the taught material. This approach remains effective even when they find it difficult to relate to the topic under discussion. Through active listening, students concentrate on comprehending and assimilating information shared by the instructor and their peers (Bidabadi & Yamat, 2014; Canpolat et al., 2015; Lee & Cha, 2017).

Reading and Reviewing Lessons

Muslim students reinforce their understanding of Catholic teachings by reading handouts and conducting additional research. This strategy helps them appreciate shared values and promotes interfaith dialogue. These were evident in the following statements:

> "*Mag read, either sa handouts or if dili pa gyud masabtan mag research on the internet.*" [I read, whether it's from handouts or if I can't understand, I research on the internet] (Ahmir, 1)
> "*I read on my own and study at home.*" (Bensar, 2)

Reading and reviewing lessons are coping strategies for Muslim students in religious education. Exploring religious texts outside of class reinforces knowledge and promotes interfaith dialogue, fostering understanding and unity among diverse beliefs. This approach enriches the learning experience, nurturing an inclusive, tolerant, and respectful educational environment (Baatsen, 2017; Swanson, 2019).

Asking for Clarification from Knowledgeable Individuals

When struggling to grasp Catholic doctrine, Muslim students ask classmates and teachers for clarification, ensuring accurate comprehension and effective communication. These were evident in the following statements:

> "*Mag asks. Akong mga friends gyud akong masaligan basta religious education nga class. Need gyud mangutana sa mga classmates nga Catholic if naay dili masabtan, even sa mga teachers.*" [I ask my friends. Especially those who are Catholic, they are the who I entrusted to in terms of religious education class if I don't understand certain things, even from the teachers] (Ahmir, 1)
>
> Four more participants responded with almost the same answer "*I ask my classmates if there's something I don't understand about Catholic matters.*" (Bensar, 2, Calihma, 3, Fatima, 6 & Ianah, 9)

Asking for clarification involves acquiring additional information or explanation on a specific topic. Four participants highlighted how asking for clarification aids their understanding of Catholic doctrine in religious education classes. This approach helps prevent misconceptions and misunderstandings, promoting effective communication and ensuring accurate comprehension (Marzola, 1988; Yang, 2006; Zamani et al., 2020). These strategies provide Muslim students with specific details to address their difficulties in attending religious education. This ensures accurate and comprehensive responses to their questions and concerns.

Self-Motivation

Muslim students cultivate self-motivation to actively participate in class, recognizing the importance of religious education and fostering a positive learning experience. This was evident in the following statement:

> "*Self-motivation helps me nga mosulod gyud sa klase and I realized nga dapat dili e walang bahala ang RelEd subject.*" [Self-motivation helps me to participate in class actively, and I've come to realize that I shouldn't disregard the importance of the religious education subject] (Fatima, 6)

Despite the challenges, Muslim students in religious education can overcome obstacles through self-motivation. Self-motivation involves self-evaluation, identifying strengths and areas for growth, and implementing strategies to enhance and maintain motivation

(Tuckman, 1991; Misra, 2017; Singh et al., 2017; Steinmayr et al., 2019; Shevchenko & Mukomel, 2022). Self-motivated Muslim students foster positive outcomes in their school engagement. This approach demonstrates their commitment to learning and understanding different faiths, enhancing their knowledge of Christianity, and promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding.

These coping strategies enable Muslim students to engage effectively with religious education, promote in Muslim students enrolled in this Catholic institution have expressed and stated their different experiences, both positive and negative, in the school environment. It was also shown in the data above that most of them have been experiencing challenging situations, especially when attending religious education classes. But despite the difficulties they have encountered, they can still pursue and continue their learning journey with the help of their coping strategies and the support of the community.

The results and discussions are related to the theory, which is resilience theory. Resilience theory focuses on how individuals can adapt and grow in adversity or challenging circumstances (Garmezy, 1991; Barton, 2005; Rew, 2005; Bauman, 2016). This will also include how students positively interpret academic or social challenges, such as by increasing effort, developing new strategies, or practicing conflict resolution. The result shows that Muslim students have encountered challenges attending religious education classes. They become resilient individuals with the help of their coping strategies and the support of the school community. Despite the diverse culture and beliefs, they can continue their studies at this Catholic institution.

Implication

Muslim students' experiences in Catholic institutions offer lessons that go beyond their immediate surroundings. On one hand, feelings of happiness, a sense of belonging, and interfaith connections

are all positive experiences that highlight the value of diversity in education and promote open communication. On the other hand, difficulties like unmet accommodation needs and contrasting religious teachings highlight the necessity of proactive support for different faiths. Coping mechanisms, such as seeking clarification and actively engaging, enhance learning experiences universally. This emphasizes the importance of mentorship and self-directed learning. Educational institutions can encourage tolerance, respect, and specialized assistance for other faiths. Giving teachers educational tools and relevant teaching approaches that promote empathy and critical thinking helps create a climate conducive to interfaith discourse. These real-world implications foster stimulating learning settings, support academic performance, and welcome various viewpoints.

CONCLUSION

In the realm of Catholic schools, Muslim students' experiences exhibit a spectrum of positive and challenging aspects. While stories of contentment, belonging, and interfaith relationships underscore the significance of diversity and open dialogue in education, hurdles like inadequate accommodations underscore the need for tailored, inclusive support systems. Navigating religious education poses unique challenges as students balance personal convictions with Catholic doctrine, demanding comprehensive understanding and critical thinking. These challenges manifest in academics and engagement, met with coping mechanisms such as attentive listening, seeking clarification, and self-motivation. Muslim students' interactions with Catholic educators yield lessons in happiness, community, and interfaith relations, advocating for diverse education and an open discourse culture. Coping strategies, rooted in active participation and inquiry, resonate globally, emphasizing mentoring

and self-directed learning. Educational institutions benefit by prioritizing respect, tolerance, and faith-specific assistance, fostering empathy and critical thinking among educators for a supportive interfaith environment. These practical applications pave the way for enriched learning, academic success, and the embrace of diverse perspectives.

A promising avenue for future research in this domain could delve deeper into the effectiveness of specific support systems and accommodations tailored for Muslim students in Catholic schools. Investigating how these tailored interventions impact the academic performance, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging among Muslim students would provide valuable insights. Furthermore, a comparative analysis across different Catholic schools, possibly across different regions or countries, could shed light on the variances in experiences and support systems, enabling us to identify best practices and areas that require improvement. Additionally, a longitudinal study tracking the long-term impact of Catholic education on Muslim students' interfaith relationships, tolerance levels, and career choices could offer a comprehensive understanding of the enduring effects of such educational experiences. Finally, exploring the perspectives and experiences of Catholic educators who engage with Muslim students in religiously diverse classrooms can provide insights into their training needs and how their pedagogical approaches evolve over time. This broader research agenda can further enhance our understanding of the dynamics within interfaith educational settings and contribute to the development of more inclusive and supportive educational practices.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: A.B.B., G.M.D., N.L.M., A.J.T., & R.C.; Data curation: A.B.B., G.M.D., N.L.M., A.J.T., & R.C.; Formal analysis: A.B.B., G.M.D., N.L.M., A.J.T., & R.C.; Funding acquisition: A.B.B., G.M.D., N.L.M., A.J.T., & R.C.;

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was approved by College of Teacher Education, Arts and Sciences, Saint Columban College, Pagadian City, Philippines.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent for this study was obtained through verbal consent by participants before interview.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

Exploring the Unseen: Muslim Students' Journeys in Catholic Religious Education Classes.

    A. Engaging Questions

            1) How is your schooling in this institution?

    B. Exploratory Questions

Central Questions: What are the experiences of Muslims students in attending Religious Education Classes?

Sub Questions	Descriptive Questions	Probing
1. What are the experiences of the Muslims Students enrolled in a Catholic institution?	1) What are your experiences as you enrolled in this Catholic institution? 2) Can you describe to us your experiences as Muslims students in the Catholic institution?	a. What are your expectations when enrolling in Catholic institution? b. What did you experience during the adjustments period of the classroom environment?
		c. Is there any person who influenced you to enroll in this institution?
		d. How these experiences affects you?

2. What are the challenges that Muslims students experience in attending Religious Education Classes?	1) What are the challenges that you have experienced in attending Religious classes?	a.	What can you say about these challenges in attending religious education classes?
		b.	Do these challenges affect your academic performance? In that way?
3. How do Muslims students cope with the challenges in attending Religious Education classes?	1) How do you cope with the challenges that you have experienced in attending Religious Education classes?	a.	What are the ways or strategies that you used to cope with those challenges that you experienced in attending religious education classes?
		b.	In what ways do these strategies are helpful and useful in coping with those challenges?

C. Exit Questions
   1. Do you have anything to add or any realizations from the interview?

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