

Experiences of Muslim Students in their Interaction with Non-Muslim Learners in Public Schools

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Abstract

The number of families who have been migrating has been increasing, and this activity is impacting not only the migrant but also the performance of students at school. Laguna is the third area that has many migrants, specifically Muslim families from different regions according to studies. This study focuses on the experiences migrant Muslim learners in public schools, and understands their life and how these experiences shape them as a learner. This study applied qualitative research as a design and a case study since the vital objective of this research is to explore and describe the experiences of these Muslim learners in public schools, and observe their behavior in the said environment. After the rigorous analysis of the data from the interview of the participants, the research has derived 7 themes that described the positive experiences of Muslim learners to non-Muslim learners in public schools, also the participants revealed the need of support in Madrasah Education Program in public school and how will teachers and educational sectors include Islamic education in the curriculum. Finally, this research sheds light to continue the deeper understanding on the experiences of migrant in the community to mitigate discrimination, biases, and inequality through listening to their voices.

Keywords: Muslim learners; Non-Muslim learners; Public schools; education, case study; experiences;

1. Introduction

Migration has been happening around the world decades ago and still happening in the present time, in a discussion, we always seek for numbers and data to have a concrete record of migration that is happening around the globe. According to the statistics data presented by UN Migration in (2022), 281 million international migrants were there and that is equivalent to 3.6 percent of the total population around the world. This event can, happen not just in a country to another country but in a particular region, in the Philippines for example, migration is also evident in the society. Migration has been a practiced of hundreds of thousands of Filipinos who have migrated from one area to another because of several factors and reasons. In a study conducted by Lomibao, (2023), he mentioned that through the years, large number coming from different regions have transferred to a richer part of the Philippines including the following: National Capital Region (NCR), Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon (CALABARZON), and Central Luzon. In connection to this, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and University of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI) (2019) highlighted in their report that 59 percent of an entire population of a country can be considered as migrants, have experience transferring inside or outside a particular country. According to them, this activity

of moving out and in of a country or region has been increasing since the end of the second world war and the number is constantly changing through the years.

Considering the data from Philippine Statistics Authority (2021), the mentioned Regions from above are not only the places where migration most likely to happen but they are the largest contributors in terms of Philippines' gross domestic product (GDP). PSA and UPPI (2019), have identified the reason why migrating in the Philippines has been being practiced. Can be inferred that the reason behind the high data of less educated citizens that migrates, can be the reason why 58 percent of migrants are trying to survive in rural areas.

Using the above information about migration, it can happen anywhere, anytime, at any age or any religion within and outside a country, including Muslims. There were a lot of diverse studies and researches that tried to explore the Muslim's life after migration. And one of the following topics emerged in these kinds of researches talked about the experiences of Muslims, this research would like to explore the experiences of Muslims after migrating from one region to another, but will focus on the way and process of interaction being made by Muslim learners with non-Muslim students. Education is a powerful tool that someone can acquire, therefore, we need to also consider different kinds of learners in a particular school environment. Schools should have the capacity and ability to cater the needs of students based on their culture, and religion, and provide them better and equitable experiences that considers their diverse culture and students (Amjad, 2018; Meymand, 2018; Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020).

Apart from this, it can also be problematic for a Muslim learner to survive and deal with other students in a non-Muslim community or school without even disregarding the belief and his religion. By this, learners will be forced to do adjustments in a school, this fact is also stated in a study conducted by Kim, Choi, and Park (2018), when they identified that first generation Muslim learners, specifically, college students have greater chance to suffer from problems and adjustments that the students need to face in college. It was mentioned above that most immigrants migrate because of the better opportunity in a richer place or region in believe that they can seek for it in these places, including quality education. Because of this, Muslim learners enrolled even in a catholic school, colleges, or universities to obtain such, and this scenario can affect the religion of a learners, Muslims might become closer to the religion being practiced in the school more than her own religion, this might be as well, problematic. In a study administered by Kuenzi (2018), that in Senegal, that adult kind of education has negative impact in terms of the faith of someone, also concluded that progress in the student's performance academically has increased, but the faith within their own religion, has put in risk.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This discussion has open opportunities for the researcher to conduct a study that cater experiences of Muslim learners in a public school. This research will seek to understand life of Muslim learners that are currently enrolled and studying in a public school where diverse religion can be seen.

1.2 Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Discuss the experiences, challenges, hindrance of a Muslim learners in a public school.
2. Describe the experience of a Muslim learners in terms of interacting with another non-Muslim learners in a public school.

1.3 Related Literature and Studies

There were a lot of diverse researches and studies published and disseminated through the years that talked about the Muslim learners, their views, perception, experiences, and religion as being connected with education and equality. This research would try to explore the life of Muslim learners in and their experiences in a public school highlighting the ways and process of interacting with other non-Muslim learners. Based on

the study conducted by Amjad (2018), it was discovered by studies that relationship with other members of community was the most common them to emerged from collected data, being followed by attitude of teachers towards the Muslim students. Being mentioned this, the researcher was triggered to discover the peer interaction that is happening to Muslim learners and how these experiences is affecting their life. In the same study, conducted in Canada, authors pointed out the importance of having a school that is ready to cater diverse learners and religion. By this, schools can better provide more fulfilling experiences without disregarding their culture and religion. Positive learning environment was mentioned as well for better communication and interaction with diverse learners. Therefore, teaching practices and curricula is subjected to re-evaluation.

In another study by Haj-Yehia and Erez (2018), they mentioned that students who are studying on learning in an environment where they considered to be minority, experienced identities being questioned. Having this result only showed that the places and other people who you interact with can affect one's belief, idea and even to question it. An example that was cited by Haj-Yehia and Erez, an Arab Muslim learner who was assigned to embark a journey as a student in Germany as an exchange student. Based on the experience of the student, she would always observe other people looking at her, like it was only the first time for these people to see a girl in a community that is wearing a Hijab, this is a head covering being worn by Muslim women especially when they go out in public places. What she did, since she felt being judge by the people around her, she responded to these people, showing, and let them know that she is a peaceful Muslim individual. It is indeed that other people might have idea or perception towards other people by just looking at them, in this example, it was realized and experienced because of the physical appearance of the Muslim learner. Somehow, the learner felt that there is a gap between her and the students from Germany and this situation also affect the way and process of interaction between two people.

In connection with this, religion of students might put at risk specially if the learner enrolled in a school that practices difference religion. It can be observed as well that from the content of materials, the subject matter and even the present religion in a particular school would somehow will make Muslim learners feel like their belief is on contrast with what is being practiced in that school. This understanding can be rooted on the study done by Wang (2018; Naparan and Balimbinga (2020), that ideology or the system of thoughts and ideals, most especially one that is being used as a basis of theories and policies about politics and economy, of a learner is in contrast with the religion belief of the school where they study.

In the Philippines, Muslim learners tend to migrate to seek for the quality education. In a study that was finished by Naparan and Balimbingan (2020), they have mentioned one of the most emerging them in research about the coping mechanism of Muslim learners in a catholic school. This result corresponds to the idea mentioned above the migration all over the world is a result of Muslims' wanting to have better life and to have access to quality education. According to the same study, there were thirteen statements that was pertaining to the them regarding the quality of education. Particularly, learners are considering the quality of education that they can gain from a school before enrolling, this study also includes reasons apart from mentioned, the ability of a school to produce an excellent graduate, internationally competitive, and looking for achieving excellence, and highly competitive teachers.

In contrast with the above result of studies about the experiences of Muslim learners in a non-Muslim school, Abrenica (2021), argued in her conducted research that positive experiences can be experienced as well in a public-school setting, the said research noted that respondents had positive outcomes the way they interact with non-Muslim students in a public school. The respondent did not experience discrimination or unjust and unequal treatment of people to another category of people because of the gap and difference on the grounds, ethnicity, age, sex, and even disability, and negative incidents because of her religion and belief. However, she reminded this result cannot be applied to everyone and she encourages researchers to look for other scenarios regarding the Muslim learners as other students might have and experienced different with the respondents. The researcher also encourages others to look at the Muslim teachers, the curriculum, and the lessons that these Muslim learners are learning inside a public-school setting.

The study is being anchored with Adaptation Theory, adaptation can easily be understood as the act of changing a particular thing, or changing someone's behavior to ensure that this is more suitable for a particular situation. But the theory was elaborated by Kashyrtsev (2021), explained being a dynamic process, it refers to the selection of a particular adjustment in behavior internally, as participants move from their own culture to a new environment and by this, they were able to develop more effective communication. In connection with this, Chen 2013; Renata (2019), also discussed in her study that adaptation, is a continuous process and it is dynamic, where an individual is confronted with demands and gained by acculturation that is placed within an individual with the new culture in a specific environment. As a result, values, belief, and attitude of an individual in the process of adapting might change. This process is identified as the last part of the process in terms of psychological acculturation, that represents the changes that can be observed in an individual when they have contact with another cultural group. The theory best fits the research to be conducted because of the concept of migration, and being able to experience new culture of an individual who already have his own culture beforehand. Based on the studies above, Muslim students tend to adjust and experience discrimination from other people because of their religion, and it is indeed part of this study to explore the process of interaction being made of these Muslim learners to have better communication with other people. It is important to get the literature aligned with the research topic because theories, frameworks, may it be conceptual or theoretical, these are somehow are terms that ambiguous and can either improve the quality of the content or not because of differences. In general, theories refer to a huge idea that organizes many other ideas including the deeper understanding and explanation to it, (Collins& Stockton, 2018, 2).

Although it was mentioned that there were diverse researches regarding this topic, this research will particularly focus on the context that have not been explored yet, regarding the way of interaction being done by Muslim learners in non-Muslim school, this research will also tackle adaptation and adjustment made by identified learners. This research can greatly leave an importance in understanding reasons why Muslim learners experienced such incident from a non-Muslim community, by this it can broaden our perception and understanding about the life that they are living. Apart from this, the research will also a good platform to discover new exploratory topics in this discipline, we cannot disregard the idea that it is possible to discover themes that can emerge in the study that somehow not related to the topic, this can be a basis of another research and study about culture. Muslim learners can also benefit from this study, perhaps some of them are not aware with the process involving adjustment, acculturation, and even adaptation of culture, and this can be an opportunity for the researcher to make them understand. Schools and the school policy can be touched too, especially the curricula, the rules and regulation inside the school in terms of religion belief. School has been a second home for every student, and it is a must that every student, regardless of their religion, race, and background should always feel safe. Most especially, by conducting this kind of research, it can elevate as well the way how Muslim learners interact with other people, perhaps a realization about the proper way of interaction to have concrete and better communication, without disregarding the cultural background of a person.

As a conclusion, objectives, goals, and point of view of learners especially Muslim learners can be varied from one student to another. It is true that Muslim learners can experienced both negative and positive incident in a public-school setting where learners have different belief and religion. Some Muslim learners might experience discrimination, some may not, some Muslim learners might have their belief questioned, changed, and have different perception at things. Having taken note that these things can really happen in and outside the county, these experiences is never limited to where a particular came from, but it is always about place or area where the Muslim migrated. Understanding these concepts give the researchers a grasp about the lived experiences of students who have experienced such situation. And triggered the idea of the process and ways of interaction a Muslim learner does. This research will aim to explore this topic, perhaps the way of interaction that someone might be the reason why some Muslim learners experienced such incident and some did not.

2. Methodology

This research will follow the qualitative research design; the researcher considered the said design because of the topic that will be discussed and explored throughout the research. This kind of research design gives importance to the organized research about a particular social phenomenon, that is being explored through qualifying such as describing, illuminating, exploring, the subject of the research (Bearman, 2019). In connection with this, qualitative research plays a vital role in investigating leadership as well as management problems given that they remain crucial social problems even after a critical study on behalf of these phenomena for longer than anyone cares to remember (Halkias, 2020). By allowing the researcher to explore the qualitative research design, it also offers variety of colors in terms of the process on how to do a particular study using this design considering the focus and the idea that the researcher would like to explore. Since the researcher will explore the interactive working environment of learners to observed their behaviour in a particular environment, it is rightful to have an in-depths study of the participants' perspectives who are involved with the phenomenon and its nature that is being studied, McCombes, (2019) has defined Case study this way, that aligned with the objective of the study.

In addition, in the same source, case study is the appropriate method to be used in this topic since these kinds of studies are commonly used in social, clinical, business, and even in educational researchers. This kind of study also functions to involve students in interactive working environment, so that the behavior of these students can be observed in terms of how they deal in a particular system, and this can be done through updated ways and method (Neubert et al., in press; Rapp & Ogilvie, 2019).

2.1 Population

In conducting research, we also need to consider the population and sampling that the researcher will do to successfully finish the research. Population in research refers to the statistical sense to refer the entire group of participants that possess the characteristics that need by the study (Bearman 2020). In accordance with the sampling technique that will be used in the study, the researcher will use purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique contains characteristics that are defined for the need of the research, by this the researcher will only use students who have characteristics that portrays the need of the research. Utilizing purposive technique in conducting this research was cemented by the idea of the same researcher, when stated that in this kind of research, purposive sample is more likely to be used by the researchers, because in this study, there is already a target respondent prior to the conducting the research. He also argued that there is nothing wrong in using purposive sampling, and its convenience has nothing to do with the wrongness if the readers are aware of the population that will benefit the research and to the people that will consider the findings relevant.

In this case, the researcher will look for Muslim learners that migrate in a community of a region and that are studying in a public school where the culture in that environment is different from the culture of the region where they come from.

2.2 Data Gathering Procedure

According to the definition made by Bearman (2020), one of the objectives of doing qualitative research is to look for deeper understanding about the experience of the people who are characterized the needs of the research, and one of the most common methods to be used to realize and achieve the objective of the researcher is by conducting a semi-structured interview.

Interview will be unutilized by the researcher to be able to gather data from the participants in connection with their own experiences about the topic being discussed. As defined by Kvale (2017), any kind of interviews is an interview, it is a process of exchanging of views and opinions. It means that, participants of research can have an effective schedule with the researcher to have a time to talk and give meaningful ideas and thoughts, and to be able to describe the experiences in a phenomenon that is being discussed by the researcher. So, the researcher should pick participants that truly can identified as the person of interest and

that can give relevant feedback and sensible ideas for the study.

In this case, the researcher will conduct a face-to-face interview with the participants, and ask for their permission to record the whole interview session, apart from this, the researcher will also observe the learners' facial expressions, hand gestures, and even reactions as these might also help in gathering data for the research.

2.3 Data Analysis

After conducting an interview with the participants, the researcher will analyse the data gathered from the process of data collection. Braun et al, (2019), pointed out the importance of using the thematic analysis in a study that follows a qualitative analytic method, even though that some researchers may argue about being main stay of this approach. Thematic analysis has been very useful in terms of conceptualizing themes and ideas about the topic. It has been conceptualized as well in having different ways and is questionably, have a better understanding as a part of umbrella term that apprehensions within the topic as a set of variety of techniques in analysis. In addition to this, stated by the same researcher, that thematic analysis can be defined as "an umbrella term, designating sometimes quite different approaches aimed at identifying patterns across qualitative datasets" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 844).

Considering these facts and ideas mentioned by Braun, the researcher will use thematic analysis as the main approach in analysing data from the interview to form themes that can help researchers and readers understand the phenomenon being studied. To be able to realize this, the researcher will follow the work of Lochmiller and Lester's (2017), their earlier work offers seven phases of thematic analysis and this process is to help the researcher engage with the data in completing the objectives in a qualitative analysis. They suggested that these phases are well suited with thematic analysis, especially if the researchers are aiming to produce wide and deep descriptive statements that replicate to the whole understanding and comprehension of the data especially with the response of the participants to the questions in the interviews.

Phase 1: Preparing and organizing the data for analysis Phase 2: Transcribing the data

Phase 3: Becoming familiar with the data Phase 4: Memoing the data

Phase 5: Coding the data

Phase 6: Moving from codes to categories and categories to themes Phase 7: Making the analytic process transparent

It was pointed out by Aguinis & Solarino, (2019), that for instance in the recent analysis of the qualitative researchers using 52 qualitative articles regarding Strategic Management Journal, it was revealed the none of these published articles were adequately transparent, and with this there is a risk that the research might be potentially unescapable in qualitative research. To avoid such scenario, the researcher will collect all the data needed with the acknowledgement of the persons involved. Letters for every activity will be provided and will make sure that participants and other members of the research will be informed and the researcher will let them sign papers as a proof and means of transparency.

3. Results

Presented in this part are the issues and challenges as experiences of Science teachers, their coping mechanism, as well as their insights on the implementation of Strategic Intervention Material which emerged from the information gleaned through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion.

This chapter showcases the relevant points and important results of the study. Issues and Challenges of Science Teachers on the Implementation of SIM after analysing the sentiments of the participants about the issues and challenges on the implementation of Science Strategic Intervention Material (SIM), six (6) major themes emerged: (1) time constraints; (2) budget constraints; (3) lack of teachers' competence; (4) lack of students' response; (5) suitability of materials and (6) replicability and duplicability of materials.

1. Muslim learners grab any opportunity to acquire education.

Almost all the participants have talked about having no other option in choosing what school to enrol in pursuit for Senior High School disregarding what they might experience in a particular school considering their religion and culture. It should be noted that Muslim learners should be included in any classroom setting, the inclusivity of their religious background is very important as it is part of their whole being, and this is the main objective of Madrasah Education as per DO 41 S. 2017, and is being defined as a place where religious learnings can be thought (Encyclopedia, 2018).

This can be inferred to the responses of the participants.

“Wala naman pong ibang choices, ang choice ko lang po talaga ay yung sa taas po kasi wala pong school dito na maraming Muslim.”

As stated by P1, it was the only school that is left for her since there is no other school where most learners are Muslims, can be inferred that she was hoping to look for a school where she can meet other Muslim learners.

“Dahil po sa mga kapatid ko, doon po sila nag-aral, lahat po sila so sumunod lang din po ako. Kasi ano din po siya, public din po then ayon nga po ‘yung mga kapatid ko subok na rin po mag-aral doon.”

P2 mentioned that although he does not have any other option in choosing a particular school, he considered the quality of education the school can provide. This is by the help of his siblings who also went in the same school.

“Mas malapit at tyaka mas maraming Muslim, tsaka doon din kami nag-aaral, sabi ko sige... kasi yan lang din naman choice ko.”

It can be noted that Muslim learners are considering the number of Muslim learners enrolled in a particular school, as stated by P4, she considered the school where she is in because of other Muslim learners enrolled in the school.

“So ano naghanap kami ng public, so doon ako nahulog sa ano, kasi yun lang nahanap ko eh, kasi late ako eh, kumbaga wala na tumatanggap eh kaya don na talaga ako sa kanila kaya doon ako nahulog.”

As for P5, she could not look for other school since she was already late for the beginning of the school year, and just grab the opportunity to continue her studies in the school that will admit her.

From these results stated by the participant, all of them do not have the opportunity to look for schools that can cater their needs as a Muslim learner. Most of them consider the quality of education that the school can offer, as well as the companionship that the school can offer in terms of other students in the same religion. And others just did not have the chance to choose, and just grab the chance to enrol and continue their studies.

Having no other opportunity for these Muslim learners to choose for a school, is somehow concerning in terms of how Madrasah Educational Program is being implemented in our country. As stated by Fauzia (2021), the objective of Madrasah in a particular society is to really impart learnings on children with regards of Islamic traditions, social and political as well as social culture, and norms in a particular society for Muslims. This kind of program helps these learners to shape their belief and be able to learn about their culture and tradition.

It can also be noted as mentioned by some of the participants that the Department of Education has not implemented this program for the benefit of these Muslim learners. Most of the participants could not give their own experience or even their idea regarding the program, and only one of them have experienced the Madrasah Education, but unfortunately according to her, it was stopped due to small number of learners enrolled and lack of support from the Department, the Local Government Unit, and other stakeholders.

“No po sir, di ko po siya na encounter here in San Pedro po, Sir. Pero

alam ko po yung madrasah education po. Kaso sir sa province ko po sya nalaman,” stated by P2.

“I have, that time grade 7-8 ako, ung madrasah na un sa United kaso tinigil din agad since onting students lng napasok.” shared by P1.

It is also imperative that these learners should have their own choice in choosing the respective institution to attend to, and to give them access with the learnings that they need and will help them develop their skills without disregarding their religion. Considering that these learners should be open with cross-cultural and social communication and have access with Islamic Religious Education, that will help them realize inclusivity in developing the society with understanding the other members of it (Yenuri, 2022).

Regardless of this idea, these learners are still motivated and hopeful to finish their studies in the school where they are in, mentioning other factors that give them the motivation to study such as being able to recognize her hard work in her academics, that they were given credits and acknowledgement with the performance done.

“Tsaka gusto ko po ‘yung nare-recognize ‘yung galing ko po, kasi pino- post po kasi nila, kaya ayon.” explained by P5.

“Pag mas mataas ka, kahit hindi ka mayaman, malaki po talaga ang bayad mo,” said P1.

Similarly, P1 shared her motivation to finish her studies is to give herself the proper education as it is one of the bases for the dowry, in their culture. She stated that if someone has accomplished a lot in terms of her academics, she will be valued higher than others. This gives the notion of Muslim learners giving importance to their education and the belief that it is still one of the advantages that they can acquire to have a better future.

2. Feeling of being unwanted in a school environment

Considering the fact of being Muslim, and believing with Islamic traditions, these Muslim learners have their own culture that is different from other religions and this indifference can affect the lives of these learners. In this research, it was found out that there is only a small number of Muslim learners in Senior High School in all the public schools in San Pedro City, due to this it can be inferred that most of learners come from any other different religions and it is imperative to also look for this scenario. Discuss about experiences of Muslim learners in a classroom being dominated by non-Muslim learners.

Most of participants expressed their dishearten encounters inside the school with non- Muslim learners and how these experiences have affected them, emotionally, and even their academic performance. These experiences are relevant in the deeper understanding of such scenarios, because perhaps these learners experienced what we called “embodied Islamophobia” as explained by McGinty (2018), this is an anti-Muslim act or even ideas that are being lived, experienced, and encountered by Muslim people every day in their interaction with others in a particular space.

“St. Francis talaga ako, nagtagal ako doon ng 2 weeks, pero hindi ko kinaya kasi parang ang sama ng tingin nila sa akin parang hindi nila tanggap na may Muslim doon na pumasok na parang ayaw nila akong pansinin,” mentioned by P3.

Two weeks were the longest period she can take to continue her studies in a Catholic school where she first enrolled, and ended up transferring to another school because of how other students treats her. It is true that the environment of a learner affects her motivation to go to school, the atmosphere of a particular institution changes the drive of the student, not to mention the presence of other learners being shown a Muslim learner.

“Yung kunwari, bakit kami nadito sa Pilipinas? Eh sa Luzon, bakit hindi kami nasa Mindanao parang ganon, paano kami napupunta dito, eh hindi namin lugar ito, dapat nadon lang daw kami.”

P5 shared a notable experience of hers when she had a conflict with a non-Muslim learner in a public school. Questioning their existence in the Philippines, and saying that Muslims should just be staying in Mindanao because that is the only place for them.

“Hindi gusto pumasok kasi feel ko kakaiba talaga ako. Ganon din po nung grade 7 ako, kaya minsan nagtatanggal po ako ng ganito eh... kasi feeling ko ano... kapag nakikita ko sila araw-araw, nakikita nila ako araw-araw parang jinujudge nila ako sa paningin po nila,” P4.

The motivation to go to school and academic performance of Participant 5 was also affected because of her experience when she was in her Elementary. She said that it was like she was being judged by other learners every day she comes to school, there were also times that she would not wear her hijab so that other learners will not identify her as a Muslim.

“Nung mag-enroll pa lang po ako, nakaramdam po talaga ako, kasi ako po ‘yung first time na Muslim na pumasok doon.”

As for Participant 1, she was also worried to enroll in the school where she is in at the beginning because according to the record of her school, she will be the first Muslim learner that they have.

It is evident that in this result most Muslim learners have had experienced dishearten when they interact with non-Muslim learners. It should be noted as well that the feelings of these Muslim learners in terms of what they have experienced are valid because invalidating does not mean that in needs to be in a form of action. As stated by Shaker (2021), in his study that emotional as well as effective encounters can also have impact in with the physicality of a person. Concluding that dishearten experiences of other participants were experienced because it was expressed through body language. In his same study he explained that affective othering does not have representations, but those experiences that cause tension between individuals. In addition, truly these experiences are evidently part of Muslim learners and is happening in the society, because of Hirsh's (2019) study, he observed that practices that contradicts to what is dominant in terms of morality and norms are often rejected of the religious group connected with them.

3. Sense of belongingness of Muslim learners varies

The sense of belongingness of Muslim learners was also explored in this study, as most of the learners have a fair share on how they feel when asked about their interaction with non-Muslim learners and all of them stated that they feel belong regardless of the difference in their religion and cultural background. According to the study conducted by Islam (2018), Muslim learners suggested that they feel belong due to different factors such as: having a positive relationship with other Muslims, being considered by other students as a Muslim, and other students showing curiosity in learning Islam. And these can be noted with the experiences of Muslim learners as they shared their experiences.

“May kakilala naman ako so nabawasan ‘yung kaba tsaka nung may nakilala na ako roon, ‘yung teacher ko ngang Muslim,” said P3.

“Pero hindi naman kinabahan ng sobrang sobra kasi may muslim din don po na teacher ako doon, mas ano yung nararamdaman ko minsan na iniisip sa akin ng mga kaklase ko, nararamdaman din niya, nagkakaintidihan kami kung paano kami iha-handle” shared by P5.

P3 and P5 stated that they were able to calm themselves and disregard the fear and nervousness upon entering the school where they are in because of the peers that she has met. Big factor of this relief was that she was able to meet a Muslim teacher as well in the same school, happened to be her classroom adviser.

“‘Yung iba hindi ko naman po maiiwasan na ang food po ay bawal po sa akin so ‘yon lang po, nagkakaroon po kami ng conflict kasi syempre ako po as a muslim po, ayoko din pong kahit madikitan ‘yung food ko ng ganun sa kanila so, medyo lalayo po ako ng kaunti, then ano po, ‘yung mga friends ko po ay understanding po talaga sila,”

said P2.

It was also evident to the experience shared by P2, when he mentioned about eating lunch together with his non-Muslim friends and they show understanding with how he takes care of his food with consideration of his own religion.

"Mas komportable po ako sa kanila na makipagkaibigan kaysa sa mga muslim, kasi kapag po non-muslim nasasabi mo po side, yung nararamdaman mo," stated by P4.

On the other hand, P4 that according to her own experience she is more comfortable and she feels belong to non-Muslim friends of hers. She said that it is easier for her to express her side of story to non-Muslim friends than Muslim friends.

The results have unravelled the variety of factors on how these Muslim learners feel the sense of belongingness inside a classroom setting we can infer that their experiences with different people varies as well. Therefore, sense of belongingness seemed to be one sided, these learners feel it to someone who they consider positive to them, someone that they can talk to regarding their academic performance, support in the institution, and their teachers (Islam 2018). The idea of how these Muslim learners feel included and not being disregarded in a classroom setting should be highlighted as a support for their day-to-day experiences. By this, we can see the freedom of these learners in terms of their belief without thinking of bullying or intimidation in their environment in connection with their religion, it can be observed by participation of students regardless of religion to any celebration of religious activities without coercion because of religion factors.

4. Perception of Muslim learners with the thoughts of non-Muslim learners

Another theme that has arisen after the analysis of data was the perception of Muslim learners with the thought of non-Muslim about them. It is imperative to look for how do these Muslim learners feel and think about the information being said about them as this also affect the kind of interaction and socialization that they have with other students.

"Medyo kinakabahan po ako baka isipin nila ganito, ganyan po na baka may dala akong bomba gayan, tyaka nung una natatakot po ako na baka magtanong po sila ng kung ano-ano na hindi ako kumportable," P4.

"Naiiyak po ako sir, kasi ganon tingin sakín ng mga kaklase ko na...na kapag muslim masamang tao... sinasabi nila na bakit kayo pumunta dito? Kasi siguro may kaaway yan sa Mindanao ganyan," she added.

P4 expressed her being nervous on what other students might think about her, she had mentioned that other students might think that Muslim are villains or evildoer and that the reason why they are in the place where they currently live is because they conflict with someone in Mindanao. She also recalled of feeling afraid of being told that she was carrying a bomb and to be asked about questions that other people might ask about her religion.

"Nakatingin sakín mga estudyante mga kaklase ko kasi tinanong nila ano religion ko? Baka kunwari ano ispin nila na muslim ka," expressed by P5.

Muslim learner has this fear as well in mind whether what her classmates might think about her whenever they look at her just because she is a Muslim. And this as well gives discomfort to P5 in terms of her interaction with other students.

"Hindi ko alam, alam talaga nila na yung Muslim ay pumapatay ganyan, yung parang takot sila sa muslim, na parang ang feeling po nila na kapag kaaway mo yung isang muslim kaaway mo na

buong...,” stated by P5.

“Napapansin ko po kasi na huwag niyong, huwag niyo silang... huwag niyong awayin ‘yang mga Muslim kasi ano, parang nakakatakot daw sila,” shared by P1.

“Kasi ang alam nila ang mga Muslim, masama ang ugali. ‘Yung masungit ba, ‘yung kapag naging kaaway mo feeling nung ano, kaaway mo din ‘yung pamilya,” said P3.

As per P1, P3, and P5 shared the same views and point for discussion about their experience with regards on how their non-Muslim classmates would seem feel afraid of Muslims, as if they feel that when a Muslim is your enemy, you will be considered as an enemy by the whole family. This notion has left the idea that there is a boundary between the Muslims and non-Muslim considering the actions that they are showing to these Muslim learners. These misconceptions about Muslim learners that have experienced by some of participants can be integrated with the Autoethnography research done by Shaker (2021), where he was able to describe his own experience as a bearded brown Muslim-looking individual and how he received weird looks, and how other people would not want to seat beside him.

These experiences can once again be injected with affective atmosphere; these are more likely concerning in terms of the emotional aspect of these Muslim learners. According to Shaker (2021), in the same study, he found out that these are very dominant in terms of othering scenarios being encountered every day, where racism and exclusion occur. He noted as well that these atmospheres enable to arouse emotion.

Affective atmosphere as discussed is evidently in the experiences mentioned by these Muslim learners, it is true that they may not have physical encounter with non-Muslim learners, they did not experience discrimination, and racism towards the non-Muslim learners. But the way these non-Muslim look at them, convey their ideas towards them, it has left a big impact in terms of their affective domain. Some of these learners feel bad, some are angry as well because of how people think about them, sadness and anger can be considered as the emotions that had arouse to Muslim learners who have experienced a particular othering from non-Muslim learners.

5. Disregarding the religion as a support for learning

Experiences of Muslim learners varies, although at some point of their experiences they have mentioned negative experiences they have also highlighted the positive experiences that they had during their interaction with non-Muslim learner. As well as how their school and teacher support them to continue their studies.

Support system for everyone is very important, especially in the case of these Muslim learners who are currently studying in a school where most learners are non-Muslim. There will be some cases where activities are not suitable for their religion, sometimes in terms of religious activity they cannot perform and do their task as a learner in a particular manner. It is imperative to talk about these experiences as well in a hope of disregarding the religious barrier to support students’ learning.

“So hindi na po bago sa akin na makipag-interact sa other classmates ko po na hindi ko po same ng religion,” expressed by P2.

“Meron nga po noon na may krus po na nilalagay sa noo, hindi naman po nila pinipilit, pinipili, na ikaw Muslim ka,” she added.

P2 revealed that it was not hard for me to interact with my classmates who are in different religion, he said that maybe it is because he does not look like a Muslim and he grew up with non-Muslim community, inferring that he was able to adjust and adapt the kind of environment where he lives. He also mentioned that during the religious activities in school, he was not required to participate and he has the freedom to whether participate or not. In this, the school has been very understanding and careful not to disregard the culture and religion of their student.

“Nirerespeto nila ako tapos, ‘yung religion namin nirerespeto naman

nila then 'yung pakikitungo nila sa akin, okay naman. 'Yung tingin nila sa akin, parang pare-parehas lang kami ng religion" said P3.

As mentioned by P3, in terms of her interaction with her non-Muslim classmates, she reported mostly positive encounters, highlighting that she felt respected in their classroom, non-Muslim learners respect her religion and interact with her without hesitations. She gladly expressed that her classmates would let her feel like they all come from one religion.

'Yung gagawa po kami ng video, tapos 'yung gagawin namin na mga bawal gawin dapat naka-short ka dahil kailangan sa video, hindi po talaga nila ako sinasali sa ganun pero sa group po kasali po ako sa may grade," mentioned by P1.

In terms of consideration with the school activities, Participant 1 has shared her experience in terms of how her groupmates have agreed to give her another task to do in exchange of the initial task that she cannot do due to her religion. She said that even though she could not participate in video making, she was able to have grade since her classmates insisted to include her in the group list.

"Fasting nga kami so nag ano kami, minsan nagtatanong siya sa amin kung okay lang ba kayo dyan? Mamaya ano mangyari sainyo dyan, pwede naman kayo matulog muna, kung nagugutom kayo," said P5.

Non-Muslim learners can be understanding and considerate in terms of the school works and activities being given to them as stated by the above participants. As for participant 5, she highlighted the support that she receives from her teacher during the celebration of Ramadan. She was concern to them and ask if they are not hungry or sleepy knowing the fact that Muslim are in fasting because of the said religious activity. It is evident that these Muslim learners were able to adjust themselves into the kind of environment that they are in, they were able to fit in and blend well in the environment that they live in. And on the other hand, non-Muslim learners and individual were able to at least realized the presence of Muslim learners that are with them. It only proved that when individuals from a particular school or institution socialize and interact with one another, they will be able to learn how to adapt to the society, as well as the behavior and thoughts of other members (Fauzia, 2024).

From this result, it can also be concluded that Muslim learners were able to feel at ease and comfortable inside the school setting when they have found support from other people not just the sense of belongingness but they were able to interact with their classmates and better their performance at school. This somehow is related to the result of the study conducted by Abrenica (2021) stating that support system that is clear and implicit are some of relevant aspects that help Muslim kids to feel comfortable at school. These learners were able to get along with their teachers and as well as the authority, the study also showed that learner was accepted and supported regardless of her religion.

6. Experiences of Muslim learners in a non-Muslim dominant classroom

Allowing these Muslim learners to enter a school or institution where most learners or dominated by non-Muslim learners can cause concepts that can be used to better understand the situation of every Muslim learner. As topics such as discrimination, cultural sensitivity, racism, and issues about religious and minority groups, it is imperative to take one step closer the people who are already experiencing and have experience such thing. According to the study conducted by Amjad, (2018) institutions such as schools can contribute in the increasing cases of racism that is already happening in our society nowadays, noting that these people behind racism can affect the community in a lot of ways. The following scenarios such as increase in poverty, violence, discrimination, and stereotypes can be the reason why exclusion of Muslim learners was present up until this day.

"Mapang-aasar yung parang kunwari... may tempered ka? May tsinelas ka na binebenta dyan? So tahimik lang talaga ako sa room....," said P5.

It cannot be argued that Muslim learners were able to experience negative treatment as well with non-Muslim learners that can be used to highlight the things that they went through and to what might another Muslim learner can be experience if they will be in the same situation. Participant 5, reported that some of her classmates keep on teasing her about selling tempered glass or even slippers, this can be rooted to the business that most of Muslim family is having in the city. What response she can make was to keep herself silence, to avoid disorder or chaos.

Naranasan ko rin yun na nagtaas ako ng kamay mali parang pabisaya siya ng pagkasabi so nagtawanan sila so mula noon hindi na ako nagtaas ng kamay," she added.

Another reported incident was being able to laughed at by her other classmates when she mispronounced words when her teacher asked her to read in front of her class. Some of Muslim learners where from different parts of Mindanao and they are not that fluent in terms of using the Filipino language, and so the way how they pronounce and enunciate words is a bit different from the other students. She mentioned that she was offended by that time, and from that moment she would not raise her hand to even recite again especially that if the task is reading.

'Yung pronunciation ko biglang naging ano malalim, parang biglang naging Bisaya na 'yung ano ko pronunciation ko, accent ko ayun nagtatawanan po, nao-offend po ako sa ganun," expressed by P1.

Similar with the experience with Participant 5, there was an issue with regard of the pronunciation of words and how the other students reacted into it. Participant 1 expressed her being offended whenever her classmates would laugh at her when she mispronounces words. Other than that, she can't recall any other scenarios where she felt embarrass or non-Muslim learners disregarding her religion.

'Yung inaasar nila ako na part daw, 'yung pamilya ko po part daw ng Abusayaf, mga ganun, yung tawag doon, pumapatay daw ng tao, tinatangalan daw ng ulo mga ganun," as shared by P3.

Apart from what have mentioned above, another notable experience shared by Participant 3 with her experience as a learner in a school that is dominated by non-Muslim learners, that they tend to tease her and they say they say that her family is part of the Abu Sayaf, that is what they call it, they say [we] kill people, they say that we are decapitate people.

By using the result as the basis, it is indeed alarming for the community specially for these learners that they were able to experience and hear these words from other learners their age. These kinds of words and behavior being shown towards these learners can not only leave impact on their emotional aspect, it can also affect their performance at school but most importantly it can create conflict and negative image to other students in a particular society.

Although it was noted as well that most of these cases were not intentionally intended to hurt, discriminate Muslim learners, there will still a devastating impact on the feelings and performance of a learner specially if he was only new to the place or can be considered as migrant (Amjad, 2018).

Therefore, as a conclusion othering can really be seen in any form and it touches different social differences, Alimahomed, (2020) stated that othering into Muslim was constructed based on merging of race, religion, ethnicity, language, size, and accent. That is evident with the experiences that were shared by the participants on how they interact with non- Muslim learners in a public-school setting.

7. Friendship knows no religion

Regardless of religion and cultural background, friendship can still be formed in consideration of humanity and as one aspect of interaction and socialization in a particular community. No man is an island they say, we can never leave alone and from time to time we will be seeking something from someone and it is the same way with Muslim learners and non- Muslim learners as they socializing inside a one environment. As a result of a study conducted by Harold (2022) Muslims, that can be considered in a small population, can

actually meet people and socialize in the society. In his study in the city of Tomohon, he found out that there were no cases of discrimination in Muslim learners as well as injustice or even intolerance. In addition to this, he concluded that Muslim in the mentioned city can celebrate their Islamic events and holidays very well. All of the participant were able to share how they were able to build a positive relationship or even friendship with their non-Muslim classmates.

Magaling po ako makipag-socialize because po, marami pong, mostly sa mga classmates ko po, siguro po lahat po sila ay nakaka-socialize ko, okay naman po kami, 'yung relation po namin as ano classmate, okay naman po," said P2.

In her statement she highlighted in the beginning of the discussion that it was not hard for him to interact and communicate with his non-Muslim classmates and now friends. He added that it was because he is good at socializing with other people and the interaction inside their classroom had helped him a lot to build repour with other students. He also shared that the competitiveness of his classmates in terms of classroom participation and activities creates a harmonious impact to their relationship as students.

"Gusto ko nga yung... yung ano.. tawag dito totoo, gusto ko kung paano mo ako kausapin ganon din kita kakausapin parang ganon," explained by P4.

She said that one thing that she really gives important on building a friendship towards other classmates is the act of being real. She mentioned that being true is important for her since she would also like to interact to other people in a way that she is also being true to herself. This implies that regardless of religion of the person, for as long as she feels that a friend is being authentic and real on the way she interacts with her, then religion does not even matter for her.

"Kung approach ako ng isang tao doon lang, doon ko lang siya approach, pero pag hindi, hindi ko rin siya approach mas okay ako kasi sa konti yung kausap ko kesa marami so ayun lang," said P5.

Being able to be approached by someone is important for Participant 5 for her to build friendship to someone, rejection by other people considering the experiences that she had before has left a scar within her to wait for someone to approach her to have a compact communication. She said that she also likes being alone and she does not have any issue if there were only few students will approach her. It is because of her personality of somehow being introvert and wants a silence and peaceful environment.

"Mas madali po kasing makipagkaibigan sa hindi Muslim, malayo po kasi ang ugali ng Muslim sa katoliko," expressed by P1.

Religion really does not limit anyone to build friendship as it all boils down with the choice and the feeling of being comfortable with someone. As stated by Participant 1, she prefers to be friends with non-Muslim learners than with Muslim learners because there is a big difference in terms of the attitude of Muslim learners. She shared that she is more comfortable to share anything to non-Muslim friends because they will not judge you the way how Muslim people will judge you by mentioning the things that you can and cannot do in your religion.

"Masaya naman kasi alam nilang muslim ka irerespeto ka nila, alam nila 'yung ano, hindi po kasi alam naman nila 'yung mga bawat sa inyo, kasi natanong ka naman nila diba, kilalanin ka nila," said P3.

She expressed how glad she is that she has found friends that accepted her as a Muslim and based on her experience, these friends of hers respect her and her religion. Her friends also often ask her questions and the same thing that she does to form stronger bonding. In her statement, it can be inferred that the friendship really starts with the curiosity of someone to know someone and by asking questions relevant to feed her curiosity.

"Madami akong kaibigan mostly lahat ng kaibigan ko Christian siya lang muslim na kaibigan ko," added by P5.

“Marami. Most of my friends are non-Muslim,” mentioned by P2.

Somehow related to what Participant 1 has mentioned in her statement about wanting to have more non-Muslim friends because of the comfort that these people can give her. The same statement expressed by Participant 5 and 2 that most of their friends are non-Muslim, and to be specific, they are Catholics. Different factors can be seen and considered to understand the preference of these learners but everything will boil down with tolerance to each other. As stated by Dewa (2021) in her study, it shows that tolerance is part of intercultural communication, essential element as she described. It is according to her tolerance refers to the ability of someone to understand the imperative things not only in a single person but also in various cultures and by that he will be able to see the values of different people, why they believe such things and why we do not, and the most important thing is to avoid any kind of conflict that may result to misunderstanding with moral and spiritual values.

4. Discussion

As a result of this research paper, the researcher was able to derive seven themes that can better the understanding of people in terms of how Muslim learners interact with non-Muslim learners in a public-school setting. After the rigorous analysis of data from the interview of Senior High School Muslim learners in public school, the following themes have derived: 1. Muslim learners grab any opportunity to acquire education. 2. Feeling of being unwanted in a school environment. 3. Sense of belongingness of Muslim learners varies. 4. Perception of Muslim learners with the thoughts of non-Muslim learners. 5. Disregarding the religion as a support for learning. 6. Experiences of Muslim learners in a non-Muslim dominant classroom. 7. Friendship knows no religion.

All the Muslim learners have expressed having no other option in choosing a particular school to attend to for Senior High School and just settle with the school that is near where they live, recommended by relatives or friends, or there are no other options left. As a result, these learners would try to adapt with the environment that they are in, and let them realize the importance of education that regardless of not being able to choose for a particular school they are still motivated to finish their studies. As this research suggests, the education sector should once again revisit their program in terms of the implementation of Madrasah since some of the learners are not aware of this, and it was reported that the implementation was stopped due to lack of support. As proposed by the study conducted by Ilham (2020), there should be a realignment of the educational system that tackles with Islamic education that does not only modify or patch things out. He highlighted that there should be a reconciliation, reconstruction and most specially reorientation to the said culture so that it can have a significant contribution to the society. It was also noted by Deporos (2022) that there is a significance in terms of giving emphasis to the necessity of having a balanced education over Islamic institutions, this can really develop the advancement of education and peace in particular country.

By examining the data in terms of the experiences shared by Muslim learners, some themes have derived regarding how non-Muslim learners treat them, as well as how these Muslim learners perceive those thoughts of non-Muslim learners about them considering their religion and cultural background. It is imperative to look for a deeper understanding on how Muslim learners feel and think about this scenario as based on the data shared by Muslim learners it affected them in terms of how they perform inside the classroom, they were hurt by words, and left impact to their emotions. It was discussed that most of these experiences can be considered as othering, the same as the findings of Shaker (2023) in his research that this can be experienced in different manners and can be based on their race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and characteristics. Having these negative experiences noted in this research, it is significant to investigate the brighter side of these experiences as well, since these learners had experienced positive encounters and support from non-Muslim learners as well and to really identify that the good and the bad experiences since as Maykel (2023), found out in his study, some of the researches done before about anti-Muslim and the feelings has well ought out some Muslim practices that creates misidentification of a particular person that either have positive or negative feelings to Muslims. Similar scenario that happened to the research conducted by Islam

(2018) when he discovered that although not all the respondents interviewed did not experiences barriers to fully adapt to an institution as a Muslim learner, there will always be some aspects to be considered that compel into it.

Lastly, this research has discovered the positive relationship towards Muslim learners and non-Muslim learners and how they interact with each other to build friendship to better their performance in school. Moreover, it was also highlighted that there were several supports and positive impact received from teachers and institutions for these learners to feel comfortable within the environment. In connection with this, Zain (2020) highlighted that teachers can help in displaying tolerance by helping these learners to make friends disregarding the differences, having a positive mindset that students will imitate the action and values being shown. This result has emphasized the importance of tolerance and acceptance towards other individuals who came from different religion or cultural background. And it was proved that the school can really help as a place to form interactions of different people from different religion and has different point of views in life. As mentioned by Arif (2021) as part of his study, that interactions in schools can help build social relations, by this awareness will be more effective if being taught at school through educating people since it is the instrument into teaching and realizing multicultural values.

4.1 Conclusion

As a conclusion of this research that the data and information being generated through the analysis of data can be used to broaden the topic about how Muslim learners interact with non-Muslim learners in a public-school setting. The result can open discussion about the diversity and variety experiences of Muslim learners in our society nowadays. The results were used to derived into several themes that emphasized both the challenges and positive experiences of Muslim learners.

It can be mentioned that the most prominent result from the analysis of data would be about the positive interaction and support by the institution to the Muslim learners. Although it can be said that most of these learners had experienced othering from other individuals, these learners have built positive relationship and friendship as well with learners from different religion. Highlighting the adjustment and how these people help them to disregard factors that limit them to socialize to each other.

Furthermore, this research exposed some concept in the sector of education in terms of the implementation of Madrasah Education Program that is relevant to Muslim learners. Participants shared their different ways on how they feel and acquire sense of belongingness to the environment where they are in.

However, I believe that more than these positive results in terms of the experiences of these learners it is imperative as well to look and acknowledge the negative aspects of these experiences. As these barriers and struggles that they have shared may shed light to continue pursuing of deeper understanding and study that can lead to mitigating discrimination, biases, and inequalities in a society.

Moving forward, more than anything else that have mentioned and discuss this research promotes the understanding towards a more equal, inclusive, and accepting environment for Muslim learners. By highlighting some of the unknown experiences and thoughts of these participants might amplify voices that are often unheard and increase the work towards striving into equal community that can be shared by learners regardless of their religion.

4.2 Recommendation

The main purpose of this research was to unfold the underlying experiences of Muslim learners in their interaction with non-Muslim learners in a public-school setting. This research also targets to understand deeper the scenarios that these Muslim learners are facing and its impact to their emotional aspect and performance in school. Guided by the findings on this research, there are some recommendations that can be considered for viewing and improving supports and to promote cultural sensitivity and a more inclusive and diverse community for our Muslim learners.

1. Revisit the implementation of Madrasah Education Program in every public school to make sure that

Islamic Education is still accessible for Muslim learners.

2. Open discussion on how will teachers and educational sectors include Islamic education in the curriculum.
3. Continue to support Muslim learners in terms of considering their religion in doing school activities and events.
4. Explore more on the side of Muslim teachers in an institution that is dominated by non-Muslim learners.
5. Institutions should have stronger regulations, and take actions on reports regarding any bullying, discrimination, religion indifference, that these Muslim learners have or might experience.

This research underlines the importance of identifying and giving value to the diversity and inclusivity of Muslim learners, at the same time looking at the impact of these experiences to their lives. And as a result, it can be noted that only solidarity and being united can build and make the world more inclusive and equitable regardless of the religion.

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