



# LUZ Y SABER



# Luz *y* Saber

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# A STUDY ON AUTHENTIC LEARNING PRINCIPLES IN GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine whether the General Education courses of Letran Manila provide authentic learning. Three hundred thirty-six student responses from a researcher-made instrument based on the Principles of Authentic Learning by Ashford-Rowe et al. (2013) were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. Results showed that the GenEd curriculum provided agreeable and authentic learning experiences in Metacognition, Accuracy, Feedback, and Collaboration. However, few indicators under Level of Challenge, Product and Performances, Knowledge and Skill Transfer, and Environment and Tools yielded neutral results. The researchers concluded that students cannot bridge connections on how the difficult tasks that they do, along with the limited future work-training environment and tools in the General Education curriculum, hone the knowledge and skills they need for their careers. A proposal for a possible solution was provided by this study. The researchers also recommended further research as the utilized tool, as the utilized researcher-made instrument yielded a 0.97 Cronbach Alpha value.

**Keywords:** Education, General Education, Authentic Learning, Metacognition, Knowledge and Skill Transfer

## INTRODUCTION

Considering the landscape of education in the current years, most higher education institutions are faced with tons of challenges. One topic that stands out is, of course, providing learning opportunities. Recently, according to Weber (2019), higher education requires finding ways to prepare students for the workforce through classroom experiences. Learning by experience creates an authentic learning experience for students. This is a major factor that must be given attention to by any learning institution.

With the consistently low enrolment numbers in Colegio de San Juan de Letran Manila, numerous factors might be at play. One of the many factors may lie in the quality and applicability of content delivered in the courses the students take, in particular, the General Education Subjects. All students take General Education courses regardless of their department. Authentic learning allows for the application of what was learned to real-world scenarios through active learning (Becker et al., 2019). One might question whether the General Education courses provide the chance for such a type of learning.

General Education courses are an essential part of the curriculum of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Students of all courses are mandated to take these courses as part of the completion of their curriculum. As mandated by the Commission on Higher Education, these courses aim to impart to students essential things that may relate to their field of study or their lives in the future (CMO 20 s. 2013). This is why all HEIs have a general education curriculum separate from the major subjects.

### Importance of Authentic Learning

Higher Education Institutions should implement General and Professional Education Subjects that are Outcomes-Based (Asio et al., 2022). In which General Education (GenEd) Subjects should act as a complement to the future careers of students. Ideally, GenEd subjects need to impart concepts, skills, and/or ideas that the students can utilize in their respective fields of work. The faculty and the curriculum should induce learning experiences that would be of maximum benefit for the students' careers. This is where the concept of authentic learning comes into play and why following an Outcomes-Based Education is a key to adhering to the concept of authentic learning.

Colegio de San Juan de Letran is not new to utilizing an Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) - a form of authentic learning - in which students are asked to participate in activities with products suited for real-world applications. Participating in an OBE class may increase the possible linkages students will have once they enter their respective fields (Mangali et al., 2019) due to the applicability and relatability of the contents of said courses. This is a good place to start to adhere to authentic learning.

However, it can be noted that even though, ideally speaking, Outcomes-Based Education seems very promising in assuring the application of student learning in real-life scenarios, OBE has no shortage of challenges. Teacher-based and administrator-based implementation problems (Ag Damit et al., 2021), along with the content of the curriculum itself and the skills induced by the activities, may come up as a hindrance to full authentic learning.

Although the Colegio supports conducting OBE-related activities, it cannot be denied that the content and the curriculum of the courses it offers may not be aligned with the principles of authentic assessment (Ajjawi et al., 2019; Alonzo et al., 2023). In particular, the General Education courses may be the most misaligned of all of the courses students must take due to the general nature of their content. Aside from that, depending on the approach of the faculty in charge of the subjects, certain skills may not be transferable to the workplace scenario of their takers in the future. This will then lead students not only to be disengaged from the subject, but also to not find the value of the course, as it has no purpose for them. To keep their engagement, Lima (2021) suggests that output-based learning makes students keep their interest and makes them genuine and active participants in class, again, highlighting the importance of authenticity.

This also highlights the importance of adhering to the contents of the curriculum and assessment to the key facets of authentic assessment (Villaruel et al., 2019). Those courses that hit multiple important aspects of authentic learning will likely encourage students to take said courses because of their perceived importance to their future career, as it gives them a clear edge. This is one thing that Colegio must consider, given its status regarding its enrollees.

There are various principles of authentic assessment (Ashford-Rowe et al., as cited in Connolly et al., 2023) that can serve as a guideline towards better applications of General Education courses. These can be used to improve the relatability of these courses to the professional lives of students. These courses, to become more relatable, must not only prioritize technical skills but also soft skills because of their value in various business areas (Cook, 2020; Montano, 2023).

Soft skills are important for 21st-century learning. It is also equally important to maintain an excellent working environment. This highlights another important aspect that General Education courses must tackle - developing these soft skills (Fajaryati et al., 2020; Noah & Abdul Aziz, 2020; Sotiriadou et al., 2019; Teng et al., 2019). By following the authentic assessment principles, this can be done. These are summarized in this study as: (1) Metacognition, (2) Accuracy, (3) Feedback, (4) Collaboration, (5) Level of Challenge, (6) Products and Performances, (7) Knowledge and Skill Transfer, and (8) Environment and Tools. The more these principles are hit by a curriculum, the higher its authenticity and applicability become (Sokhanvar et al., 2021).

### Authentic Learning Principles

The fifth principle, Level of Challenge, deals with the capability of the activity to allow students to demonstrate their higher-order thinking and abilities (Chabeli et al., 2021). As with any effective activity, it is much more valuable for students to be able to analyze, create, and evaluate, rather than just recall. This relates to the first tenet - metacognition. That action alone of evaluation is already a higher-order thinking skill. However, if the students can reflect on their own actions, the authenticity of the activity or lesson becomes richer (Wiewiora, A., & Kowalkiewicz, 2018). Self-reflections make students feel more grounded in real-world scenarios. In turn, this makes the learning process more authentic.

This leads to authentic learning principles two and eight - accuracy and environment and tools. The core of authentic learning is to test students' abilities through simulations of real-world scenarios or, to narrow it down, the demands of the workplace (Karunanayaka & Naidu, 2021). To make these simulations more accurate, the curriculum should provide the necessary environment and materials for students to experience the real scenario within the context of a simulation.

In simulating the workplace, it is also important to tackle interpersonal relationships. This is where principles three and four focus. Feedback mechanisms in learning are necessary. It allows for the further development of the students because they are receiving key points of improvement upon which they can work. Which is why in any curriculum, teacher-to-student feedback, student-to-teacher feedback, and student-to-student feedback should all be integral parts of assessment. Not only does this allow students to develop their activity-based skills, but it also fosters interactions and collaboration, which are also important. Collaborative activities promote a training ground for real-world interactions in the future jobs of the students (Gosselin, 2024). The more they develop this skill early on, the better they can collaborate with the people around them in the future.

Tenets six and seven - Products and Performances and Knowledge and Skill Transfer - are the standing points of authentic learning. This focuses on the importance of how any skill or knowledge they learn must reflect what they need in their future careers or lives (Jackson et al., 2019). With this, students will truly give their attention and time to those courses that offer the greater chance of experiencing these principles. These are the aspects that any curriculum must have to be more authentic. Each aspect is geared towards the future life of the student - an important part of a curriculum that adult students are inherently seeking to make relatable. This is why adult learners should be taught using methods and ways that stick to the theory of andragogy (Lewis & Bryan, 2021).

### Andragogy and Authentic Learning

Andragogy proposes that adult learners should learn differently from young learners. The reason is that adults tend to look for a relationship between what they learn to what they do in their careers and their lives. With this, it is of high importance for college courses to deliver authentic learning to ensure that adult learners learn as much as possible from the courses that they take, and to ensure that their curriculum remains relevant.

As a result, it is important to look for areas of adjustment to the General Education Curriculum of Colegio de San Juan de Letran Manila to ensure that said curriculum provides authentic learning to all of its students in each program (Ornellas et al., 2019). Because even with effective teaching and work performance, higher education institutions still need to consider revisiting and revising the curriculum for General Education subjects so that it can be adaptive to a changing society (Cook, 2022; Mangila, 2022; Singha et al., 2023).

This study created a framework/proposal that details the possible points for improvement for the General Education curriculum to make it more relevant to the professional lives of students. This is in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2012).

The researchers believe that assessing the authenticity of the General Education courses is key to determining whether the institution is catering to the needs of modern learners. This study revolved around the question: How can the General Education courses of Letran Manila improve its curriculum across all programs? To address this main question, the researchers explored the following research questions: (1) How do Letran Manila students experience authentic learning in General Education courses? (2) Based on the experiences of students, what framework/proposal can be suggested to strengthen authentic learning in General Education courses? The researchers utilized the extracted variables as the focus of a syllabus and/or curriculum revision. This can help in the continuous development of General Education courses to make them more authentic and relatable for each program, thus improving the Colegio as well.

## METHODS

### Research Design

The researchers aimed to make a generalization based on the thoughts of the students. With this in mind, the study used a descriptive quantitative approach to tackle its aims. By using numerical data and assigning categories, generalizing the responses of the students became possible. This design also allows replicability, which ensures the counterchecking of the results for further studies.

### Data Collection

A survey questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms through simple random sampling to selected 3rd and 4th-year students of Colegio de San Juan de Letran Manila. A total of 336 respondents were asked for this study. The survey questionnaire was researcher-made and was derived from the elements of authentic learning from the study of Ashford-Rowe et al. (2013). Results were analyzed through descriptive statistics and were used to craft a proposal for the improvement of General Education courses. The study participants are students who met the following criteria: (1) A current student of Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Manila for School Year 2024-2025. (2) Currently in their third or fourth year in terms of residency at Colegio de San Juan de Letran. (3) Must have completed at least five or more general education and/or general education elective courses in Colegio de San Juan de Letran.

### Ethical Considerations

There were no risks for the participants involved in this study. However, to prevent retaliation from the faculty against the students, the researchers ensured their anonymity. The participants were informed of the researchers' aim, ethical considerations, and privacy statement through an Informed Consent form at the beginning of the survey questionnaire. Participants provided their full agreement for the researchers to collect, use, and manage their personal data for data collection and analysis in relation to the study. The data coming from the participants were only used to help in the creation of a proposal to improve the quality of General Education courses of Colegio de San Juan de Letran. No alterations to the results were made to ensure transparency and accuracy.

The researchers assured that all responses from the respondents were kept anonymous. Subsequent findings of the study were only used for research and supporting documents. The researchers also ensured that the information participants provided was treated with adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. To avoid plagiarism and to ensure the validity and reliability of the study, before publication, it will be run under a plagiarism checker.

It should be noted that participation in this study was voluntary. Participants were able to choose to withdraw their consent at any moment, should they have felt the need to. To avoid bias, participants did not receive any reward or payment once they had completed this survey – only the feeling of accomplishment that they had been part of the mechanism of change in improving the quality of education in the Colegio.

### Scope and Limitations

This study focused on General Education courses only. And, to obtain a more accurate assessment of the General Education courses, the study only focused on students who had taken, if not all, GenEd courses in their curriculum. This study sets its sights only on authentic learning based on the principles proposed by Ashford-Rowe et al. (2013) and will not assess any other aspects of the General Education area curriculum.

## RESULTS

The respondents who belonged to the third- and fourth-year levels are from varied programs. In presenting the data, the researchers grouped the programs by department. The following table presents the respondents in this manner:

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

Department	Frequency	Percentage
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	147	44.35%
College of Business Administration and Accountancy	95	28.27%
College of Engineering and Information Technology	92	27.38%
<b>Total</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>100%</b>

The researchers present the findings based on the data collected in this research. To address the first research question, the researchers interpreted the data

based on the mean, mode, and standard deviation. This was done to make a general view of the experiences of the students about authentic learning in the General Education courses of Colegio de San Juan de Letran. The responses are presented as follows:

**Table 2: Results for the Tenets Metacognition (M), Accuracy (A), Feedback (F), and Collaboration (C)**

Item	Mean	SD	Mode	Categorical Interpretation
M01	3.67	1.01	4	Agree
M02	3.88	0.96	4	Agree
M03	3.61	1.03	4	Agree
M04	3.64	0.99	4	Agree
M05	3.65	0.99	4	Agree
M06	3.65	0.94	4	Agree
M07	3.44	1.02	4	Agree
M08	3.64	0.96	4	Agree
A01	3.57	0.98	4	Agree
A02	3.74	0.90	4	Agree
A03	3.71	0.90	4	Agree
A04	3.70	0.91	4	Agree
A05	3.64	0.90	4	Agree
A06	3.80	0.93	4	Agree
A07	3.37	1.11	4	Agree
F01	3.47	1.00	4	Agree
F02	3.72	1.03	4	Agree
F03	3.61	1.03	4	Agree
F04	3.43	1.05	4	Agree
F05	3.44	1.08	4	Agree
F06	3.49	1.08	4	Agree
F07	3.57	1.03	4	Agree
F08	3.37	1.17	4	Agree
C01	4.04	0.96	4	Agree
C02	3.99	0.91	4	Agree
C03	3.99	0.88	4	Agree
C04	3.79	0.99	4	Agree
C05	3.68	1.07	4	Agree
C06	3.79	0.97	4	Agree
C07	3.76	1.03	4	Agree

"Metacognition" (M01-M08) shows that the item responses normally incline towards agreement as the highest. This means that most of the responses in this category show an inclination towards positive responses. All items showed responses in favor of "Agree" and "Completely Agree". Neutral responses are present, but they are only minimal. The weighted mean is at 3.65, which reflects the presence of the neutral responses, and the standard deviation is slightly lower, meaning the answers are more compact in the responses.

In the "Accuracy" category (A01-A07), the dominant response goes to "Agree". All items show responses that go with positive sentiment on the indicators, as many of the answers agree. The weighted mean is 3.65. As for the standard deviation means minimal variations for the responses once more.

For the tenet "Feedbacking" (F01-F08), the respondent data shows that the answers incline towards agreement. All indicators show responses with the dominance of agreement, and even support more with responses in complete agreement, though neutral responses are observable. The weighted mean is at 3.51 while the standard deviation lies between 1.00 to 1.17, the greatest of which is on item F08.

The data for "Collaboration" (C01-C07) all show responses with the dominance of agree and completely agree. This shows a positive sentiment towards the indicators. The weighted mean is 3.86. The standard deviation also shows minimal variation in the responses.

**Table 3: Level of Challenge (LC), Products and Performances (PP), Knowledge and Skills Transfer (KST), and Environment and Tools (ET)**

Item	Mean	SD	Mode	Categorical Interpretation
LC01	3.10	1.06	3	Neither Agree nor Disagree
LC02	3.48	0.95	4	Agree
LC03	3.60	0.99	4	Agree
LC04	3.77	0.88	4	Agree
LC05	3.35	1.05	4	Agree
LC06	3.03	1.11	3	Neither Agree nor Disagree
LC07	3.51	1.03	4	Agree
PP01	3.92	0.84	4	Agree
PP02	3.87	0.86	4	Agree
PP03	3.68	0.94	4	Agree
PP04	3.76	0.93	4	Agree
PP05	3.38	1.09	3	Agree
PP06	3.56	0.99	4	Agree
PP07	3.28	1.07	3	Neither Agree nor Disagree
KST01	3.54	0.89	4	Agree
KST02	3.14	1.14	4	Agree
KST03	3.44	1.06	4	Agree
KST04	3.49	0.99	4	Agree
KST05	3.35	1.03	3	Neither Agree nor Disagree
KST06	3.51	0.95	4	Agree

ET01	3.51	1.08	4	Agree
ET02	3.58	0.98	4	Agree
ET03	3.56	1.00	4	Agree
ET04	3.32	1.11	4	Agree
ET05	3.30	1.11	4	Agree
ET06	3.09	1.22	3	Neither Agree nor Disagree
ET07	3.46	1.06	4	Agree
ET08	3.20	1.21	3	Neither Agree nor Disagree

In the analysis of the "Level of Challenge" field (LC01-LC07), respondents showed agreement with most of the items (LC02, LC03, LC04, LC05, and LC07). However, there were also neutral responses as seen in LC01 and LC06. A weighted mean of 3.41 indicates that, for this field, many of the respondents agree with the indicators given. However, two items may require attention as to why the neutrality rose above. Standard Deviation values indicate minimal variance between the responses of the students.

The data within the "Products and Performances" field (PP01-PP07) shows a distribution of the responses that leans between agree and neutrality. Leading responses on Agree were found on indicators PP01, PP02, PP03, PP04, and PP06. On PP05 and PP07, however, while still leading to agree responses, it has been found that there are greater neutral responses on these indicators. Even so, the weighted mean is at 3.64, while the standard deviation only shows minimal variety in terms of the responses.

Results for the "Knowledge and Skill Transfer" (KST01-KST06) show that all items incline with the same pattern. KST01, KST02, KST03, KST04, and KST06 all show patterns with "agree" as the leading response, followed closely by neutral responses. As for KST05, the data differ as both agree, and neutral responses end with the same frequency. Judging by the mean, however, it can be categorically interpreted as neutral. The weighted mean result is at 3.41 since most answers incline with agree, though the notable neutral responses need to be accounted for, especially with indicators having equal or close frequency with agree responses. The standard deviation, once again, shows minimal variation with the responses.

Finally, as for the "Environment and Tools" (ET01-ET08) category, responses fall under the "Agree" selection, followed by "Completely Agree," suggesting a good positivity inclination but still showing a notable amount of neutral responses. Most items (ET01, ET02, ET03, ET04, ET05, ET07) show similar response patterns. ET08 shows a substantial neutral response, and ET06 leads with neutral responses. The weighted mean is at 3.38, which shows that the indicators, especially the one leading with neutral responses, need attention. The standard deviation of indicators ET06 and ET08 at 1.22 and 1.21, respectively, is far more deviated than the other items.

The findings of this research show that the responses are not evenly divided among the categories. For each category, the distribution of responses varies slightly across the various levels of agreement. It is noticeable that for most indicators, a more even distribution of responses can be observed throughout the students' agreement.

Some data from a few indicators may imply that the students are ambivalent as to whether there are clear importance or concise effects on the current general studies that they are being taught. This is noticeable since there is a prominent appearance of the "Neither Agree nor Disagree" response as a substantial answer in a few fields (LC01, LC06, PP05, PP07, KST05, ET06, and ET08). Although this is the case, it does not imply that there is an authenticity issue with courses within the General Education curriculum since the majority still showed "Agree". This only leads to having further developments about what these indicators refer to, so as to properly align the GenEd curriculum towards a more authentic learning experience.

It is to be noted that the self-made survey instruments the researchers have utilized for this study obtained a 0.97 Cronbach Alpha value. This indicates high internal reliability, but it also means that the instrument has its flaws. A factor analysis was also done to the instrument which resulted in certain items being considered for removal. This only means that even though the results of this study can be taken into consideration, it still needs to be taken with caution. Things related to this will be further discussed in the Conclusions/Recommendations section of this paper.

## DISCUSSION

### What needs to be continued

The collected data showed that the majority of the participants agree to a certain extent that the General Education courses offered at Colegio de San Juan de Letran are authentic in nature. This is particularly evident in the fields of Metacognition, Accuracy, Feedback, and Collaboration

A classroom setup that encourages metacognition promotes deeper thinking (Rivas et al., 2022; Üzümcü, 2023). This also allows the class to reflect and not just evaluate what they have learned from the course. With this, those who complete general education courses are able to think about the decisions they are making in their daily lives. Even though what they have learned in the GE courses was technical, it still somehow moved beyond the superficial to something that is a form of higher-order thinking that links it to their day-to-day lives.

Self-assessment is under metacognition and is important in the aspect of personal development (León et al., 2021; Radović et al., 2023). If the courses they are taking promote these kinds of activities, it will also help them to grow and develop as individuals (Negi & Dwivedi, 2024; Perry et al., 2018; Vechiu & Popa, 2021).

Accuracy in the field of education leads to students having more satisfaction upon doing and completing tasks (Sokhanvar et al., 2021). This means that they can see the reasoning why they are doing a particular task and how it is going to affect their current or future lives. Promotion of this tenet in classrooms is one key factor in developing an authentic learning environment. Students need to understand how important the things they are learning and the tasks they are doing are to their studies, their professional development, and their lives in general (Vo & Ho, 2024). Hitting even just one of these three can already lead to much more enthusiasm during classes.

Like metacognition, feedback is another important field which promotes self-growth. Going beyond the GenEd curriculum, this principle is important. This study both dealt with both feedback towards the students and feedback from the students. Both of which are vital to the process of involvement and personal development from the students' perspectives.

Teachers should give feedback to students in a way that indicates whatever flaws their output or performance has while also giving a sense of encouragement and appreciation (Brooks et al., 2024; Pan & Gan, 2019). This act can promote the development of the skills of the students, leading to their appreciation of the subject and its premises (Shen et al., 2021). It is also vital for students to be heard for their suggestions and comments about the curriculum and the teachers handling the courses (Carless, 2019; Röhl et al., 2025). A balance of these two feedbacking types provides a dynamic nature for the process of learning to occur.

Fostering a sense of collaboration between students is one of the 21st century skills they are required to learn (Antao & Morales, 2025). Understanding that the GE courses are inclined to promote this kind of behavior is a step in the right direction. Communication between students can help in developing interpersonal relationships and even personal growth if done properly (Gratton, 2019; Sølberg & Rismark, 2023). This also encourages healthy environmental working conditions in their future workplaces as they tend to learn how to communicate with respect and open-mindedness. This skill also provides a way for students to have linkages and connections beyond the classroom - a skill which can be proven effective once they go out into their respective professional fields in the future.

### What needs to be improved

Even though in the previously mentioned principles, the GE curriculum has stood out and inclined towards the positive side, in the fields of Level of Challenge, Products and Performances, Knowledge and Skills Transfer, and Environment and Tools, a few points stood out as the respondents became collectively neutral with their responses.

The results indicate that the difficulty of GE courses is split between hard and easy. It is to be noted that this field not only deals with the difficulty of the subjects but also the overall effort and skills needed to accomplish them. Students need to have a certain level of difficulty in their subjects (Zhao et al., 2025). Students who find subjects to be too easy will become disinterested and lax about them. It may even promote absences and lateness. More difficult subjects in terms of required skills, and on the other hand, might discourage students from

learning. A perfect balance between the difficulty could enhance not only interest but also authenticity.

LC01 and LC06 are the indicators that were categorically interpreted as neutral. LC01 refers to the perception of ease in the activities of GE courses, while LC02 refers to whether the difficulty of GE activities reflects the difficulties of their future job tasks. This stance might imply that even though the activities may not be too simple or difficult, there is a misalignment in the current curriculum and the professional tasks the students may have in the future. This is an unfavorable situation as a reflection of the professional workers' tasks that should be present in the curriculum, as it promotes authentic learning.

For 21st-century learning, product-based activities are of high value as they promote higher-order thinking under the bracket of creating. This is why it is necessary to have various outputs for any subject or course (Rosal, 2024). What is more important is that these products and performances are related to the path that the students are taking to initiate kinship and enhance learning. Students should be able to use various skills in accomplishing tasks to promote training and mastery.

Based on the results, PP05 and PP07 are the items to which respondents became neutral. These neutral responses, even with slightly higher SDs compared to the others under the same principle, suggest that the way GE courses are being taught does not fully help or discourage the preparation of the students to real-world scenarios (PP05) and the relatedness of the output or performance to the future lives or careers of the students (PP07).

Preparation for real-world scenarios is of high importance during classroom interactions. Educators must be able to find ways to connect the things students do in class to the things the workers in their field are doing. In doing so, a more authentic way of learning is achieved (May & Faldas, 2024; Rollorata et al., 2025; Saong et al., 2023).

Students experience a lot of tasks in various subjects. This is why the interconnectedness of various subjects can not only promote better, authentic learning, but it can also reduce fatigue and encourage effort in the production of quality output. It should be highlighted that the knowledge and skills that students acquire in one course can be transferable or is related to skills and knowledge required or used in another course (Era & Samoraga, 2025; Mahmud & Wong, 2022). In promoting so, students themselves find that what they are learning is something of value. It also helps when the skills and knowledge they gain are part of what they can use for their future jobs as it feels like it was not a waste of time and effort.

The neutral interpretation of KST05 suggests the importance of ensuring that the skills and knowledge being trained in the General Education courses should steer towards training the students for their future work environment. This is in line with the recent information about the Philippine higher education system should emphasize the need for students to have authentic learning, which gives way for academic knowledge and skills to be on par with real-world professional demands.

The GE curriculum should be developed in a way that considers more authentic tasks and problem-solving scenarios to better enhance the readiness of students for their respective workplaces in the future. This approach also improves student engagement and creates the development of vital skills to increase employability (Jenkins & Crawford, 2021).

The classroom environment plays an important role in promoting learning (Pajarillo-Aquino, 2019). Ensuring that teachers are up to date with the latest educational technologies and that the students have a conducive learning environment can promote better learning in general (Roxas, 2023). Classrooms would also benefit from being a laboratory or simulation of the workplace environment and facilities (Miranda et al., 2021; Pickering et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2024). In doing such, students can learn how to navigate their future workspaces within the classroom walls.

Indicators ET06 (The rooms where GE courses are held simulate the environment of the students' future workplaces) and ET08 (GE courses allow students to get familiar with various aspects of their actual future workplaces through on-site visits and field studies) were both interpreted as neutral. This could mean that there is a gap in the GenEd curriculum that concerns the integration of authentic workplace situations and experiential learning. Although an On-Job Training course is present in any collegiate curriculum, it is not observed in General

Education courses, leading to the gap. However, this only means that there should be better ways that GE courses could simulate an OJT scenario to improve experiential learning activities (Acut, 2024; Comia et al., 2024).

The weighted mean of tenets' Level of Challenge, Knowledge and Skill Transfer, and Environment and Tools, should be emphasized as they fall short of indicating "Agree". This means that even though there is minimal deviation in the data, there is an almost equal distribution between the responses of "Neither Agree nor Disagree", "Agree", and "Completely Agree". Considering this information, emphasis should also be given for improvement.

Overall, this analysis indicates that the students are somehow failing to see how difficult tasks that they do, along with the limited future work-training environment and tools in the General Education curriculum, hone the knowledge and skills they need for their future careers. This leads to various issues that affect the learning process. The researchers have developed a proposal (see Appendix A) to help address the neutrality shown in some of the specific indicators. The said proposal is also aimed at further improving the authenticity of General Education courses across the various fields that make learning authentic.

## CONCLUSION

### General Education Curriculum and Authentic Learning

The findings indicate that General Education courses in Colegio de San Juan de Letran provide authentic learning. Specifically, based on the principles of authentic learning by Ashford-Rowe et al. (2013), the metacognition, accuracy, feedback, and collaboration are what can be considered as excellent. Highlighting metacognition enhances students' deeper understanding through reflection and self-assessment. This provides personal growth and the application of learned knowledge and skills to their daily lives.

Similarly, providing accuracy in GenEd courses better student satisfaction by clarifying the relevance of the tasks they do in a course to their academic, professional, and personal lives. The availability of the two-way means of feedback in General Education subjects can foster skill development, appreciation of subject matter, and the creation of a dynamic learning environment.

Lastly, the tilt of GE courses toward collaboration among students and other parties aligns with 21st-century skills, creating a training ground for having interpersonal relationships, open-minded communication, and the development of valuable future professional linkages.

Even with its strengths, this paper has pointed out areas to which authentic learning within GenEd courses can be further enhanced. In particular, the Level of Challenge, Product and Performances, Knowledge and Skill Transfer, and Environment and Tools principles are what need some attention as some indicators within these have neutral responses.

With regards to the level of challenge, a probable misalignment between the difficulty of GE activities and the demands of future professional tasks, impacting student interest and engagement, should be given attention. In a similar tone concerning the relevance of products and performances to real-world scenarios indicate the necessity to enhance future career preparation is indicated by effectively connecting classroom activities to professional contexts.

The neutrality of respondents toward the knowledge and skill transfer tenet highlights the need to train students of GenEd courses for their future work environments. This aligns their academic learnings with the demands of their future profession and thus improves their employability.

As for the environment and tools principle, it was suggested that the presence of on-the-job training in college curricula should be replicated, even in small-scale, within the General Education courses, to incorporate experiential learning activities to create a much more immersive learning experience.

### Recommendations

The results of this study have shown that students taking General Education subjects neither agree nor disagree that the curriculum is capable of being useful as a ground to develop knowledge, skills, and experiences which will help them in their future work. This is an important aspect that requires attention, as the collegiate learning setup should be able to prepare the students for their future

lives and careers. This is why the researchers have created a proposal that could be of use to help educators within the General Education cluster enhance their teaching methods to align more with the principles of authentic learning.

It is to be noted that the survey instrument utilized for this study may have too high a reliability value, leading to its major recommendation. Future researchers could further conduct studies focusing on the reliability of the survey instrument used in this paper. Initial factor analysis conducted with the survey instrument revealed that there are items that are meant to be removed from the study. Because of this, the results of this study may only serve as an overview of the status of the General Education curriculum and its alignment with authentic learning. Once further studies have been done regarding the instruments, the curriculum can once again be retested and reassessed with the help of more reliable participants to improve it.

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# INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO REDUCE BULLYING BEHAVIOR AMONG BASIC EDUCATION LEARNERS AT COLEGIO DE SAN JUAN DE LETRAN

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## ABSTRACT

This research investigates intervention strategies for reducing bullying behavior among basic education learners at Colegio de San Juan de Letran Manila, Bataan, and Manaoag campuses. Based on B.F. Skinner's behaviorist theory, the research employed a mixed-methods action research design involving quantitative surveys, qualitative focus group discussions, and interviews. Results showed that verbal bullying was the most common form and that teachers and administrators most often employed student counseling and support and prompt response protocol as intervention strategies. While these were deemed adequate, there were various issues, such as inconsistent implementation, underreporting of cyberbullying, and lack of systematic monitoring observed. The research concluded that an integrated, values-based, and behaviorist-informed framework supported by consistent protocols, stakeholder collaboration, and enhanced teacher training is needed to improve safer and more inclusive school cultures. These findings help enhance policy and develop scalable anti-bullying programs in basic education contexts.

**Keywords:** bullying behavior, intervention strategies, behaviorist theory, basic education, student well-being

## INTRODUCTION

Bullying occurs in most schools globally and has serious implications on students' psychological, emotional, and academic well-being. Bullying is also a significant issue in the Philippines. According to PISA statistics, there is a high percentage of Filipino students who are bullied at school, with around 43% of girls and 53% of boys being bullied regularly (PISA, 2022). This situation underlines the need for schools to utilize effective intervention strategies to insulate the negative impact of bullying and build a safer school community.

Given the national context, Letran's proactive stance on bullying presents a unique opportunity to evaluate and enhance current strategies. To address the urgency of this pressing concern, Colegio de San Juan de Letran, one of the Philippines' top learning institutions, is at the forefront of fighting bullying through policymaking and research. Even with its anti-bullying laws such as the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, the issue persists, which proves that current interventions do not work due to possible factors such as inconsistent implementation, insufficient teacher training, and cultural attitudes that minimize the seriousness of bullying. In this study, current intervention approaches on Letran campuses will be analyzed and an integrated anti-bullying policy model that can be used in all campuses will be proposed. Through identifying the key drivers of bullying behavior and examining the effectiveness of current interventions, this study will enhance basic education as safer and more inclusive.

Bullying affects students' emotional and psychological well-being, scholarship, and social life. Schools play a central role in preventing and alleviating bullying through adequately designed intervention programs. Nonetheless, even with all these, bullying is still widespread in most schools, including Letran schools, which means there are loopholes in present intervention measures. This study explores the types and trends of student bullying behaviors in K-12 levels of Colegio de San Juan de Letran, their motivations, whether interventions implemented by teachers and school administrators have been effective in curbing such, and how these students view the said interventions. Specifically, the objectives are to: (1) identify the causes of bullying behaviors in school environments, (2) evaluate the effectiveness of current teacher-led interventions, (3) analyze student's perceptions of these interventions, and (4) propose enhancements using behaviorist theory and best practices. This research aims to formulate interventions to prevent bullying among the student population in the elementary and junior high school grades of the Colegio de San Juan de Letran.

Specifically, the objectives are to identify what is the cause of bullying behaviors in school environments, assess existing interventions by teachers as effective or

otherwise, understand how students perceive such interventions, and provide recommendations on how anti-bullying programs can be enhanced by integrating behaviorist theory and proven intervention practices employed by other schools. This research aims to provide tangible data on the nature of bullying in the Letran campuses.

The research will contribute to anti-bullying intervention research in the framework of Philippine education. Regarding its ability to identify gaps within existing approaches and present a novel framework for an anti-bullying policy, the study is to enhance the quality of life of Letran students and create a template that other schools around the country will use. The findings of this study would be especially helpful to school administrators, teachers, and policy makers who are responsible for guiding the students to a sound and safe learning environment where they can acquire knowledge.

The subjects are teachers who directly experience dealing with bullying cases or running anti-bullying programs because they can share useful information on current procedures and issues. Members with minimal or no interaction under such circumstances will be left out to ensure the study is generalizable.

Administrators who take part in formulating and implementing anti-bullying policy will also be included, selected using stratified purposive sampling to ensure good representation and eliminate possible biases. Methods used will include anonymous feedback and interaction with administrators in off-campus locations to provide comparative feedback. Quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews will be employed to gather data to accumulate different experiences and perceptions. The research is restricted in the Colegio de San Juan de Letran campus environment and might not be representative of common school settings. Results, nonetheless, attempt to make important contributions to school management, precisely in crafting effective anti-bullying interventions.

Ethical measures, including informed consent, psychological support to the participants, and safe data handling, will guarantee the integrity and safety of the research process.

In conclusion, this study aims to develop an integrated anti-bullying policy model for Colegio de San Juan de Letran by analyzing current interventions and identifying key behavioral drivers for bullying.

## Theoretical Background

## Theoretical Framework

This study is based on B.F. Skinner's behaviorist theory, which posits that environmental stimuli influence behavior and can be shaped through reinforcement (Lejeune, Richelle, & Weardon, 2005). According to Skinner, behavior is not solely the result of internal motivations; it is also a product of the external environment and the consequences that follow actions.

In the context of school bullying, the Behaviorist Theory suggests that negative behaviors, such as bullying, can be discouraged by implementing consequences or deterrents. Conversely, positive social behaviors can be encouraged through reinforcement and rewards. Within the school environment, this theory supports the notion that interventions can be designed to change student behavior by altering the stimuli and consequences that shape those behaviors.

Skinner's theory further distinguishes between positive reinforcement (adding a rewarding stimulus to increase behavior), negative reinforcement (removing an aversive stimulus to increase behavior), and punishment (applying consequences to reduce behavior). These mechanisms are essential in designing school-based interventions that either discourage bullying or promote prosocial behavior. To illustrate this, the conceptual diagram below demonstrates the process by which behavior is shaped:

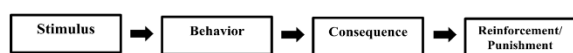


Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram based on Skinner's Behaviorist Theory

In addition, while Lejeune et al. (2005) provides a strong foundation, more recent and local studies applying behaviorist principles in Philippine schools could enhance the relevance of this framework (eg., Philippine studies on classroom management, reinforcement strategies, or anti-bullying programs).

Finally, in this study, Skinner's theory will be operationalized by guiding the design of survey questions, informing the interpretation of student behaviors, and shaping the development of the proposed integrated anti-bullying policy model. This ensures that theoretical principles are concretely linked to practical interventions.

## Literature Review

### School Bullying: A Global Perspective

Bullying, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is unwanted aggressive behavior with a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or emotional and can target students of any age. Bullying, as Rigby (2017) states, is a systemic problem that tends to flourish in settings where social hierarchies and peer influence are strong. Studies that have been done in Western nations show that bullying affects academic achievement and interpersonal relationships negatively and results in long-term outcomes for the future of students (Allison, 2016).

Statistics from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2022 indicate the international prevalence of bullying. Around 33% of students globally report having been bullied at some point, with figures in the Philippines being significantly higher—more than half of the student population reports frequent bullying. This indicates a gap between policy interventions to counter bullying and their application in schools (PISA, 2022). Synthesizing these findings suggests that while the global problem is well documented, the Philippine context presents an even greater challenge, where cultural, systemic, and resource-related factors intensify the mismatch between policy and practice.

### Bullying in the Philippine Context

The Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 (Republic Act 10627) requires schools to institute policies that prohibit bullying and respond to it. Nonetheless, based on recent research, bullying is still prevalent among public and private schools. A survey was made by Gatchalian (2024) and published that the lack of standardized procedures for interventions and poor teacher training significantly contributes to the failure of anti-bullying programs. Similarly, Menesiri (2017) observes that, despite the law being in place, its enforcement is not uniform, with most cases of verbal and emotional bullying being disregarded by school authorities. There

are few resources and no trained staff to deal with cases of bullying in most schools, particularly in rural areas, which further exacerbates the problem.

Students in urban centers like Metro Manila report more frequent incidents of bullying, both verbal and cyberbullying, than rural students. Cyberbullying has emerged as a pressing issue due to widespread digital access, with victims often facing harassment that extends beyond the physical school setting. Recent Philippine studies (e.g., Santos, 2023; Dela Cruz & Ramirez, 2024) highlight that schools are still struggling to implement cyber-safety education, leaving students vulnerable. Rapee et al. (2020) argue that cultural factors, such as school hierarchical structuring and conservatively oriented approaches to discipline, play an important role in teachers' reactions to bullying. Policy-practice mismatch underscores the need for stronger, context-specific interventions. This body of literature consistently suggests that while RA 10627 provides a strong legal framework, gaps in enforcement, monitoring, and cyberbullying prevention remain critical areas requiring attention.

### Causes of Bullying Behavior

It is important to understand the underlying causes of bullying to create effective intervention programs. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, aggressive acts like bullying are acquired through observing and imitating others, particularly in a setting where the behaviors are rewarded or ignored (Bandura, 1977). This is relevant in the Philippine setting because Rigby (2017) explains that Filipino students tend to bully others based on peer pressure, social ranking, or violence experienced at home. Linking this to intervention design, Bandura's framework suggests that modeling prosocial behaviors by teachers and peers, alongside consistent discouragement of bullying, is vital for effective program development.

In addition, Allison (2016) found through his study that students who are exposed to violent or harsh discipline from their environments have a high probability of resorting to bullying actions. Likewise, Rapee et al. (2020) reported some of the contributing factors to bullying as low self-esteem, poor parental involvement, and lousy influence from peers. In the Philippines, cultural norms that allow for physical aggression as a way of showing dominance or for popularity tend to spur bullying. From a behaviorist perspective, specific reinforcement strategies such as rewarding acts of kindness, public recognition of prosocial peers, and restorative practices are practical methods that schools can adopt to shift student behavior. This integration of Social Learning Theory and Behaviorism highlights both the observational and reinforcement dimensions of bullying prevention.

### Intervention Strategies for Bullying

Most schools globally have in place several strategies aimed at preventing bullying, such as school-wide anti-bullying initiatives, peer mediation, and counseling programs. Nevertheless, evidence shows that the success of such interventions relies on their effective implementation and the commitment of the school toward creating a positive school climate. For instance, Finland's KiVa program has demonstrated sustained reductions in bullying by combining curriculum-based lessons with teacher training and parent engagement (Karna et al., 2011). Similarly, whole-school approaches in the United Kingdom, where student councils and restorative practices are integrated, have been successful in reducing bullying prevalence. These international models provide useful insights that Philippine schools may adapt in ways that fit their cultural and institutional contexts.

Lawlor and Courtney (2008) highlight the importance of teacher intervention against bullying incidents. They posit that properly trained teachers can also curb bullying quite substantially by detecting early warning signs of aggression and responding effectively. In the Philippines, the Department of Education has initiated various training programs to equip teachers with skills to manage bullying. Nevertheless, Gonong (2024) observes that most educators remain lacking in the knowledge and support required to deal with more insidious manifestations of bullying like verbal and psychological abuse. This contrast between international best practices and the Philippine context underscores the urgent need for localized, well-supported, and consistently implemented intervention models.

### The Behaviorist Approach to Reducing Bullying

B.F. Skinner's Behaviorist Theory offers a model of behavior understanding and modification using reinforcement. According to Skinner's theory, behavior is

conditioned by its consequence. This means that positive behaviors can be enhanced by reward, while negative behavior can be reduced by punishment or negative reinforcement (Lejeune, Richelle, & Weardon, 2005). This approach has been applied across various school settings to counteract bullying by instituting reward schemes for good peer conduct and punishments for violent conduct.

In behavior modification studies, Rapee et al. (2020) discovered that schools applying behaviorist principles to their anti-bullying programs saw a dramatic decrease in the frequency of bullying over the long term. Positive reinforcement of tactics such as praising students for showing empathy and cooperation proved to be very effective in encouraging a positive school environment. This is consistent with the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, where positive discipline and respect for students are encouraged to be promoted. Specifically, RA 10627 emphasizes the use of non-violent, constructive disciplinary measures that align with behaviorist strategies such as reinforcement and consistent consequences. By discouraging punitive corporal punishment and instead encouraging schools to apply reward-based systems and corrective feedback, the law operationalizes Skinner's principles within a rights-based framework. This connection illustrates how behaviorist theory not only supports compliance with the Act but also provides a practical foundation for designing positive discipline interventions that sustain long-term behavioral change.

### The Role of Teachers and School Administrators

Teachers and school officials are key to the success of any anti-bullying intervention. Menesiri (2017) highlights the significance of teacher awareness and intervention in stopping bullying. Teachers are usually in the first line of defense against bullying, but they might not have the training or confidence they need to respond successfully to it, says Allison (2016).

A research study by Lawlor and Courtney (2008) indicates that teachers who are actively involved in engaging with students and fostering positive relationships are more effective in preventing and intervening in bullying behavior. Teachers who are passive or indifferent are more likely to create a climate conducive to bullying. Gatchalian (2024) adds that school administration must regularly support teachers' intervention strategies to ensure effectiveness.

At Colegio de San Juan de Letran, this study points towards the imperative of crafting a detailed anti-bullying policy that equips teachers and administrators with the required means to combat bullying effectively. By promoting synergy between all concerned, the school can develop an integrated strategy to mitigate bullying occurrences. Beyond immediate classroom management, administrators carry crucial responsibilities in enforcing anti-bullying policies consistently, allocating resources such as training budgets and counseling services, and ensuring continuous staff development. These functions directly determine whether interventions remain sustainable and effective, as policy alone is insufficient without institutional commitment and structural support. Thus, the role of teachers and administrators extends from day-to-day intervention to long-term capacity building and organizational accountability.

### Conceptual Framework

This research is grounded in B.F. Skinner's Behaviorist Theory holds that environmental factors influence behavior and are changeable through reinforcement. Under school bullying, this theory also holds that students' positive and negative behaviors are susceptible to influence by intervention strategies of teachers, principals, and the overall school milieu. Independent variables are teacher-initiated interventions like verbal reprimands, counseling, contacting parents, mediation, and school-wide initiatives like anti-bullying policies and programs. The research also examines students' knowledge of these interventions and their perceptions of effectiveness. The dependent variables pertain to the observed and reported outcomes of bullying behavior, such as how often and what form of bullying they experienced, how comfortable they feel reporting, and their perceptions of how effective the interventions are.

Furthermore, the research also considers several mediating or moderating variables, such as the respondent role (teacher or administrator), campus site (Manila, Bataan, or Manaoag), gender, and grade level of the students, which affect how interventions are viewed and their efficacy. Using a mixed-methods design integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative information gathered through focus group discussions and direct observation, the study seeks to fully

grasp the behavioral patterns that go with bullying and the practical effects of intervention strategies. Examining these variables through a behaviorist framework aims to posit a better anti-bullying model that promotes healthy student behavior and discourages hurtful behavior, leading to a safer and more welcoming school climate. To further clarify these relationships, a conceptual framework diagram is included (see Figure 2).

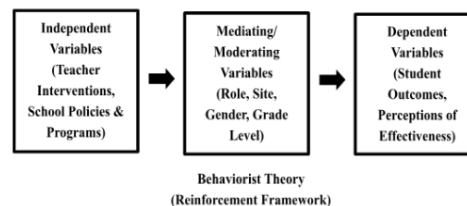


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

This diagram visually illustrates the interaction among independent variables (teacher-initiated interventions, school policies, and programs), mediating/moderating variables (role, site, gender, grade level), and the dependent variables (student-reported outcomes of bullying and perceptions of intervention effectiveness). Such a visualization enhances understanding by showing how interventions flow through mediators to influence bullying outcomes.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study uses the mixed-methods action research model to examine and address bullying tendencies among K-12 students within Colegio de San Juan de Letran. Through the intermixing of qualitative and quantitative methods, the model allows a detailed exploration of bullying prevalence rates, underlying reasons, and viable intervention measures. The goal is to present workable suggestions aimed at strengthening anti-bullying policies and operations.

Quantitative data will be collected via structured questionnaires to determine the prevalence and pattern of bullying and the perceived effectiveness of current anti-bullying interventions among teachers and administrators. Qualitative data will be collected by implementing semi-structured interviews, FGDs, and observations to trigger personal experiences and contextual factors underpinning bullying and anti-bullying interventions.

A mixed-methods design facilitates data triangulation, which provides statistical data and a deeper understanding of bullying activities and the effectiveness of intervention programs. This approach is essential because it enables the integration of statistical trends with contextual insights, offering a comprehensive understanding of bullying dynamics and intervention effectiveness. The quantitative data reveals measurable patterns, while the qualitative findings capture the lived experiences of stakeholders, thereby ensuring that proposed policy recommendations are both evidence-based and contextually grounded.

### Subjects

The study will consist of K-12 teachers, and administrators from three campuses, namely, those who have had experiences with issues about bullying. Teachers who have encountered bullying situations or are busy carrying out the anti-bullying policies in the school will qualify for selection. On the other hand, those teachers who are not involved directly in or connected with the bullying case will be exempt from the research study. Such a consideration means that the insights sought from educators who have understood the essentials of bullying circumstances in their school stand to serve an important value in the study.

Finally, the study will involve administrators who are directly involved in creating, monitoring, or implementing anti-bullying policies, such as guidance counselors, discipline officers, and school heads. Administrators whose roles are not related to bullying interventions will be exempt.

Recruiting participants will employ stratified purposive sampling to guarantee equal representation from every campus and minimize bias. The research will recruit 20 teachers, and 10 administrators.

### Study Site

The study will be conducted on four campuses of Colegio de San Juan de Letran: Manila, Maaag, and Bataan. Having multiple campuses enables a varied analysis of bullying behavior and intervention approaches, considering the unique demographics and socio-cultural contexts of each campus.

### Quantitative Data Collection

Structured questionnaires will be used to quantify several key factors in bullying. They include frequency and type of bullying behavior, i.e., physical, verbal, social, and cyberbullying, and perceptions about effectiveness of current anti-bullying programs. Surveys will also quantify frequency and intensity of bullying. To quantify the data, the survey will be composed of multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions.

### Qualitative Data Collection

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will be 5-8 members each who will contribute their experiences about bullying and what interventions and obstacles they face. FGD with teachers and administrators will be conducted separately to glean different perspectives. Semi-structured interviews will provide more in-depth information from purposive participants as well, giving importance to each of their respective experiences and how current policies bear implications. Direct classroom, corridor, and daily area observation will also be undertaken to record live incidents of bullying and reaction by the teachers. Observations will be triangulated with the interview and survey data to obtain context-specific information.

All FGDs and interviews will be conducted in quiet and soundproof rooms to ensure confidentiality. Audio recording will only be undertaken after the participants' consent has been obtained and will be maintained confidentially.

### Ethical Considerations

To address the sensitive issue of bullying, several ethical practices will be utilized. Informed consent will be obtained from adult participants. To preserve confidentiality and anonymity, the identity of the participants will be anonymized through alphanumeric codes, and information will be safely stored on password-protected encrypted devices as well as locked filing cabinets. In addition, participant welfare will be safeguarded by psychological support given to participants who may experience distress from the study. Study participants should be informed that they can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

### Quantitative Data Analysis

Data from surveys will be measured by descriptive statistics in terms of reporting prevalence and severity of bullying, and views on interventions. Inferential analyses such as correlation and regression will determine relationships between variables such as frequency of bullying and academic performance.

### Qualitative Data Analysis

Interview and focus group discussion transcripts will be analyzed thematically to look for patterns and emerging themes. Triangulation with observational information will provide a broader context and dynamics of bullying.

## RESULTS

This section displays the numerical results of the study, discussing the incidence of bullying reports, the most prevalent types of bullying encountered, intervention measures used by school personnel, and their effectiveness. The data came from a structured survey of teachers, school administrators, guidance counselors, and prefect of discipline of the Basic Education Department of Colegio de San Juan de Letran campuses of Manila, Bataan, and Maaag.

Two statistical measures were used in the analysis of the data. Frequency and percentage distribution were utilized to define categorical variables, such as observations of bullying, bullying types, and intervention strategies. On the other hand, mean and standard deviation were used to analyze Likert-scale responses, which were on the perceived effectiveness of intervention strategies.

The quantitative data derived from this analysis are used to supplement the thematic findings reported in the qualitative phase, giving a better picture of how bullying is identified and managed within the institution. The findings from

the evidence are used to inform practice and future policy recommendations to enhance anti-bullying measures within school communities.

**Table 1. Observation of Bullying Incidents**

Response	F	Percentage
Yes	8	40.00%
No	12	60.00%

**Note:** This table presents the responses to whether participants have observed bullying incidents in their class or within the school premises.

The statistics show that 40% of the school staff, including teachers, administrators, the prefect of discipline, and guidance counselors, reported that they have witnessed bullying incidents either in the classroom or in the school campus. On the other hand, 60% of the participants reported that they have not witnessed such incidents. Even if most of the participants have not witnessed bullying, the fact that almost half of the staff witnessed bullying tells us that the problem is still there and is not yet eradicated in the school setting. This observation is a source of serious concern regarding the visibility and incidence of bullying, and the implication is that bullying incidents might be happening in less visible areas, such as secluded places, during periods of minimal supervision, or even on online platforms. The necessity of constant monitoring on all campuses, supplemented by proper communication and staff training on identifying various forms of bullying, is critical to address this issue comprehensively. Enhancing the support structures and ensuring immediate intervention in such bullying incidents is essential in making the school setting safer for everyone, particularly for schools with multiple campuses like Colegio de San Juan de Letran in Manila, Bataan, and Maaag.

**Table 2. Most Frequently Observed Type of Bullying**

Type of Bullying	F	Percentage
Physical	2	14.29%
Verbal	12	85.71%
Social	0	0.00%
Cyberbullying	0	0.00%

**Note:** This table outlines the types of bullying that were most frequently observed by the respondents. Verbal bullying was the most noted.

The results of the survey confirm that the most prevalent type of bullying among students is verbal bullying, cited by 85.71% of the school staff including the teachers, administrators, head of discipline, and guidance counselors of the K-12 Basic Education Department. Physical bullying was cited by fewer respondents (14.29%), and there were no instances of social exclusion or cyberbullying.

As the school staff are most likely to encounter the students directly, this finding underscores that the most common problem within the school environment is verbal bullying in the form of name-calling, teasing, or insulting comments. That social exclusion and cyberbullying are not being reported may reflect either lower prevalence or underreporting, especially in more hidden or private cases (e.g., online posts). It is important to note that although verbal bullying is serious, constant surveillance and training for school staff must be done to be able to act appropriately on all cases of bullying, including those not immediately visible.

**Table 3. Intervention Strategies Employed by Teachers**

Intervention Strategy	F of use
Prompt Response Protocol	13
Student Counseling and Support	16
Administrative Incident Reporting	6
Parental Involvement and Communication	4

**Note:** Respondents were allowed to select multiple responses to indicate how they typically intervene when witnessing bullying. Table 3 presents the total number of times each strategy was selected.

The data reveals the most common intervention tactics used by school personnel when they witness bullying behavior. The most common response was counseling the students involved, chosen 16 times, or 41.03% of all responses. Immediate intervention of the incident was also common, being chosen 13 times (33.33%). Informing school authorities about the incident was chosen six times (15.38%), and the least common strategy was contacting parents, with four choices (10.26%).

The results point towards the fact that, across the Basic Education Department (K-12) of Colegio de San Juan de Letran (Manila, Bataan, and Maaag), school personnel primarily prefer direct action in dealing with bullying first, through the counseling of students involved and immediate intervention before they opt for formal reporting or involving parents. The lower frequency of contacting parents may reflect a desire to resolve issues internally or to follow established school-

based protocols that prioritize on-site intervention and support. Continuous training on when and how to escalate cases could help ensure that more serious incidents receive the appropriate level of administrative or parental involvement.

**Table 4. Perceived Effectiveness of Interventions (N=19)**

Rating	F	Percentage
4 - Very Effective	14	73.68%
3 - Somewhat Effective	5	26.32%
2 - Not Effective	0	0.00%
1 - I'm Not Sure	0	0.00%

Note: Respondents rated the effectiveness of their interventions using a 4-point Likert scale (4 = Very Effective, 1 = I'm Not Sure). M = 3.74, SD = 0.45

The results indicate that most respondents rated their interventions as "Very Effective" (73.68%), followed by "Somewhat Effective" (26.32%). No respondents considered the interventions to be "Not Effective" or "I'm Not Sure," which suggests a strong consensus on the perceived effectiveness of the interventions employed.

The mean score of approximately 3.74 (on a 4-point scale) demonstrates that, on average, respondents judged their intervention efforts to be very effective. The standard deviation of 0.45 indicates low variability in responses meaning most respondents gave similar ratings. This low SD supports the conclusion that there is a strong consensus among school personnel across the three campuses regarding the effectiveness of their anti-bullying interventions.

## FINDINGS

### Administrators' Perspectives

This section introduces the findings that were obtained from semi-structured interviews with the key administrators, i.e., the Principal and the Prefect of Discipline, of Colegio de San Juan de Letran's Manila, Bataan, and Maaang campuses. Adhering to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis model, verbatim transcripts were systematically coded and synthesized into four broad themes. These themes capture the way administrators monitor and evaluate bullying cases, their intervention strategies, the resources and policy recommendations they recommend, and the challenges they face in ensuring a safe and inclusive learning environment. Each theme is preceded by exemplar quotations (participant codes P2, P3, P4, P7, and P13) and followed by an in-depth explanation that links the data to the study's goal of reducing bullying behavior among basic education learners.

### Multi-Layered Monitoring and Case Validation Process

"Before the case reaches my office, they first assess the situation... Most are dropped as allegedly named as bullying." (P4)

"We always check that there are narratives from both parties because we cannot proceed with a case without narratives from both sides." (P3)

Administrators follow a structured referral and validation system before a case is officially labeled as bullying. Teachers and advisers are the first to assess and collect narratives and decide on severity. This multi-tiered system promotes thoroughness and avoids mislabeling minor conflicts as bullying. But this same system can result in underreporting less subtle forms of bullying, like relational or emotional aggression, if the teachers making the assessment are not specially trained. The process is highly dependent on adviser discretion, and there is a need for clearer guidelines and more standardized criteria for evaluating reports. From Skinner's perspective, this stepwise monitoring process reflects the principle that consistent application of consequences shapes behavior; if inconsistent or unclear, the reinforcement or punishment loses its effectiveness in discouraging negative behavior.

### Counseling-Centered Intervention and Values Integration

"We refer both bullies and the bullied to the guidance office... to help the victims for their emotional and psychological need." (P4)

"We reiterate the importance of safe environment and positive relationship through integration of values... particularly in CLE, Values Ed, GMRC..." (P4)

"Student development seminar... not just bullying, about mental health also." (P13)

Intervention strategies are founded mainly on counseling support and values formation. The guidance office plays a pivotal role in responding to the emotional needs of the victims and the perpetrators. Subjects like CLE, GMRC, and Values Education reinforce empathy and respect. Seminars also supplement these lessons. This is a holistic, Catholic-centered approach that is intended for internal transformation and not merely punishment. But effectiveness would rely on teacher facilitation and openness of students. More emphasis on restorative practices and peer-initiated activities could enhance behavioral change. In relation to Skinner's theory, these strategies highlight positive reinforcement, where prosocial behavior such as empathy, respect, and cooperation is rewarded through recognition and values integration, thereby strengthening desirable student behaviors.

### Gaps in Identification and Disciplinary Consistency

"Ang galing nila magsinungaling... skill ata talaga nila." (P4)

"Yung student in denial na siya yung nangb-bully... or yung feeling nab-bully siya, pero hindi naman." (P3)

"Verbal warning... then that's the time na magsisend kami ng conference letter... then suspension." (P13)

Administrators recognize that identifying authentic bullying cases can be complex and contentious, especially when students will deny involvement or manipulate stories. The challenge lies in ascertaining truth based on emotionally laden testimony. Further, while there are official sanctions on the student handbooks like verbal warning, parent meeting, and suspension, they are sometimes inconsistently applied, especially in marginal cases. This indicates the need for further training in trauma-informed practice and more organized monitoring of behavioral patterns to ensure equitable enforcement and early intervention. Skinner's framework suggests that inconsistent application of punishment weakens its ability to reduce undesirable behavior; thus, clear, fair, and consistent disciplinary measures are crucial in shaping long-term behavioral compliance.

### Recommendations for Improved Collaboration and Resources

"Design modules for homeroom guidance classes... one module allotted for intervention and prevention." (P4)

"We're revising our student handbook to add more information about anti-bullying." (P2)

"We call for conference with parents... so the school and home will collaborate on watching them." (P4)

"Nagkaroon kami ng intervention... and then we went to the barangay. Para hindi na po tayo liable." (P13)

Administrators also advocate the application of proactive resources, including anti-bullying homeroom modules, updated student handbooks, and greater parental involvement. These recommendations acknowledge that bullying must be addressed through multi-sectoral collaboration, consistent messaging, and collective responsibility between home and school. Institutionalization of these recommendations through structured programs and continuous monitoring and evaluation can enhance the overall effectiveness of the school's anti-bullying campaign.

The administrators' remarks indicate that Colegio de San Juan de Letran employs a layered and collaborative framework in addressing incidents of bullying. Although monitoring systems exist, problems of student integrity and case validation continue to prevail. Counseling and values education are accorded significant emphasis by the institution and complemented with procedural penalties and home-school collaboration. The requirement for revised policies, modular guidance materials, and intersectoral coordination indicates a shift in institutional commitment toward holistic student protection and welfare.

### Grade-Level Teachers' Perspectives

This section presents the findings from interviews with grade-level teachers regarding their approaches to addressing bullying behavior among students at

Colegio de San Juan de Letran. These teachers represent the Manila, Bataan, and Manaoag campuses. Using thematic analysis, four major themes emerged based on the structure of the interview guide. Each theme is supported by direct quotes in the original language (coded as P1, P2, etc.) and is followed by an in-depth interpretation grounded in the data.

### Immediate, Restorative Classroom Interventions

"Pinag-uusap ko po yung dalawa... pagkatapos, pagbabatiin ko silang dalawa. Pero in case na hindi pa rin okay sa loob ng room, binababa ko na sa prefect of discipline." (P1)

"Immediate action po, calling out the student... hindi po sa harap ng klase. Ipo-pull out po namin sila... nag-sorry po sila sa classmate nila." (P8)

Teachers prefer immediate, low-conflict interventions to address bullying in the classroom, employing conversation and individual reflection instead of public punishment. The procedure is usually to take students out of class, hear both sides, and mediate apologies. This is typical of a restorative approach focused on awareness of action and emotional reconciliation. When these measures fail to restore peace or when the case escalates beyond manageable levels, teachers immediately refer it to the Prefect of Discipline. This theme demonstrates the teacher's two roles as first responder and entry point to higher discipline procedures. It also demonstrates trust in tiered systems of support and sensitivity to the emotional work of daily classroom management.

### Predominantly Verbal and Appearance-Based Bullying

"Verbal bullying... Like yung sa mga color nila, sa height, sa weight." (P1)

"Physical appearance is the most common form... 'Ang pangit mo, ang pandak mo, ang itim mo...'" (P12)

Teachers across all grades consistently identified verbal bullying, with a focus on physical appearance, as the most common form. These include body-shaming, skin-color teasing, and name-calling which are typically minimized by students as jokes but leave deep psychological imprints. These behaviors thrive in cultures where teasing is tolerated, thus the need for proactive empathy, respect, and self-image education. The repeated pattern of appearance-based teasing also suggests that deeper cultural or societal prejudices may be underlying classroom dynamics, further calling for value-driven education at the basic education level.

### Barriers to Consistent Bullying Management

"Pag pinagsasabihan... matatahimik sila... uulitin lang naman." (P1)

"Minsan nagkakampihan yan... 'tropa-tropa'... ayaw umamin." (P11)

"It's just a joke'... kids say that to dismiss it." (P7)

Teachers find it challenging to ensure consistent behavior changes after intervention. Students resume bullying after a temporary hiatus, and peer-group affiliations complicate verification of incidents or holding students accountable. Normalization of bullying as "just a joke" also weakens the effectiveness of classroom-based corrective strategies. These considerations indicate the limitations of isolated teacher efforts and expose the need for more intense behavioral training, peer accountability structures, and formal follow-up processes to counteract repetitive and group-based bullying behavior.

### Strengthening Multi-Level Support and Preventive Structures

"Counseling and seminars regarding bullying... both students and parents." (P1)

"Regular homeroom... reminders of values and the student handbook." (P8)

"Spiritual life... always ikinikintal sa mga bata." (P12)

"Design modules for homeroom guidance classes... constant refresher lessons." (P4)

Teachers advocate an integrated, whole-school approach that reinforces anti-bullying values in policy and practice. It involves recurring homeroom instruction, teen-parent seminars, and even spiritual development as mechanisms for character. There is a strong belief that homeroom-repeated, value-based messages can potentially contribute to a more secure emotional environment among students. The demand for more specific, engaging, and prolonged intervention tools is a reflection that teachers see bullying as a surface symptom of interior emotional, spiritual, and family issues. Intervention, in turn, needs organizational design as well as humanistic outreach.

### Guidance Counselors' Perspectives

This section presents insights from in-depth interviews with guidance counselors from various units of Colegio de San Juan de Letran. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis, four major themes emerged. These illustrate how guidance counselors identify, address, and reflect on bullying cases, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and collaborate with school stakeholders. Themes are supported by participant quotes and followed by interpretation linked to the study's overarching aim: improving school-based responses to bullying behavior among learners.

### Nuanced Understanding of Bullying and Its Manifestations

"So halimbawa, nagkakaroon ng gantihan... pero if you dig deep dun sa report, ay nagbibiruan sila." (P5)

"Umabot sila sa cyberbullying... good thing hindi umabot sa DepEd." (P6)

Guidance counselors emphasize the complex and contextual nature of bullying, particularly the difficulty of differentiating between friendly teasing and hurtful behavior. At the elementary and junior high school levels, reports often stem from minor conflicts misinterpreted as bullying. In senior high school, however, the incidents are more intense in nature ranging from cyberbullying, rejection, and verbal aggression. Counsellors point out that mislabeling or oversimplifying such incidents may cover up the emotional realities for the student, particularly those with underlying conditions such as ADHD. Such findings call for more advanced and age-sensitive frameworks in identifying bullying.

### Psychoeducational Interventions and Holistic Case Handling

"Sa guidance, meron tayong program about personal boundaries... may psychoeducation." (P5)

"It's effective kapag you target the emotional and psychological well-being of the person." (P10)

Counselors view their role not merely as disciplinarian but as advocates of psychoeducation and emotional healing. Their interventions extend beyond mere solution to immediate problems and extend to as deep as conversations around boundaries, self-perception, and internalized behavior. This restorative approach typically involves counselling, classroom intervention, and support modules on issues like bullying, self-awareness, and resilience. Rapport building and trauma-informed care are of great priority for counselors, guided by the philosophy that one changed mindset can create ripples in peer interactions.

### Systemic Challenges and the Value of Structured Collaboration

"We coordinated with the faculty... we make use of appointment slip... kailangan may endorsement." (P9)

"Guidance programs minsan sumisingit... pero very supportive ng advisers." (P5)

Despite their vital role, counselors operate within systems that at times experience confusion or protocol gaps. Participants reported past issues related to unclear referral routes and bypassed procedures. Schools over the years have established structured systems such as endorsement slips, clear referral pathways, and regulatory-required signatures to encourage accountability. Coordination has been enhanced, especially in settings like EJHS, where homeroom periods and the principal's support allow effective guidance program implementation. Counselors emphasize the need for keeping open lines of

communication with teachers, coordinators, and administrators to coordinate interventions and prevent future incidents.

### Strengthening the Culture of Prevention and Student Empowerment

“Ayaw sana namin umabot sa point na magpapaalis kami ng bata.” (P6)

“Magandang may mga follow-up or follow-through... para aware sila na yung asar pala bullying na.” (P5)

Counselors promote a preventive, student-empowering approach to bullying. They focus on early detection, student orientation, and ongoing campaign work educating learners about what bullying is and how to respond. There is a growing belief among counselors that shifting the image of counseling away from punishment and toward empowerment helps students become more open and accountable. Recommendations for improving existing systems are ongoing anti-bullying campaigns, integration of conflict resolution modules, and reinforcing counselors as allies, not enforcers.

The counselors' accounts illustrate a deeply reflective and systems-sensitive way of addressing bullying. They practice from a foundation of psychoeducation, emotional support, and collaborative strategies. Procedural systems have been enhanced, but further efforts are necessary to promote early identification and follow-through. Counselors attempt not only to intervene in bullying incidents but to reshape the school culture, giving students clarity, confidence, and compassion. As bullying behaviors evolve in complexity, particularly in online environments, ongoing investment in counselor development, policy clarity, and community partnerships are essential.

The findings of this study paint a rich and layered picture of the way bullying is seen, observed, and addressed on the three campuses of Colegio de San Juan de Letran. Quantitative data indicate that, even though verbal bullying remains the most reported form, more subtle forms such as cyberbullying and exclusion may be subject to underreporting. Teachers and staff most frequently employ immediate responses and counseling-type interventions, and they primarily see these strategies as highly effective.

Other than this, the qualitative results shed light on the subtleties of actual circumstances and systemic efforts. Administrators, teachers, and school counselors alike emphasized the importance of early detection, value formation, structured case management, and multi-level collaboration. Across roles, there is strong alignment around using counseling and character education as key tools, though gaps in consistency, training, and reporting systems were also acknowledged.

Collectively, the findings highlight the school community's shared commitment to a safe and inclusive environment while also pointing to areas that require reinforcement, most notably in streamlining protocols, empowering students, and addressing the evolving nature of bullying in both physical and digital spaces. These insights form a critical basis for improving anti-bullying policy and intervention development.

## DISCUSSION

Bullying is a pervasive issue within schools, and understanding its nature, incidence, and effective interventions is crucial for developing strategies that create safer learning environments. This section discusses the observations of bullying incidents, the types of bullying most frequently encountered, intervention strategies employed by teachers, and the perceived effectiveness of these interventions. It also integrates the perspectives of administrators, grade-level teachers, and guidance counselors on how to address bullying and improve prevention efforts. This discussion also provides a direct triangulation of the quantitative results, qualitative themes, and existing literature, culminating in a final synthesis where the integrated insights inform the study's key implications.

### Observation of Bullying Incidents

The results of this study uncover a large gap in the prevalence of bullying incidents between the campuses of Colegio de San Juan de Letran. Although a notable proportion (40%) of school personnel reported that they had personally

witnessed bullying incidents, a larger share (60%) did not, indicating a gap in visibility. This gap is consistent with Olweus's (1993) finding that bullying incidents occur frequently in less supervised areas, such as corridors, restrooms, and online platforms, where supervision is poor. Additionally, indirect bullying, such as social exclusion and emotional manipulation, which are inherently harder to observe, are likely to lead to underreporting (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). To overcome these challenges, it is necessary to enhance the awareness and identification ability of school personnel through continuous professional development (Espelage, Low, & Jimerson, 2014). In addition, student-centered reporting systems, particularly in the event of cyberbullying, can be implemented to ensure that bullying incidents are observed and acted upon effectively (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). This quantitative under-observation converges with qualitative testimonies from teachers and administrators, who explained that some incidents are minimized as “joking”. Literature further confirms that such normalization leads to underreporting (Bradshaw et al., 2007).

### Most Frequently Observed Type of Bullying

Verbal bullying, reported by 85.71% of the participants, is the most frequently observed form, supported by the literature that identifies verbal aggression in the form of teasing, name-calling, and verbal threats as the most common and socially accepted form of bullying (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Physical bullying, to a lesser degree reported at 14.29%, may not necessarily reflect lower prevalence but rather a decrease in overt aggressive behaviors, possibly because of stricter school policies and more direct interventions (Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011). The underreporting of social and cyberbullying may be indicative of a lack of awareness or inability to identify these forms of bullying (Tokunaga, 2010). With the covert nature of social and cyberbullying, school personnel must become trained to identify relational aggression and integrate digital citizenship into their curriculum to prevent these behaviors (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013; Williford et al., 2013). This triangulates with qualitative accounts where teachers and counselors identified verbal and appearance-based teasing as the most common forms. Together with literature, this confirms that verbal bullying is both widespread and culturally tolerated.

### Intervention Strategies Employed by Teachers

The most used intervention strategies for teachers are student counseling and support (41.03%) and prompt response protocol (33.33%) which reflect an increasing focus on restorative and rehabilitative measures in addressing bullying. These methods are consistent with the principles of restorative justice, focusing on healing and reintegration rather than punishment (Zehr, 2002). The use of counseling, in contrast to punitive action, resonates with the conclusions of Bradshaw et al. (2013), who cite the positive impact of emotional support and conflict resolution on long-term change in student behavior. Less commonly used intervention strategies are administrative incident reporting (15.38%) and parental involvement and communication (10.26%), which could reflect a school culture focused on conflict resolution in the classroom (McGrath, 2011). The practice of this behavior maintains teacher authority, but it may limit access to more integrated support systems. Having more explicit guidelines for escalating incidents of bullying and involving parents in intervention would offer a more comprehensive approach to address bullying (Fekkes et al., 2005). This quantitative pattern aligns with administrators' and counselors' qualitative emphasis on counseling as the first-line strategy. However, that low parental involvement and weak referral systems are critical gaps in practice.

### Perceived Effectiveness of Interventions

A convincing 73.68% of respondents rated their intervention strategies as “Very Effective,” which indicates high confidence among school personnel in their ability to address bullying. This is consistent with the literature, which reports that immediate interventions and long-term counseling are the most effective strategies when consistently applied (Trofi & Farrington, 2011). Nevertheless, as Durlak et al. (2011) suggest, the long-term effectiveness of these interventions depends on fidelity in their application, continuous training for teachers, and the institutionalization of these strategies within the school culture. It is imperative to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions not only on perception but also on empirical data on the reduction of bullying behavior over time. This requires the application of tracking and feedback systems, such as student surveys, to measure the effect of bullying prevention interventions (Merrell et al., 2008). Qualitatively, teachers and administrators echoed this confidence, but

triangulation with literature reveals the need for outcome-based monitoring, since perceived success does not always equal measurable reduction in bullying.

### Administrators' Perspectives

#### Multi-Layered Monitoring and Case Validation Process

Administrators indicated that the school employs a systematic, multi-layered process for validating incidents of bullying, including teachers and class advisers as the initial point of contact. This approach aligns with Olweus's (1993) call for the necessity of early intervention on the part of school personnel. Confirming incidents of bullying, however, is not easy, especially where the students deny or minimize its severity (Craig, Pepler, & Boulton, 2009). To facilitate this process, clear and consistent policies, along with training of all school personnel, are needed to ensure that incidents are addressed equitably and effectively (Boulton, 2013). This complements quantitative findings showing relatively low administrative reporting (15.38%), suggesting that while structures exist, escalation is not always followed through consistently.

#### Counseling-Centered Intervention and Values Integration

Administrators' focus on counseling and character education as central elements of their bullying intervention strategies highlights the importance of values-based approaches to discipline. This is in line with the responsive regulation model proposed by Braithwaite (2002), where change in behavior is achieved through ethical reflection and reintegration rather than exclusion. Prioritizing Values Education and Christian Living Education (CLE) aligns with evidence of the role of moral development and social-emotional learning in bullying prevention (Elias et al., 1997). As Cohen et al. (2009) note, however, if these values are to be internalized, they must be modeled by teachers and supplemented by the creation of an inclusive school culture. This triangulates with teacher and counselor perspectives that emphasize character formation as key, aligning with quantitative reliance on counseling.

#### Challenges in Identifying Bullying and Maintaining Discipline Consistency

Administrators have pointed out difficulties in identifying bullying incidents, particularly in instances where the act is less apparent or where students are likely to downplay their actions. This finding aligns with the argument of Farrington and Ttofi (2011) that inconsistency in enforcing disciplinary sanctions would make anti-bullying programs ineffective. Therefore, the establishment of clear, codified disciplinary policies and regular training for school administrators are essential in upholding fairness and consistency in the resolution of bullying cases. This explains the quantitative gap where 60% did not observe bullying – qualitatively, under recognition and denial are central issues.

#### Recommendations for Improved Collaboration and Resource Allocation

Administrators have also suggested increased cooperation between school personnel and more resources for anti-bullying programs. This suggestion underlines the importance of a coordinated effort on the part of all school stakeholders, which are the teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents to effectively address the problem of bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2007). In addition, increased investment in professional development and the provision of more support resources would substantially improve the overall efficacy of bullying interventions. This matches teacher's and counselors' call for stronger systems, triangulating with the quantitative finding that parental involvement (10.26%) is low.

### Grade-Level Teachers' Perspectives

#### Immediate, Restorative Classroom Interventions

Grade-level teachers emphasized the necessity of immediate, restorative interventions in responding to bullying in their classrooms. Such interventions are in line with the values of restorative justice principles and are effective in fostering long-term behavioral change among students (Zehr, 2002). This aligns with quantitative evidence showing frequent use of prompt response protocols (33.33%) and with administrators' emphasis on early classroom intervention.

#### Predominantly Verbal and Appearance-Based Bullying

Teachers have reported that verbal bullying, particularly name-calling and teasing related to looks represent the most observed type of bullying. This aligns with the broader trends in bullying research, which indicate that verbal aggression is most typically considered the most socially tolerated form of bullying (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). This

complements the 85.71% quantitative findings and triangulates with counselors' reports that verbal bullying is often hard to distinguish from joking.

### Barriers to Consistent Bullying Management

Teachers identified various barriers to consistent bullying management, including the lack of resources and parental and administrative support. This is supported with findings by McGrath (2011), where he described that while teachers have a significant role in bullying management, they can be prevented from doing so effectively if there is insufficient institutional support. This complements quantitative gaps in reporting and parental involvement, showing a triangulated pattern where systemic barriers weaken anti-bullying efforts.

#### Strengthening Multi-Level Support and Preventive Structures

Teachers suggested increasing multi-level support systems, such as peer support programs and more effective preventive interventions. This is consistent with research highlighting a school-wide approach to bullying prevention (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). This triangulates with administrator recommendations for more collaboration and counselor calls for culture-based prevention.

### Guidance Counselors' Perspectives

#### Nuanced Understanding of Bullying and Its Manifestations

Guidance counselors have addressed a nuanced understanding of bullying, acknowledging the complexity of the issue and the various ways that it can manifest. This is corroborated by the work of Swearer et al. (2010), which stresses the importance of comprehensive understanding of bullying to create effective interventions. This aligns with quantitative diversity in observed types, but also explains why some forms (e.g., social/cyber) are underreported.

#### Psychoeducational Interventions and Holistic Case Handling

Guidance counselors emphasized the need for psychoeducational interventions to address the underlying causes of bullying. These interventions, such as teaching students to self-regulate, empathize, and resolve conflicts, are critical in preventing bullying behavior and fostering emotional intelligence (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). This complements teachers' reliance on counseling and the high (73.68%) perceived effectiveness, while literature urges outcome validation.

#### Systemic Challenges and the Value of Structured Collaboration

The guidance counselors also reported the importance of a coordinated, systematic approach to addressing bullying. This involves having clear referral procedures and processes for addressing bullying incidents, as recommended by Bradshaw et al. (2007). This triangulates with administrators' recognition of weak escalation and quantitative data showing low administrative reporting.

#### Strengthening the Culture of Prevention and Student Empowerment

The guidance counselors emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of prevention and the empowerment of the students to be active in preventing bullying. This claim is supported by the fact that student programs and participation in anti-bullying programs can be quite effective (Musher-Eitzenman, Drum, & Willems, 2004). This converges with teachers' call for peer support and administrators' emphasis on values integration forming a holistic, triangulated approach.

#### Triangulation of Findings

The quantitative evidence (e.g., 40% observation of incidents; dominance of verbal bullying at 85%; reliance on counseling at 41.03%; 73.68% "very effective" ratings) converges with qualitative testimonies from administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors that verbal/appearance-based bullying is most visible, counseling and values integration are the first-line responses, and referral/parental involvement are less consistently enacted. Literature reinforces and complicates this picture: verbal bullying is widely normalized (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Wang et al., 2009), perceived effectiveness requires outcome verification (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011; Durlak et al., 2011), and whole-school, consistently enforced systems with active parent engagement yield more durable effects (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Cohen et al., 2009; Espelage & Swearer 2004). Together, the three lenses reveal convergence (verbal bullying prevalence; counseling-centered practice; high staff confidence), complementarity (quantitative under-observation explained by qualitative "joking/minimization" culture), and a critical divergence (perceived vs. measured effectiveness).

Implication from the triangulation: (a) strengthen escalation and referral pathways (to address low administrative reporting and parental involvement); (b) institutionalize monitoring of outcomes (beyond perceptions) to test effectiveness longitudinally; and (c) embed whole-school preventive structures (homeroom modules, digital citizenship, peer supports) that align roles across administrators, teachers, counselors, and families. This synthesis demonstrates that triangulation is not merely confirmatory but vital, as it redefines the problem of bullying as a systemic issue requiring multi-level coordination, rather than isolated teacher-led interventions.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the prevalence and methods of bullying, the intervention strategies employed, and the perceived effectivity of these interventions in the basic education departments of the Manila, Bataan, and Manaoag campuses of the Colegio de San Juan de Letran. The findings indicated that verbal bullying is the most prevalent mode of bullying, with school personnel most often responding with immediate intervention and counseling. Less visible modes of bullying, such as cyberbullying and exclusion, may be underreported or overlooked. The findings emphasized the necessity of infusing multi-level collaboration, values education, and strong but empathetic disciplinary frameworks. The overall findings, triangulated across quantitative survey data, qualitative interviews, and relevant literature, reinforce the school community's dedication to cultivating a safe and inclusive learning environment, while also pointing to areas in policy implementation and teacher training that are due to closer scrutiny and enhancement.

### Theoretical contributions

Based on B.F. Skinner's behaviorist theory, this study establishes that bullying in student behavior can be managed using external stimuli and reinforced through structured intervention. Using counseling, positive reinforcement, and values formation aligns with Skinner's theory that behavior can be modified through consequences. The study also broadens the behaviorist model using qualitative data, which establishes how context-specific interventions such as moral education integration and character development in the classroom can encourage positive behaviors and reduce aggression. This study contributes to the theoretical corpus of literature by establishing that a behaviorist approach, when contextualized within the Philippine educational environment, can be an effective basis for the implementation of anti-bullying programs that are both preventive and rehabilitative.

### Practical implications

The research findings of this study have numerous practical implications for school administrators, teachers, and policymakers. There is a clear need for continued teacher training aimed at detecting and addressing overt and covert forms of bullying. The use of systematic and consistent intervention strategies within the school based on restorative practices can help improve the management of bullying cases. The study also suggests the need to promote a school climate that encourages respect, empathy, and positive peer relationships through valued education. The findings further highlight the need to enhance coordination among stakeholders, teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, and parents to create a unified front against bullying. Consistency in the implementation of policies on all campuses, and the promotion of partnership with outside organizations such as local government units, also expands the reach and effectiveness of school-based anti-bullying programs.

### Limitations and Recommendations

Although the study was informative, some limitations must be mentioned. The study was confined to Colegio de San Juan de Letran's three campuses, and this may limit the generalizability of the findings to other schools. The sensitivity of the topic of bullying may have led to underreporting, especially of emotional and cyber types of aggression that are likely to occur outside school personnel's observation. Additionally, although teachers, administrators, and counselors were well-represented, victims' and bystanders' voices and, more broadly, the student voice, need further study. Future studies must employ larger and more diverse samples to avoid these limitations and ensure that more students' voices are heard through anonymous surveys or online forums. Longitudinal studies would also provide richer data on the long-term impact of intervention strategies. Additionally, the inclusion of digital citizenship education in the curriculum is recommended as an intervention in response to the growing

incidence of cyberbullying. Finally, there is a need to institutionalize the periodic review and evaluation of anti-bullying policies and their implementation to ensure that they remain relevant and effective in sustaining student well-being.

### Proposed Framework for Anti-Bullying Policy Enhancement

Grounded in the qualitative and quantitative results of the study, this research offers an integrated behaviorist framework for anti-bullying policy enhancement. The framework is made up of seven interrelated components that are especially tailored to meet the root causes of bullying, reinforce positive behavior, and ensure consistent, system-responses across all campuses. These include preventive education, structured reporting protocols, behavior reinforcement, restorative counseling, stakeholders' collaboration, cyberbullying prevention, and the adoption of a student-parent contract system. Grounded in B.F. Skinner's behaviorist theory and supported by field-based experience, the framework offers a holistic, practical, and context-sensitive approach to enhancing the effectiveness of existing anti-bullying policies in basic education settings.

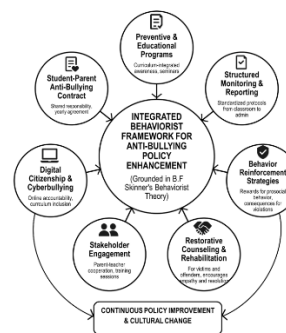


Figure 3. Integrated Behaviorist Framework for Anti-Bullying Policy Enhancement

This framework integrates behaviorist principles with seven actionable components designed to address, prevent, and reduce bullying in school settings.

#### Preventive and Educational Programs

Implemented in the form of anti-bullying awareness integrated in values-based subjects such as GMRC, CLE, and Homeroom classes, and student and parent seminars. These aim to cultivate empathy, respect, and emotional intelligence in students.

#### Structured Monitoring and Reporting Protocols

Established standardized incident-reporting instruments, documentation protocols, and response protocols from classroom teachers to school administrators, and guidance counselors. This ensures that bullying incidents are tracked and addressed systematically.

#### Behavior Reinforcement Strategies

The strategy includes positive reinforcement to encourage prosocial behavior yet simultaneously setting, clear and consistent consequences for bullying behavior in accordance with school policy and B.F. Skinner's behaviorist theory.

#### Restorative Counseling and Rehabilitative Actions

Interventions are for victims and offenders. These interventions focus on conflict resolution, emotional healing, and behavior change to prevent recurrence and to encourage a sense of accountability and empathy.

#### Stakeholder Engagement

Enhanced by collaborative work with parents and faculty. Regular training and consultation guarantee that the whole school community is united in its endeavor to prevent and respond to bullying.

#### Digital Citizenship and Cyberbullying Prevention

Integrated in the curriculum to prepare the students with knowledge and accountability in utilizing online platforms, awareness of abusive behavior, and being aware of how to report it.

#### Student and Parent Anti-Bullying Contract System

Parents and students agree to a binding contract at the beginning of each school year to maintain anti-bullying expectations, recognize school policies, and

accept consequences for violations. The contract serves to solidify shared responsibility and acts as a proactive commitment toward establishing a respectful and inclusive learning environment.

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## SOCIAL MEDIA USERS' RISK PERCEPTION, AWARENESS, AND BEHAVIOR TOWARDS PRIVACY AMONG STUDENTS OF A PRIVATE COLLEGE

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### ABSTRACT

Social media connects people in today's society; however, its large user base is vulnerable to security threats. This study explores the relationship between perceived privacy risks, awareness, and protection behavior. A face-to-face survey conducted in March 2023 examined socio-demographics, social media use, risk perception, privacy awareness, and protection behaviors. Using Pearson correlation, the study found a strong link between perceived risk and protective actions, as well as between privacy awareness and behavior. Among 332 stratified random participants, most were female students aged 20–22. The results suggest that respondents are highly aware of privacy risks and actively take steps to protect their personal data. These findings highlight the need for educational institutions to implement social media privacy awareness training programs to reinforce safe practices and safeguard student information online.

**Keywords:** social media, privacy risk, privacy awareness, privacy protection behavior

### INTRODUCTION

Social media is a popular communication tool among students, who frequently use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. As of January 2023, there were approximately 4.76 billion social media users worldwide (Statista). Facebook remains the leading platform, with around 2.9 billion active users. In the Philippines, about 30.5% of Facebook users were aged 18 to 25 as of December 2022. With 84.07 million digital users recorded in January 2022, the country ranked ninth globally. Owing to its exceptionally high engagement rates, the Philippines has often been referred to as the "social media capital of the world."

Social media platforms (SMPs) allow individuals to interact, share experiences, and explore their environment, reducing communication barriers (Bishop, 2019; Oducado et al., 2019). While social media has become integral to daily life, privacy breaches have also risen (Tao et al., 2019; Jozani, 2020). Notable breaches include 700 million LinkedIn users' data leaked in June 2021, 500 million records scraped by a "God User," and Facebook's 2021 breach exposing 533 million users' data (Hill & Swinhoe, 2022). These incidents highlight growing privacy risks linked to widespread social media use.

Users of SMPs often share personal data due to high trust levels. This trust is exploited by attackers who collect data for malicious purposes, posing major privacy and security risks (Kayes & Iamnitchev, 2017). Cyberattacks and data breaches can cause serious harm. Despite awareness of these risks, users frequently trade privacy for online services. It is essential for users to understand these dangers and take protective measures when storing information online.

This study examines students' risk perceptions, awareness, and privacy protection behaviors in relation to their use of social media. The research findings could aid educational institutions in providing comprehensive education on privacy to students. Also, this study could influence the privacy protection strategies individuals utilize on SMPs.

#### Theoretical framework

##### Theory of Ritualized Media Use

The Theory of Ritualized Media Use (TRMU) suggests media consumption goes beyond information or entertainment, becoming part of daily routines for relaxation and social interaction (Barth et al., 2017; Rubin, 1984). Rituals include scheduled viewing or casually flipping through channels (Strecker et al., 2015). Similarly, social media use becomes habitual, increasing engagement (Hossain,

2019). However, repeated use may lead to personal information disclosure and privacy risks. Users must be cautious and weigh the benefits and risks before sharing personal data online (Schmidt et al., 2022).

This theory provides additional insight into the tremendous popularity of SMPs such as Facebook and their apparent disregard for users' privacy.

##### Uses and gratification theory

The uses and gratifications theory explains that individuals choose media based on personal needs. Social media use is driven by desired gratifications, influenced by user traits like age, gender, and personality (Katz et al., 1973; Olpin et al., 2023; Kircaburun, 2020).

Social media use differs by platform, driven by personal choice and gratification. Users engage for various reasons, including building relationships, seeking information, leisure, comfort, self-enhancement, monitoring others, and social interaction (Masciantonio & Bourguignon, 2023; Falgoust et al., 2022; Hossain, 2019; Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Preferences reflect individual autonomy and motivations behind media engagement.

##### Protection Motivation Theory

Protection motivation theory (PMT) explains protective behavior through four fear appeal components: severity, likelihood, response effectiveness, and self-efficacy (Maddux & Rogers, 1983). It focuses on threat and coping appraisal—assessing danger and vulnerability, and the ability to manage threats. People valuing privacy often take more protective actions (Baruh et al., 2017; Büchi et al., 2017).

The theory offers a framework for describing individuals' risk perception and their ability to defend against potential threats instead of highlighting the motives for disclosing or not disclosing private information. The use of PMT in the realm of privacy demonstrates how perceptions may impact people's actions.

#### Literature review

##### Perceived privacy risk

People often feel uncertain when faced with ambiguity. Slovic (2000) defines risk perception as a subjective interpretation shaped by knowledge and confidence. In social media, privacy risk refers to threats users face when sharing personal data. Many users overlook these risks, especially those with limited internet knowledge (Alguliyev et al., 2018; Kayes & Iamnitchev, 2017). While privacy settings offer some control, they do not ensure full protection (Office of

the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, 2019). This study examines whether users perceive privacy risks when using SMPs.

### Privacy awareness

Privacy awareness involves understanding how personal data is protected, its presence online, and its future implications (Correia & Compeau, 2017). The National Privacy Commission (2022) stresses its importance in fostering a privacy-conscious culture in the Philippines. A lack of awareness may expose users to cyberattacks (Jain et al., 2021). Since social media collects vast data, users must understand how it's gathered and shared, adjust privacy settings, and be cautious when sharing information (Lee & Attablayo, 2023).

This issue prompted us to investigate consumers' awareness of privacy factors such as social sharing visibility, information sharing with third parties, privacy settings, and security measures on social media sites.

### Visibility of profile information

Visibility refers to how much personal content is seen by others (Limecube, 2022). Limiting visibility to selected individuals helps protect horizontal privacy but may not fully safeguard vertical privacy, as platforms or third parties can still access and use the data (Bartsch & Dienlin, 2016; Quinn & Epstein, 2018).

### Privacy settings

Social media platforms have default privacy settings that users should adjust before posting. These settings help limit interactions with specific followers (Monti & Wacks, 2019). However, they can be confusing, leading most users to stick with defaults (Fiesler et al., 2017). Privacy-conscious users must understand these settings, even if they offer limited protection. For example, Facebook allows users to control data visibility, but many struggle to use the tools effectively.

### Sharing information with third parties

Social media privacy is a major concern, as third parties can access and misuse user data. The Facebook-Cambridge Analytica breach showed data was taken without consent (Meredith, 2018). Such access exposes users to identity theft, stalking, blackmail, and other serious privacy risks.

### Security measures

Personal data security awareness involves understanding social media security measures to prevent cyberattacks caused by user ignorance. Users must learn basic protections—like using strong passwords, avoiding information disclosure, updating software, and using antivirus tools—to reduce third-party threats (Kurniawan, 2023; Lavany & Santharooban, 2021).

### Privacy protection behavior

Individuals use various strategies to safeguard their online privacy, especially amid concerns over data collection and third-party disclosure. Privacy protection involves limiting shared personal information on social media (Park & Kim, 2020) and applying safeguards (Baruh et al., 2017). Protective behaviors, such as adjusting privacy settings and controlling disclosures, help users manage perceived privacy risks (Milne et al., 2009). User behavior plays a vital role in privacy management by enabling selective sharing of information and interests within social networks. These actions reflect a proactive approach to protecting personal data in today's digital environment.

For this study, we considered the following indicators to be routinely performed: limiting search engines, controlling followers, reviewing posts, limiting contact, blocking users, limiting connections, disabling location services, receiving notifications, and utilizing 2-Step verification.

### Perceived privacy risk and privacy protection behavior

Perceived privacy risk influences social media privacy and security behaviors, though findings are mixed. Koochaksaraee (2019) found no link between risk perception and behavior, highlighting the role of trust and privacy concerns. In contrast, Van Schaik et al. (2017) and Zhou and Liu (2017) found that higher perceived risks lead to more precautionary actions and privacy protections, especially among Facebook users and Chinese teenagers.

The given hypothesis was tested based on the given scenarios. (H1): There is no significant relationship between perceived privacy risk and the privacy behavior of active social media users.

### Privacy awareness and privacy protection behavior

Studies have shown a link between perceived privacy awareness and behavior. Zwilling et al. (2022) found a positive relationship between cybersecurity awareness and protection behaviors. As awareness increased, so did efforts to prevent cyberattacks. Those with greater cybersecurity knowledge took more precautions, especially when using familiar defense methods. Additionally, individuals' understanding of internet use influenced how awareness translated into protective actions, suggesting that digital literacy plays a key role in shaping effective privacy behaviors.

Given the scenario, the following hypothesis was examined: (H2): There is no significant relationship between awareness and the behavior of active social media users.

### Synthesis of the Literature

We looked at how privacy risks and how aware people are of privacy affect their behavior online. Most studies say that when people think there's more risk and are more aware, they are more likely to act safely on social media. But most of this research focuses on general groups of people, not specifically on students at private colleges, who might have different challenges and ways of using the internet. Also, many studies look at risk and awareness separately, not together, when it comes to how they affect privacy actions. This study aims to fill those gaps by looking at these factors within a private college setting. The goal is to create a real-world program that helps students better protect their privacy online through education and training.

### Conceptual framework

The conceptual model shows how privacy risk, privacy awareness, and privacy protection behavior are connected among social media users at a private college. The focus of the study is on the students, who serve as the primary subjects of the research. The two main factors are looked at: privacy risk and privacy awareness. Privacy risk means how much people think they are in danger from using social media, like having their identity stolen, their data leaked, or their personal info used wrongly. Privacy awareness is about how much people know and understand privacy issues and the ways they can keep their personal data safe. Both factors are thought to affect privacy protection behavior, which is what people do to keep their privacy safe online.

Specifically, Hypothesis 1 (H1) assumes that individuals who perceive greater risks are more likely to engage in protective behaviors, while Hypothesis 2 (H2) assumes that individuals with higher levels of awareness will also demonstrate stronger privacy protection behaviors. The model also shows how this study can help in real life. The connections between these factors will be used to create a social media education and training program. This program is meant to help students learn more about privacy and how to protect themselves online. In short, the conceptual model gives both a theory and a practical way to link how people see risks and awareness to their actions, and how that can lead to better ways of using social media safely and responsibly.

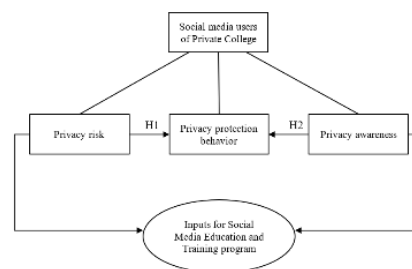


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model

## METHODS

### Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative and descriptive correlational research method to assess if perceived privacy risk and awareness influence privacy behavior in the use of social media. Quantitative research involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting narrative and non-numerical data to

understand better a given situation (Gay et al., 2006). This study was classified as descriptive research that aims to provide a detailed account of a phenomenon and its attributes. Descriptive correlational research is employed to depict the relationship between variables rather than to deduce causal relationships. (Lappe, 2000).

### Subjects

The sample selection employed a stratified random sampling technique, employing college departments as the stratum to ensure proportional allocation. Stratified sampling is a random sampling technique in which researchers divide a population into smaller sections based on comparable characteristics and then randomly choose a sample from these groupings (Simkus, 2022). The sample came from Colegio de San Juan de Letran (CSJL) in Manila. The population sample consisted of 332 collegiate students who were enrolled at CSJL during the second semester of SY 2022-2023. More than 98% of college-aged individuals use SMPs. (Zedd, 2023).

### Study site

The study focused on collegiate students at CSJL in Intramuros, Manila. The sample consists exclusively of collegiate students who have active social media accounts. School is ideal for the study because college students who grew up with social media need validation and affirmation more than ever (Zedd, 2023).

### Instrumentation

The questionnaire was adapted from previous research conducted in privacy studies. The items concerning perceived risks and behaviors were adapted from Koochaksaraee (2019), while those about privacy awareness came from Tuunainen et al. (2009). The questionnaire was divided into five sections to gather the needed information from participants. Part 1 of the study includes the students' profiles, social media use, and frequency of use. Part 3 focused on their perception of the risks associated with SMPs. Part 4 covers awareness of security and privacy, while the final part refers to behavior on social media.

A pilot test at another school assessed the survey's reliability using Cronbach's alpha, which measured internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The resulting value of 0.924 indicates strong reliability, confirming that all test items used in the survey instrument are acceptable for this research.

### Data collection procedure and ethical consideration

After determining the scope of the study, we implemented a systematic protocol to begin data collection. Permission to collect responses from higher education departments was asked by the Research and Publications Department. The RPD endorsement letter was then sent to the respective department, informing them of the matter. The survey was conducted in person (pen and paper).

The research followed ethical standards, ensuring students' voluntary participation and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Informed consent was obtained through the survey's first page, which outlined research details and participant rights. Selecting "yes" indicated consent. Confidentiality was maintained by avoiding the use of identifiable personal information.

### Data analysis

The data were collected, processed, and analyzed using various statistical methods. The percentage of data in the profile (gender, age, department, and year level) was calculated using frequency and percentage distribution. Then, weighted mean was used to calculate the average response value for privacy perception, awareness, and protection behavior.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationship between the variables in the study, which include privacy perception, awareness, and protection behavior. Finally, data were evaluated using SPSS software with a significance level of 0.05.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Profile

Table 1. Profile of Respondents

Demographic Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	132	39.8
Female	200	60.2
Age		
17-19 years old	113	34.0
20-22 years old	196	59.0
23 and above	23	6.9
Department		
CBAA	183	55.1
CLAS	89	26.8

	CEIT	55	16.6
	COED	5	1.2
Year Level	Freshmen	104	31.3
	Sophomore	147	44.3
	Junior	50	15.1
	Senior	30	9.0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>332</b>	<b>100</b>

The table indicates that out of 332 participants, 60.2% (f = 200) are female, and 39.8% (f = 132) are male. The table shows that 59% of respondents are 20–22 years old, and 34% are 17–19 years old. The remaining 6.9% are 23 years old or older. In addition, most of the respondents (55.1%) were from CBAA, followed by 34% from CLAS, 16.6% from CEIT, and only 5% from COED. Regarding the academic year level, 147 students are sophomores (44.3%), 104 are freshmen (31.3%), 50 are juniors (15.1%), and 30 are seniors (9%).

### Social Media Platforms and their frequency of use

Figure 2 depicts the SMPs used by respondents and their frequency of use.

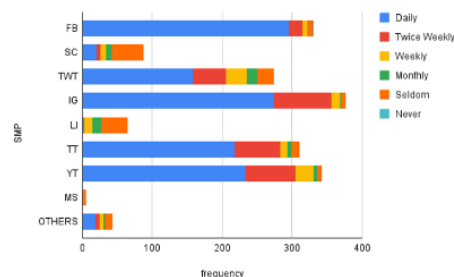


Figure 2. Frequency of use of social media platforms

The table reveals that 99.7% of the 332 people use Facebook, while Instagram was the second most popular SMP among the 332 respondents, with 311 (93.7%) individuals using it. YouTube was ranked third by 93.1% of respondents. Other SMPs include TikTok (79.25%), Twitter (46.15%), and Snapchat (13.6%). Most respondents utilize the top three SMPs daily, as the graph illustrates. Some respondents used these platforms on a biweekly or weekly basis.

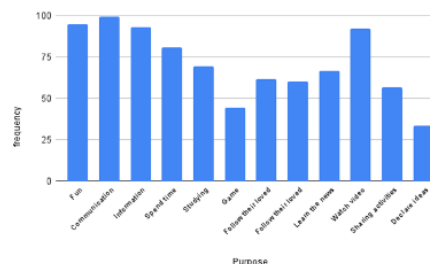


Figure 3. Purpose of social media use

Figure 3 shows that most respondents (99%) use SMP for communication purposes, followed by enjoyment (95%), information (93%), and watching movies (92%).

### Perceived privacy risk

Table 3 displays the perceived risks of utilizing SMPs.

Table 3. Perceived Risks Involved in Using Social Media Platforms

Statements	Mean	Interpretation
1. The risk of social media security threats to the average user.	3.91	Very High
2. The risk of social media privacy breaches to an average user.	3.96	Very High
3. The chance that an average user will fall victim to a security breach through social media.	3.93	Very High
4. A social media users' vulnerability to security and privacy issues.	4.06	Very High
<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.95</b>	<b>Very High</b>

Respondents perceived social media usage as very high risk (mean = 3.95). It is vulnerable to security and privacy issues (mean = 4.06). Additionally, respondents believed that average users were at a very high risk of having their social media privacy violated (mean = 3.96). Furthermore, the chance that an average user will fall victim to a security breach (mean = 3.93) or security threat (mean = 3.91) is also very high.

## Privacy awareness

Table 4 presents the respondents' level of awareness regarding the security and privacy features of the social media platforms (SMPs) they use.

**Table 4. Awareness of Security and Privacy**

Statements	Mean	Interpretation
1. Visibility of profile information..	4.40	Extremely Aware
2. Privacy Setting	4.28	Extremely Aware
3. Sharing Information with Third Party	4.48	Extremely Aware
4. Security Measures	3.87	Very Aware
<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>4.15</b>	<b>Very Aware</b>

Table 4 indicates that the respondents possess a high level of awareness regarding the security and privacy of the various SMPs they utilize, with an overall mean score of 4.15. Respondents are "extremely aware" that they may share information with a third party (mean = 4.48), their profile information is visible (4.40), and they have knowledge of privacy settings (mean = 4.28). However, they are "very aware" of the security measures to protect their account (mean = 3.87).

## Privacy protection behavior

Table 5 presents the respondents' frequency of engaging in various privacy protection behaviors on social media to ensure the security of their accounts.

**Table 5. Privacy Protection on Social Media**

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1. Limit search engines	4.02	Often
2. Control followers	4.24	Always
3. Review posts	4.61	Always
4. Restrict contact	4.30	Always
5. Block users	3.69	Often
6. Limit connections	4.37	Always
7. Disable location services	4.27	Always
8. Get notifications	4.64	Always
9. Use 2-Step verification	4.52	Always
<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>4.29</b>	<b>Always</b>

Table 5 displays social media users' various privacy protection behaviors to safeguard their accounts. Respondents "always" receive notifications when their accounts are accessed from new devices (mean = 4.64) and review posts or photos in which they are tagged (mean = 4.61). Moreover, they "always" use 2-step verification (mean = 4.52), limit connections (mean = 4.37), disable location services (mean = 4.27), and control followers (mean = 4.24). On the other hand, respondents "often" limit search engines and block users, if necessary, especially those with malicious intent (mean = 3.69).

## Relationship between perceived risk and awareness with protective behavior

Table 6 shows the Pearson-R correlation coefficient outcomes for the relationship among perceived risks, privacy awareness, and behavior on social media

**Table 6. Relationships of Perceived Risks and Awareness to Privacy Protection Behavior on Social Media**

Variables	Pearson-r	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Risks Behavior	.163	.003	Reject Ho	Significant
Awareness	.339	.000	Reject Ho	Significant

The table shows a weak positive correlation ( $r = .163$ ) between perceived risks and behavior. A moderately positive correlation ( $r = .339$ ) exists between awareness and behavior. The hypotheses are both rejected since their p-values are .003 and .000, respectively.

## DISCUSSION

### Demographic Profile

The study shows that most participants are female sophomores aged 20–22 from CBAA. Meltwater (Howe, 2023, 2022) reported that 53.5% of social media users in the Philippines are female. Compared to men, women are more vocal, expressive, and open. The SMP helps them make new friends and stay in touch with family and friends.

### Social Media Platforms and their frequency of use

Social media is increasingly ingrained in people's lives. The study's findings indicate that Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are the most frequently utilized SMPs among the participants. These findings corresponded to the data provided by Statista and the previous study conducted by Wang et al. (2019). Most respondents cited the top four reasons for using social media: communication, entertainment, information, and watching videos. Similar results were found in the study of Torrijos-Fincias et al. (2021), wherein entertainment and

communication with peers were cited as the two primary purposes. This result also supports Oducado's (2019) claim that these SMPs enable individuals to freely explore their environment, share personal experiences, and break down communication barriers.

### Perceived privacy risk

The findings indicate that participants exhibited high awareness of potential privacy violations on social media. It demonstrates that students are aware of potential security and privacy risks. The results indicate that participants viewed social media as a potential threat and displayed a heightened awareness of security breaches and risks associated with using SMPs. Users' general awareness of privacy risks, prior experience with privacy violations, handling highly confidential information, and personal experiences with privacy threats all impact how they perceive risk. (Gerber et al., 2018). Interestingly, Torrijos-Fincias et al. (2021) observed a correlation between security threat awareness and risk perception. Understanding privacy issues may help users recognize privacy concerns and reduce risk. It suggests that users have knowledge of the privacy dangers but are unwilling to stop using SMPs and are prepared to face the implications.

### Privacy awareness

Generation Z exhibits a heightened awareness regarding the proper and improper utilization of their SMPs, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. The study's findings indicate that participants possess a high level of awareness regarding the potential risks of sharing personal information with third parties, the need to make their accounts private, and, to some extent, limiting it to specific followers. It demonstrates that respondents are extremely aware of the need to optimize the privacy settings of their social media accounts to safeguard their personal information. Moreover, respondents are also extremely aware of the visibility of their profile information, which allows the user to control profile visibility to selected individuals such as acquaintances or colleagues (Bartsch & Dienlin, 2016; Quinn & Epstein, 2018).

### Privacy protection behavior

Findings revealed the respondents' different actions to safeguard the information they share on social networks. The results of this study support the claim of Baruh (2017), wherein individuals must only disclose personal information and implement privacy protection controls.

The respondents always apply these privacy protection controls: they always get notifications to ensure that they know activities going on to their accounts, review their posts to avoid bashing or negative comments, they use two-step verification to make sure that no one else is using their account for any malicious content, limit connections to avoid threats from a third party, restrict contacts by declining requests from those who are not seemingly trustworthy; they turn off location services for them not to disclose their whereabouts at a given moment; and they control followers only to those who can be trusted. However, respondents often restrict search engines to protect their privacy and only block individuals when necessary. The research of Torrijos-Fincias et al. (2021) revealed that participants employed various strategies to mitigate perceived risks on social media. These strategies include exercising sound judgment, making educated choices about the content they post, and preventing individuals suspected of having fake profiles.

### Relationship between perceived risk, privacy awareness, and protective behavior

The research indicates a significant correlation between risk perception and privacy protection behavior. The results are consistent with Van Schaik's (2017) and Zhou and Liu's (2023) research, which found a significant correlation between social media risk perception and privacy behavior. Both studies concluded that high-risk perception leads individuals to view the online gathering, utilization, and dissemination of personal information as a significant threat to their risk, subsequently engaging in preventative measures to mitigate such risks. In line with this interpretation, individuals with frequent usage and greater exposure to SMPs tend to perceive higher levels of risk. This may be attributed to their previous experiences with specific dangers, or their enhanced perception of the risks based on their experience and knowledge gained. Generation Z reaped the benefits of social media while still preventing risks, which helped them develop strong privacy practices.

This finding contradicts Koochaksaraee (2019), who found no link between risk perception and privacy behavior. Users often accept high risks due to the perceived benefits of social media (Acquisti & Gross, 2006). Van der Schyff et al. (2023) noted that trust increases users' willingness to share information.

Furthermore, this study reveals a significant relationship between privacy awareness and privacy protection behavior. This finding is consistent with Zwilling et al.'s (2022) study, which demonstrated that awareness mediates the relationship between knowledge and behavior concerning using SMPs. The findings indicate that increased awareness of privacy on social media is associated with an increased likelihood of individuals engaging in protective behaviors against privacy threats and security breaches. Increased awareness can prompt users to protect their security and privacy in response to potential threats. Even though respondents have a strong understanding of privacy protection, ongoing education may be required to increase their awareness of privacy breaches, security threats, and security measures, which have the lowest mean among the indicators. Additionally, they need to understand the significance of limiting search engines and blocking someone from SMP to remain cautious about their privacy.

## CONCLUSION

### Theoretical contributions

This current study attempts to fill in the gaps and, in doing so, make significant contributions. According to our search of databases that have been peer-reviewed, no previous study has empirically examined the students' risk perception and privacy awareness relationship with their privacy protection behavior in an academic setting. Furthermore, existing research on social media privacy has generally focused on integrating only one or two of the criteria stated. Several studies have also examined the link between these characteristics and privacy attitudes. Furthermore, existing research on privacy in social media use has primarily focused on specific factors such as privacy concerns, disclosure, and privacy settings.

The study's theoretical lenses are TRMU, U&G, and PMT to explain social media privacy. Although not directly tested in this study, the TRMU and U&GT are relevant as a backdrop and a framework for exploring and describing the results. The TRMU is a compelling theory about how social media has become a ritual in the lives of these students, leading to a lack of concern for privacy and personal risk. The findings show that students are very aware of the dangers of social media and have taken steps to reduce the risks and prevent adverse effects. The U&GT examines the use of social media to satisfy varying individual needs. Students see social media to unwind, have fun, meet people, and make new friends.

The research shows that SMP's gathering, utilizing, and sharing of information are perceived as a substantial risk to individuals' privacy and security. Perceived risk is positively related to protective behavior. According to the PMT, individuals are more inclined to engage in measures to safeguard their online privacy if they perceive the threat to be more significant.

### Practical implications

Social media continues to become more significant in both daily life and education. The study has practical implications regarding the significance and nature of privacy when using SMP. Students have demonstrated a high awareness of the potential risks associated with social media usage; however, they must take the necessary precautions to mitigate these risks and prevent any adverse effects from active participation.

The institution may contribute significantly to students' privacy awareness by developing a social media education and training program to teach the students to protect their privacy. This program may include topics on the myth of total anonymity in social media, the Data Privacy Act of 2012, types of privacy threats and security breaches such as social engineering and phishing, confidentiality and social media privacy settings, and best practices for safe social networking.

Furthermore, the institution can organize a privacy day featuring speakers on data protection topics, conduct email campaigns with privacy tips, and advertise on traditional platforms like school papers and television to tackle diverse social media privacy threats.

### Limitations and Recommendations

Although the results are noteworthy, this study has some limitations. This study only looked at Generation Z, which is more adept with technology and social media. Other demographics, such as baby boomers and Generation X, should be considered in future studies. This generation is not entirely exposed to technology and may need to familiarize themselves with the inner workings of SMPs.

We searched peer-reviewed databases and found that most research is based on a single SMP or SMPs in general. Future research may examine each SMP's privacy protection controls by comparing them. This comparison will provide possible sources for privacy education and privacy management.

The current study addresses perceived risk, privacy awareness, and protection behavior. Hence, employing a comprehensive research approach that involves other important variables is recommended. The impact of privacy on using SMP can vary depending on several factors, including benefits, privacy concerns, privacy self-efficacy, trust, beliefs, technology for protecting privacy, and privacy sensitivity.

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## DARWIN RAMOS: AN EXEMPLAR OF FINDING MEANING IN LIFE

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### ABSTRACT

The suicide cases and its attempt among the Filipino youth prompts the question of how they give meaning to their lives. Victor Frankl (1985) a European psychiatrist theorized that meaning in life can be found in three ways “(1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering” (p.133). This study, using humanities approach aimed at analyzing the biography of the Servant of God Darwin Ramos entitled “Darwin Ramos, Master of Joy” by Fr. Matthieu Dauchez to uncover how Darwin may serve as a role model for Filipino youth in finding meaning in their lives using the lens of Frankl’s theory. The results showed that Darwin was able to find meaning in life through Frankl’s 3 ways by being other-centered. Recommendations were made in the sector of education in relation to the results of the study.

**Keywords:** Darwin Ramos; Meaning in life; Victor Frankl; Filipino youth; exemplar

### INTRODUCTION

#### The rise of Filipino youth suicide

The University of the Philippines Population Institute (2022) through their “2021 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study, series 5” was able to discover a significant rise of Filipino youth who have “tried to end their life”. They have showed that the 2013 data which indicated “more than 574,000 or 3%” of the Filipino youth who had attempted suicide increased in 2021 with a rise of 7.5%, an estimate of 1.5 million Filipino youth (UPPI, 2022).

Within this population only “6 out of 10” seek for help, most of which are from “friends and peers (25%), parents/guardians (7%), other relatives (5%), and mental health professionals (4%)” (UPPI, 2022). The Department of Education through the testimony of its Assistant Secretary Dexter Galban affirmed these same findings in the Philippine senate for the year 2021, since he had mentioned that out of “28 million students, 404 committed suicide, 2, 147 attempted, and 775, 962 asked for the help of guidance counsellors” (Felipe, Mateo & Tupas, 2023).

Amidst this rise, the study of Lagman, Gara, Baweja and Kim (2021) have discovered by using the “2015 Global School-Based Health Survey” (p.1) that the leading predictors of attempts of suicide among their Filipino youth participants were “the use of amphetamine or methamphetamine, having fewer friends, smoking, and feeling lonely” (p. 2). Addition to these were the experience of “being bullied, drinking alcohol for the past 30 days, being female, being physically attacked, getting worried and cannot sleep, having less physical activity and less parental supervision” (Lagman, Gara, Baweja and Kim, 2021, p. 2). Moreover, the study of Quintos (2017) affirms the importance of relationships among family, friends, peers and the availability of guidance counselors, avoidance of risky behaviors and peers with suicidal tendencies in mitigating suicidal attempts among the Filipino youth.

#### Meaning of life among Filipino youth

This rise of suicide and its attempt among the Filipino youth now leads to the question of the Filipino youth’s meaning in life. Here are some studies that gives an overview about the Filipino youth’s quest for the meaning of life. Datu, King, Valdez and Eala (2019) indicated that among their Filipino junior high school participants those who were “gritty” (p. 872) or those who have the intense desire to do what they can to succeed and fulfill their long-term goals (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007 as cited in Datu, King, Valdez and Eala, 2019) are more likely to know the meaning of their life because they are goal oriented. Among college students, Navarez (2017) discovered that at this stage their participants were seeking for their life’s meaning hence, they believe that life is meaningful. They also suggest that if students can find meaning

in their lives and gave their best to search for it, it increases their happiness (Navarez, 2017). The same findings were affirmed in the study of Datu and Mateo (2015) where it was implied that college students who can find the meaning in their lives were able to experience more life satisfaction than those who are not. This can be related to the fact that at this developmental stage students are forming their identity as a person and having found life’s meaning is a way of satisfying this need thus, leading to life satisfaction (Datu & Mateo, 2015). Furthermore, Galang, Magno, Paterno & Roldan (2011) discovered that happiness can be derived from activities that allows Filipino Junior High School students unravel the meaning of their life. Moreover, despite their vulnerability to meaninglessness because of their tendency for immediate satisfaction (Frankl as cited in Ong, 2008) Ong (2008) suggested that Victor Frankl’s logotherapy can help them find meaning in life despite experiences of depression.

#### Servant of God Darwin Ramos

As per studies mentioned above, happiness, satisfaction and meaning in life have a significant relationship with one another in the context of the Filipino youth of today. In this regard, Servant of God Darwin Ramos can be one of their role models. Role models are important for human development, this is what Albert Bandura signified in his social learning theory (McLeod, 2025). In his theory, the more a person can identify with their role model the more is the likelihood that s/he will imitate his/her role models behavior (McLeod, 2025). The influence of others is also an important factor in terms of the youth’s faith development with Fowler’s (1981) theory, which implies young people ages 13-16 are seeking for role models of the faith beyond their family and community, this other role models includes people whom they encounter in “school, work, peers, society and media”. On the other hand, while young adults are becoming critical in evaluating whom they can see as their role model in the faith they are still open to learn from other perspectives (Fowler, 1981; Andrade, 2014).

The life of Darwin Ramos can be identified with most of the Filipino youth today. Together with the problems mentioned above, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2023) in 2021 an estimate of “5.12 million” of the Filipino youth are considered poor and “1.58 million” are considered “food poor” or those who have no access to “basic food” needs. Darwin Ramos died as a young Filipino in 2012 due to his illness, Duchenne muscular dystrophy (Dauchez, 2021). Darwin lived a challenging life, he came from a poor family, had an irresponsible father, and had a developmental illness which he battled for almost all his life and yet despite all these challenges, the people who encountered and journeyed with him called him a “master of joy” (Dauchez, 2021). Having endowed with this title implies that despite the suffering he had experienced Darwin was able to find the meaning of his life. Hence, on August 28, 2019, the Diocese of Cubao opened a cause for his canonization to sainthood (Dauchez, 2021).

## Theoretical framework

### Victor Frankl's 3 ways of finding meaning in life

In line with finding meaning in life, Victor Frankl (1985), a European psychiatrist, theorized that more than anything else the basis of an individual's behavior is how s/he gives meaning to his/her life. His theory mostly came from his experience of suffering and the suffering he saw from other victims in the Nazi concentration camps (Wong, 2005). Frankl (1985) believes that even though some people give less importance to meaning in life, at the end of the day what they truly seek is life's meaning. He also conceptualized a state of meaninglessness termed as "existential vacuum" (p. 128) which is basically caused by boredom, when an individual has nothing to be concerned of (Frankl, 1985). Specifically, he pointed out that although life's meaning is unique to each person and is determined by the self alone there may be 3 ways to find life's meaning namely "(1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering" (Frankl, 1985, p.133).

Given this background this study aims to: (1) Distinguish how the life of the Servant of God Darwin Ramos compares to Victor Frankl's 3 ways of finding meaning in life; (2) Set the life of Darwin Ramos as an example for the Filipino youth in finding meaning in life.

## METHODOLOGY

Humanities approach in research dwells into the study of creative materials such as literature that aims to uncover the meaning of human experience through those works (Trinidad, 2018). This study explored the humanities approach in research particularly using textual analysis of the biography of Darwin Ramos by Fr. Matthieu Dauchez, entitled "Darwin Ramos, Master of Joy." Victor Frankl's 3 ways of finding meaning in life were used by the researcher as a theoretical lens in discovering how the Servant of God Darwin Ramos found the meaning of his life. The results of this analysis were discussed in relation to the realities faced by the Filipino youth of today and its implications. Using the said approach and form of analysis distinguishes this paper from a book review since the researcher did not just retell what the book says but analyzed its content in a different lens. Aiming at a new way of looking into the life of Darwin Ramos.

## RESULTS

### Finding meaning in life by creating a work or doing a deed

According to Victor Frankl (1962, 1963, 1985) an individual can find meaning in life through a work or a deed since it allows him/her to realize that s/he can contribute something important not only for his/her own good but that of the other. Thus, life becomes meaningful if one can see how his/her work or deed impacts the life of the other.

This was also true in the case of the Servant of God Darwin Ramos. Darwin, the eldest among siblings, came from a poor family, his father was irresponsible and violent and only her mother brings food to the table by doing laundry for their neighbors (Dauchez, 2014). Witnessing the poverty of his family and willing to help their mother, Darwin together with his sister "Marimar" had the courage to help her by begging in the streets of Manila (Dauchez, 2014). The two were happy to contribute something to their family, their mother, despite her objection had no choice but to allow her children to beg to ease their family's suffering (Dauchez, 2014).

This willingness to help the family by earning something progressed by venturing to the selling of recyclable materials to junkshops, the two learned this from other street children who became their friends (Dauchez, 2014). Compared to begging what they have now ventured is actual work by scavenging (Dauchez, 2014).

As time progressed, Darwin is already experiencing the consequences of his developmental illness, at the age of 7 he can no longer support himself and needed the help of others just to move (Dauchez, 2014). But his willingness to help their family did not fade, despite his situation even though against his own will he begged again at a train station in Pasay, many commuters pitied him and

earned more compared before (Dauchez, 2014). He was happy but after his mother had known this, she was disappointed and told Darwin to stop begging but his irresponsible father saw it as opportunity to earn more hence, he continued despite his mother's refusal (Dauchez, 2014).

It is clear from these accounts that Darwin, despite the circumstances of shame, indignation and being benefited by his irresponsible father, had wanted to work or had begged to help his family and mother. Earning money under these circumstances was not what Darwin really wanted but was forced to do so because he is thinking of his family. Thus, it became meaningful. He was able to realize at an early age that his life's meaning does not only revolve around himself but his family. This was clearly emphasized with what he said to the staff of Tulay ng Kabataan foundation when he was encouraged to stay with them: "I would love to, you know (said Darwin). But my family: my brothers and sisters and my mother need the money I earn every day" (as cited in Dauchez, 2014, p. 33).

### Finding meaning in life by experiencing something or encountering someone

Frankl (1985) stated that when someone had experienced events where "goodness, truth, beauty, nature and culture" (pp. 133-134) are found this helps a person determine the meaning of his/her life. In addition, meeting someone who out of love, shows appreciation for a person, the way who s/he is, leads to meaning in life (Frankl, 1985).

The life of Darwin Ramos was full of people who had allowed him to experience, goodness, truth, beauty, and love. Starting from his own family, his friends, the community who took care of him and most importantly his friendship with God.

Even though his father was irresponsible and they lived in poverty Darwin was still able to experience goodness, truth and love from his mother, Erlinda Ramos. She had worked hard to compensate the irresponsibility of their father: "It was mostly Erlinda who had to support the family. She managed to do the laundry for a few neighboring families while looking after her children and earned just enough money to feed everyone" (Dauchez, 2014, p.7). Darwin also witnessed her mother's love for them when for multiple times she had rejected the idea of Darwin and his sister "Marimar" begging just to help her, particularly when Darwin was already ill (Dauchez, 2014). Another instance would be the pain of letting Darwin be taken care of by the Tulay ng Kabataan foundation, it was a painful decision for her, but she needed to agree for Darwin's health (Dauchez, 2014).

Another key person in his family was his sister, Marimar. She was the faithful companion, playmate, and helper to her brother when they begged in the streets of Manila, in selling of recyclable materials to junkshops together with Darwin's begging at the train station to earn something for their family (Dauchez, 2014). She was also instrumental in bringing his brother to the Tulay ng Kabataan foundation so that he would be taken good care of (Dauchez, 2014).

Another set of people who were important in Darwin's life, with whom he experienced goodness, truth and love were his friends. One of which was a security guard at the train station with whom Darwin patiently listened to with his stories (Dauchez, 2014). When he moved into the foundation he had befriended "Elmar" who protected him from other children who bullied him (Dauchez, 2014). Another friend from the foundation was "Estin" who was his faithful companion and friend when he was transferred to a more specific group of children with special needs. Estin was an abused child and could not speak but despite of this he and Darwin became good friends and took good care of Darwin (Dauchez, 2014).

The community of the foundation itself was an experience and encounter valuable to Darwin. The community led by Fr. Matthieu Dauchez, the nurse assigned to care for him whose name was "Joseph," his fellow children and all the staff of the foundation were very supportive of him and took good care of his every need. From the start of his stay, when he battled the symptoms of his illness, in his hospitalizations and at the very end of his life, they were all there for him. He had witnessed in them not only people who are trying to help him in his condition but saw in them a second family. This was exemplified when he was asked by one of the staff if he considers one of the children in the foundation as a friend: "He's not my friend, he's, my brother! He felt deeply that the foundation was a family and did not take fraternal bonds lightly" (Dauchez, 2014, p. 72).

The most important friendship that Darwin had in his life was his friendship with God. It was his mother who had introduced him to God through their prayer life as a family (Dauchez, 2014). They practiced daily prayers and in times of difficulties Darwin always cling to God for help and guidance and even prays for his irresponsible father (Dauchez, 2014). Darwin saw in God not only a sovereign refuge but someone whom he can identify with in his suffering as Darwin said: "Jesus, you will be my best friend." (Dauchez, 2014, p.10).

As his best friend Darwin was always excited to know more about Jesus and this was shown in their catechism classes: "He was also happy to see the chaplain for catechism in his household who told them about Jesus, his friend, and Darwin discovered and rediscovered moments of the life of Jesus that nourished his prayer" (Dauchez, 2014, p. 63).

Darwin by means of prayer through Eucharistic adoration always made sure to have time with his best friend together with his friends at the foundation:

Sixty children from various households gathered every Friday in the presence of Jesus the Eucharist. They prayed together and confided their joys and pains. Estin would push the wheelchair of his protégé up to the entrance of the chapel, then he would carry him into the oratory and sit him comfortably against the wall. Darwin would join his hands that he had laboriously put on his knees and close his eyes. (Dauchez, 2014, p. 66).

With these people around him, Darwin despite of poverty, pain, suffering and illness was still a person of joy, gratitude, humility, and other-centeredness (Dauchez, 2014). He did not forget to smile, to say thank you and care for the people around him (Dauchez, 2014). Having these kind of reactions in such situations simply implies that these people were not just companions on the journey but key agents for Darwin to realize the meaning of his life. They served as role models to Darwin in finding reasons to be joyful, grateful, humble and other-centered despite the gravity of the situations. He was able to find meaning in the worst of situations because he had someone who is by his side to confront those challenges.

What they did to Darwin motivated him to uncover his capacity for joy, gratitude, humility and other-centeredness. In turn they too were inspired by Darwin to do so, a common remark by Fr. Dauchez, the author of Darwin's biography. This was evidenced by the remark of Estin at Darwin's funeral as he said to Fr. Dauchez with a smile "Darwin, langit" (p. 83) (Darwin is already in heaven) which the priest immediately agreed to (Dauchez, 2014). It became a two-way process which could lead to the point that Darwin with his significant others genuinely loved each other. As Frankl (1959) puts it, it is only through an experience love that a person can uncover his potentials because of the love shown to him/her, which makes him/her realize that someone believes in his/her capacity and potentials as a human person which in turn inspires him/her to actualize them in life and find meaning in it.

**Finding meaning in life by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering**  
Frankl (1959) acknowledged that there are circumstances in life that "cannot be changed" (p.112) like unavoidable suffering. But he also argued that despite of such desperate situation one can still turn it to something meaningful by the attitude that a one chooses to act upon it (Frankl, 1959). In short, the situation is unchangeable but the way an individual reacts to it through his/her attitude can be changed which in turn could lead to meaning (Frankl, 1959). He also clarifies that it does not imply that suffering is a "necessary" (p.113) ingredient to realize meaning in life instead what he points out is the fact that even in suffering one can still find meaning. Which implies the "unconditionality of meaning" (p.114) that despite of an uncontrollable situation such as unavoidable suffering meaning can still be found.

The life of Darwin Ramos is filled with unavoidable suffering. He lived in poverty, had a degenerative disorder (Duchenne myopathy), was bullied, and faced a spiritual battle (Dauchez, 2014).

#### **Unavoidable suffering due to poverty**

As stated earlier, Darwin lived a life of poverty they lived in a "small slum on the south of Manila" (p.7) both of his parents met there until they have their own children (Dauchez, 2014). They lived in a garbage dump with makeshift houses which are not suitable for living (Dauchez, 2014).

Added to this is the presence of his irresponsible and violent father whose only concern is himself and his vices: "alcohol, drugs and gambling" (p.8) and not his family (Dauchez, 2014). This in turn gave Darwin and her sister Marimar the courage to beg (even with his illness) to help their mother (who was strongly against it) in sustaining their family (Dauchez, 2014). They were also forced out of their home in the slums and was forced to live in the streets (Dauchez, 2014). Hence, with their poverty and with the fact of Darwin's lingering condition, even though it was painful for her and with Darwin, Darwin's mother, Erlinda allowed her son to be taken care of by the Tulay ng Kabataan foundation (Dauchez, 2014). The reality of their family's poverty cannot be avoided even he is already at the foundation. When he was visited by his family at the foundation, he had the impression that Marimar had involved herself in street prostitution just to help their family, he greatly disagreed with this and reprimanded his sister...

If you want to help your family, do it with your heart, not your body...unfortunately, soon after he learned that his little sister could not extricate herself from prostitution despite his admonition. He was greatly distressed by this news. He often confided her to Jesus, asking him to do what he would have wanted to do himself: to take care of her. (Dauchez, 2014, p. 56)

Yet despite of this poverty, Darwin faced life with joy and courage. As Fr. Dauchez (2014) remarked, that when the symptoms of his illness were not yet evident, he is fond of playing "Patintero" (p.8) with the children of his age and has the attitude of "smiling and being contented" (p.8) with their life. Darwin together with his sister Marimar also find the courage to beg and scavenge to help their mother (Dauchez, 2014). This joy and courage were also manifested when Darwin was begging even with the presence of the symptoms of his illness at the train station as Fr. Dauchez (2014) stated:

Cleaners, ticket agents, guardians, all the employees of the station knew him. All were happy to find the cheerful, even if disabled, little fellow every morning. He impressed everyone with his courage and mostly his everlasting joy, despite his disease, despite his father's oppression. (p.23)

There was also a time when his father brought his younger brother at the station to elicit more pity from the commuters, he was angry inside but instead of being consumed by his anger he just enjoyed the time with his brother and played with him, displaying a joyful interaction between the two (Dauchez, 2014). This joy was also maintained by his friends at the slums who visits him at the train station (Dauchez, 2014, p.24).

Moreso, Fr. Dauchez (2014) mentioned in Darwin's biography that while he was begging at the train station Darwin had an invincible companion, since he had the practice of praying to Jesus. He saw Jesus as a companion who he can identified with in suffering. Surprisingly even he had his own suffering because of poverty, and his illness Darwin did not only pray for his own welfare but also for the poverty he witnessed in society:

He confided in Him his numerous intentions: not only his own sufferings but also those he witnessed hopelessly everyday: violent street fights for no reason, slum children well-known to him who inhaled glue to forget how hungry they were, older ones stealing for a few pesos, and the police raids whose real intentions were to get a hold of the loot rather than protect people. But what hurt him the most was to recognize some of his young neighbors in the prostitutes who hung around the station in the evening. He watched, disgusted, the sordid ballet of grown men, sometimes foreigners, hiring sexual services from innocent young people who were prisoners of this human deprivation. He could not understand why the police, so eager to chase after a child stealing a handful of fruit, allowed these men to enter neighboring hotels with children who were now nothing than objects for their sexual pleasure. (p.24)

#### **Unavoidable suffering due to bullying**

On his first day at the foundation Darwin also faced the challenge of being bullied. This is unavoidable suffering for any child particularly when one does not have a choice to whom they will be with in a children's foundation. The foundation staff did what he can to stop this bullying but when he is not around it goes back (Dauchez, 2014). In the case of Darwin this was stopped because of his friend Elmer who supported and protected him together with his other friends (Dauchez, 2014). Hence, because of this Darwin had the courage to make friends with the others and his friends grew as time goes by (Dauchez, 2014).

#### **Unavoidable suffering due to illness**

Darwin suffered from Duchene myopathy, an illness that deteriorates the muscles with an unknown cure (Dauchez, 2014). He first felt the symptoms when he was five, by having frequent falls with no reasons including a weakened body, his mother brought him to a clinic for check-up but sadly he was not diagnosed well

because of the prejudice of the doctor (Dauchez, 2014). When he was 7 the symptoms worsened and he lost his ability to walk with his legs hence he used his arms to move himself (Dauchez, 2014).

Arriving at the foundation changed the course of Darwin's life, he was well taken care of. He had his own wheelchair and was even given a specialized one that suits his condition, his fellow children at the foundation especially Estin, the staff, Fr. Dauchez and his personal nurse, Joseph were very caring to him and provided his every need.

When his condition got worst, he needed to be confined in a hospital. Fr. Dauchez (2014) narrated that there was a time that he needed to be intubated to help his breathing since manual ventilation can no longer help him, Fr. Dauchez was hesitant at first together with Darwin but even though it would be very painful for him, he accepted it since Fr. Dauchez said that it will be the only way possible to help him breathe. Because of the said intubation procedure Darwin was not able to speak again (Dauchez, 2014). Darwin also suffered from the condition of the hospital where he was admitted in, since it was a public hospital, it was crowded and the facilities were not enough for the patients hence, he stayed in a makeshift ICU room (Dauchez, 2014). Fr. Dauchez (2014) also mentioned how some of the staff and doctors of the hospital were apathetic towards them. Fr. Dauchez, the staff of the foundation and children took rounds to take care of Darwin while he was admitted in the hospital. On an Easter Sunday of September 2012 Darwin died at the age of 18, his family, friends and the community from the foundation were all there at his side (Dauchez, 2014).

While battling with his illness Darwin had shown distinct attitudes of courage, hope, other-centeredness, joy and gratitude. Upon feeling the symptoms of his disease Darwin did not hold back and had the courage in helping his family through begging at the train station (Dauchez, 2014). Even though they were exploited by his father, particularly in his illness, Darwin still had the hope that one day his father would change for the better (Dauchez, 2014). This hope was also exemplified as he embraced the life of being part of the foundation, that he has still the chance of living a joyful life despite of his illness, this was seen in his willingness to learn new things in their classes at the foundation together with their catechism classes: "He was eager to learn, and Ana, the foundation's teacher, was impressed with the determined, sometimes even imperious, curiosity of the little fellow in his wheelchair. Darwin wanted to understand everything, to be amazed" (Dauchez, 2014, p. 63).

Despite of his suffering due to illness Fr. Dauchez (2014) remarked that Darwin remained other other-centered:

Witnessing one of the biggest scandals in the world knows, innocent children suffering, I am torn apart. I would like Darwin to feel all the affection I have for him, instead it is him who exudes love. I would like him to draw courage from me, but his generous spirit is catching. I would like to support him in his hardship; he inspires me. His weakness is my strength. (p. 31)

Another evident attitude portrayed by Darwin despite his illness was joy. Fr. Dauchez (2014) for multiple times would mention the smile on Darwin's face at his stay at the foundation and in the most painful stages of his illness at the hospital. This was beautifully expressed when he wrote down something:

Using my support again, he scribbles a few more words on the right of the page. Masayang-masaya aka. "I am very happy." He drops the pen and points at the short sentence to ensure I am taking him seriously. Then he offers me a beautiful smile. I am wordless and quickly wipe the tears in my eyes. I was not expecting those simple but profound words: I read them again and again. In the way we see things in our world, Darwin has nothing left to be happy Physically or emotionally. His body makes him suffer and there is a little hope of recovery. He should be in despair, but instead mysteriously, he expresses joy. I do not doubt for one second the authenticity of this joy: an inexplicable joy that plunges us into a mystery beyond comprehension. (Dauchez, 2014, p. 61)

Darwin's joy was partnered with gratitude. This was consistent throughout his life. He was thankful to his mother, to his friends at the foundation, the staff and Fr. Dauchez for all the kindness they have shown him. It was a consistent attitude throughout his life even amid suffering:

Darwin takes a deep breath, which is a huge effort, to be able to speak. And then he tells me very slowly but as loudly as he can, knowing the pain he is in: Thank you for everything, Father. Thank you. That is all. That is what he wanted to tell me. Those few words resume his life. A thanksgiving. He endlessly repeated these words, "Thank you," when we visited his household, when an educator passed by him, when his friends

pushed his wheelchair, or when there were visitors to the foundation. Darwin always impressed those who met him with his kind words and large smile. That evening, even as he began his Holy Week, he did not fail to say those two words. Even if talking is excruciating for him, he wants to say, "Thank you." He is not complaining about his pain, nor asking for anything. All those efforts for the simple "Thank you." A free word, a smile directly from the heart. Divine exhalation. (p.6)

Fr. Dauchez (2014) believes that Darwin was able to display such attitudes despite of suffering because he looks up to Jesus as role model and has seen his suffering as a mission:

Darwin has always accepted without fatalism the evolution of his disease that he calls his mission. His infirmity and his sufferings have a meaning, he is aware of it. I remember the day when Darwin told me: "You know, Father, I think Jesus wants me to hold on until the end, just like what He did." He was expressing his edifying comprehension of his "mission" and was walking in the steps of the One who had suffered like him. And if he was not too sure of the path to follow, he was absolutely convinced that he would not be discouraged, leaning on the stick of perseverance, hand in hand with Jesus Christ. (pp. 38-39)

### Unavoidable suffering due to spiritual battle

Darwin's close relationship with Jesus also implied that the devil wants him to despair, amid his hospitalization Fr. Dauchez (2014) mentioned that on the Thursday of his Holy Week at the hospital Darwin seemed terrified at something and the priest had felt that Darwin is pleading for prayers for he is battling with someone:

Darwin is clearly experiencing a terrible spiritual battle in broad daylight, like some of the biggest saints of the hagiography. The devil does not even bother to hide when dealing with such pure soul. His biggest deception, which is to pretend he does not exist, has no effect on such a heroic child. Desperation is the last battle left. Doubting the friendship of the One who has always been with him on his earthly pilgrimage. (p. 40)

It was tough battle as Darwin continuously stares at the ceiling with fearful eyes but fought valiantly through prayer as Fr. Dauchez prayed with him and had given him the extreme unction (Dauchez, 2014).

Darwin in facing all these unavoidable suffering had indeed portrayed that even in uncontrollable situations meaning can be derived as Frankl (1959) theorized. Darwin in his courage and joy to face poverty; friendship with others despite of bullying; courage, hope, other-centeredness, joy and gratitude during illness and courage in the midst of a spiritual battle simply implies that suffering is not the last word but the attitude one chooses to face them. The hindrance to meaning is not the unavoidable suffering but the individual's reaction to it.

## DISCUSSION

### On Victor Frankl's 3 ways of finding meaning in life

It can be said that Darwin's search for the meaning of his life through these three ways overlaps in terms of his being other-centered. He was able to find meaning even in the humiliation of begging because of his love for his family. He saw the people around him as role models, hence, through his experience of goodness, truth, beauty, and love by encountering them he became aware of his potential for meaning and was also able to inspire them. Implicating a two-way mode of inspiration. He endured unavoidable suffering for the sake of his family, out of gratitude to the people who supported and was with him and as an imitation to Jesus Whom he identified with. Looking at Victor Frankl's (1959) 3 ways of finding meaning in life it can be said that all three are geared to other-centeredness: by doing something for the other, being in relationship with others and offering one's unavoidable suffering for the sake of others. Darwin did all 3 as described above and in the results of the study. This affirms Ong's (2008) study that through Frankl's Logotherapy, which includes these 3 ways of finding meaning in life can be an avenue to find life's meaning among the Filipino youth even for those who experience depression.

## CONCLUSION

As a conclusion the Servant of God Darwin Ramos was able to find meaning in life by becoming other-centered. This was clearly expressed as the researcher analyzed his life in from the lens of Victor Frankl's (1985) 3 ways of finding meaning in life. By helping his family in their finances at an early age through begging despite of his illness he had realized that his life is not only for his own

but for his family as well. By encountering and experiencing the love of his mother, sister, friends, the foundation, and God he was able to uncover his potential for meaning because someone is by his side and believes in him and in turn, he was also able to become an instrument of the same experience to them. With these same persons as his inspiration Darwin despite of the unavoidable suffering of poverty, being bullied, of his illness, and spiritual battle found his life's meaning as portrayed in his courage, hope, other-centeredness, joy, and gratitude.

This kind of other-centeredness that allowed Darwin to find the meaning of his life is rooted in his being a Filipino by treating the other not as other but as kapwa, as co-equal dignified person and the extension of himself (de Guia, 2005). Hence, he was able to discover the meaning of his life through his relationships with his kapwa.

### Recommendations

From the findings of this study the following suggestions are based on the implications of Darwin's search for the meaning of his life to help the Filipino youth to find the meaning of their lives. Since education plays a crucial role in the formation of the Filipino youth recommendations were made specifically for this sector.

Reinforce in schools, activities that highlights the importance of one's need of support systems among one's family, friends, peers and community in senior high school both in private and public schools. As implicated in the study, the role of support systems is important for Darwin to find the meaning of his life. In this regard schools particularly in the senior high school level must promote activities that will make them realize the important role of their significant others such as family, peers and the community. This will help them face transitions in life as they now enter the collegiate life or the vocational tract. As seen in the results of the study what helped Darwin in transitioning in life from his immediate family to his journey in the foundation and in his battle with his illness are his support systems (family, friends, community, and God). Moreso, as indicated by UPPI (2022) and Quintos (2017) support systems are important persons in the life of those Filipino youth who attempted suicide, hence, this support systems must also be educated and trained so that they may realize the importance of their presence and support to young Filipinos.

Teach the life of young Filipino saints like San Pedro Calungsod and Darwin Ramos as an inspiration of finding life's meaning through religious and values education among Catholic schools. Instead of repeated subjects being taught in junior high school to senior high school Catholic schools can focus on teaching the life of San Pedro Calungsod and Darwin Ramos in the senior high school level since as said earlier this is a time of transition. In them they can have particular role models to look up to and identify with in finding the meaning of their life in the Catholic context as indicated by Albert Bandura's social learning theory (McLeod, 2025).

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