

# Acceptability of Non-Muslim Teachers Teaching the History of Filipino Muslims And the Indigenous Peoples of Minsupala (HIS003) Among Muslim Meranaw Students

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## Abstract:

This paper is a survey on the acceptability of non-Muslim Teachers teaching the History of the Filipino Muslims and Indigenous Peoples of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan (HIS003) in the southern Philippines by Muslim Meranaw students. One hundred and one Meranaw served as research participants to a content-validated survey tool that is comprised of five items, representing five aspects of the students' perceptions on the non-Muslim teachers, namely: Impartiality, Trust, Comfortability, Capability, and Acceptability. Findings of the study reveal that research participants are generally confident with their non-Muslim teachers in teaching the subject. They thought that non-Muslim teachers' credentials and training are enough in supplying learnings in the subject. Respondents also thought that they can freely express their feelings and insights. The study shows a generally positive attitude of the Muslim Meranaw students towards their non-Muslim teachers teaching the history of the Muslims in the southern Philippines.

**Keywords:** Mindanao, Bangsamoro, Teaching, Muslim-Christian Relations

## Introduction

The Mindanao State University (MSU) is a special instrumentality of the Philippine government in the southern part of the country. It is special because it was the only state university charged with the responsibility of integrating the Filipino Muslims of into the main body politic of the nation (See MSU Charter).

As part of the effort of the university to carry out the above mandate, a special subject is required to be taken by all MSU students regardless of academic programs. This course is HIS003, which is the History of Filipino Muslims and Indigenous

Peoples (IPs) of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan (MINSUPALA). Currently, this course is handled by the History Departments of the multi-campus university and is taught to all students regardless of religion or ethnic backgrounds. The rationale for teaching the course to all students, (which includes a significant number of non-Muslims), is several folds. (1) It is supposed to acknowledge the historical contribution of the Muslims and IPs in the making of the Philippines. (2) It is supposed to correct the distorted, exclusive, and lopsided "popular history" that had alienated Philippine minority groups. Lastly, (3) it is supposed to raise

awareness among people that the problem affecting the Filipino Muslims is a problem that affects the entire nation (Caballero, 2015).

Apart from the above, the teaching of the subject is supposed to promote empathy among non-Muslims for the plight of the Filipino Muslims. As such, the subject may be considered a tool for Muslim-Christian dialogue and better understanding.

Lately however, a controversy arose in one of the campuses of MSU as to who should handle the very delicate subject. The controversy began when some Muslim faculty members argued that the subject would be better taught if teachers handling it were Muslims themselves. The Christian teachers, of course, vehemently opposed the argument stressing that teaching history is not only a matter of perspective but more importantly educational qualification as well. Mention must be made that Christian faculty members dominate the History Departments of some MSU campuses.

While the debate was intense between the Muslim and Christian teachers, the students, who are the ultimate recipients of classroom instruction, were always silent. Hence, to give them a voice in the debate, this survey is undertaken.

### Literature Review:

Teaching history at the tertiary level requires an innovative and creative approach in order to ensure a dynamic learning experience on the part of the students. In the study of Badilles *“Lived experiences of Tertiary Students in the teaching of Philippine History Courses”*, the author highlighted the student’s satisfaction and appreciation to faculty-member’s approach. The students also appreciated the utilization of the primary sources in teaching history in which the historical knowledge of the students would improve. Moreover, most respondents focused on the attitudes and personalities of the faculty members teaching history subjects (Badilles, 2017).

Interestingly, the study of Javinari entitled *“Proper Education for the Muslim Filipino Children from Muslim Parents’ Perspectives”*, interviewed ten

Muslim parents from a public school in Cainta, Rizal. The study found that Muslim parents expressed their desire of a holistic education that would prepare their children to become productive citizens and at the same time good Muslims. The findings provided invaluable inputs for educational administrators in developing improvement plans, programs and projects related to inclusive education like Muslim education. With the recognition of the peculiar needs of Muslim Filipino children, teachers need continuing training on exemplary practices that recognize and affirm diversity of learners (Javinari, n.d.).

In the work of Baybado Jr., *Beyond Colonization: The Impact of History in Philippine Interreligious Dialogue*, he claimed that the perception of history is crucial in interreligious dialogue. He further stated that the different historical narratives have enduring impact on Muslim-Christian relations. That colonization is Christianization for Christians and de-Islamization for the Muslims. Hence, an “invisible wall” exists which divides the Muslims and Christians like those in the Philippines. He also accentuated that the guru and Sufi missionary, Karim Al-Makhdum when he arrived in Tawi-Tawi in 1380, brought Islam. For the next three centuries, Islam dominated the archipelago. However, in 1521, Christianity arrived in the archipelago with the coming of Ferdinand Magellan in search of the Spice Islands. On March 31, 1521, Christianity had its birth date, which later become the principal religion of the archipelago. Yet, the introductions of these two religions gave rise to new identities (Baybado, 2017, pp. 38-43). Although Babado Jr. presented the impact of the Philippine colonial history to the Muslim-Christian relation, however, he failed to elaborate the other relevant causes of the disharmonious relationship between the Muslims and Christians in the Philippines.

Similarly, the study of Majul, *The Role of Islam in the History of the Filipino People* which focuses on the role of Islam in forging the sense of Filipino nationalism reveals that the Muslim-Christian relations in the Philippines was highly influenced by the Spanish colonial era. When the colonizers imposed the “Divide and Rule Policy” to the

natives in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao the natives become estranged from each other. On top of that, they eventually become enemies when the Christian converts in Luzon were exploited by the Spaniards to fight the Muslims in the south thus extended their frontier. Yet, Majul concluded that Filipino national consciousness cannot be achieved so long as the natives use their religion and diverse political loyalties as their identifying factors (Majul, 1966, pp. 303-305).

Furthermore, the study of Gowing entitled *Of Different Minds: Muslim and Christian Perceptions of the Mindanao Problem* presented several factors of the discordant relationship of the Muslims and Christians in the Philippines. He asserted that the Muslims and Christians in the Philippines lived in a different world. That the Christian and Muslim Filipinos look at the problems of their interrelationship with quite different minds. Accordingly, the Muslims belong to an "Age of Faith" where they tend to see their relationship with Christians in religious terms. That the Muslims failed to understand and accept enlightened humanitarianism of the modern Philippines. Meanwhile, the Christians lived in an "Age of Politics" where they perceived Islam as a tool of the Muslims to materialize their political interests. Further, he also cited the idea of "We are the same" vs. "We are different" where he concluded that the Muslim and Christian resentment is not a problem of what they have in common but rather of what made them different (Gowing, 1977, pp. 243-252). Accordingly:

*While Christian Filipinos are loudly insisting "All Filipinos are the same!" Filipino Muslims are saying, "We know the things we have in common, respect? Really, respect? The thing that makes us different, our Islamic faith (Gowing, 1977, pp. 245-247)."*

In his study, Gowing added the idea of "Integration vs. Orchestration". It is the principal aim of the Philippine government to "integrate" the cultural communities into the mainstream of the Philippine life. Technically, the word "integration" means

bringing many different parts together to make a whole without compromising the individual identities of each part. However, in the implementation of the said integration, the Muslims have perceived it differently. For them, if not all, the integration is a step towards their assimilation into the dominant Christian society. Meanwhile, a Muslim scholar said that the Muslims prefer the term "orchestration" (Gowing, 1977, pp. 250-251). Accordingly:

*The term "orchestration" is a beautiful and helpful concept. The violin and the trumpet and the drums are all adjacent instruments in an orchestra; and if the orchestra is to produce symphonic music, and not just noise, then no one instrument can be allowed to drown out the sound of others (Gowing, 1977, pp. 250-251).*

He concluded that the Muslim-Christian relations in the Philippines sprung from a deeper reality of the Philippine national and Muslim Filipino community. Apparently, Gowing presented the differing realities of the Muslim-Christian relationship in the Philippines, which focuses on their colonial and religious history. However, he failed to recognize that there were also manifestations of harmonious Muslim-Christian relationships in the Philippines (Gowing, 1977, pp. 250-251).

The Muslim-Christian relations in the Philippines is not entirely characterized with hostilities. In the study of Lacar, *Balik Islam: Christian Converts to Islam in the Philippines, c. 1970-1998* reveals the Filipino *Balik-Islam* who are defined as the individuals who have made a paradigm shift—Christianity-Islam in their ordered view of life from one perspective to another. The study shows that there is a rapid growth of *Balik-Islam* converts in the Mindanao. For instance, in 1988, there were at least seven-hundred eighty (780) *Balik-Islam* converts in Lanao del Sur and Marawi City. In the same year, in Lanao del Norte and Iligan City, there were five hundred seventy (570) converts. Moreover, in 1992, Zamboanga del Sur and Zamboanga del Norte had reportedly five hundred

(501) *Balik-Islam* converts. He explained that one of the reasons that stimulated their conversion was their harmonious relationship with the Muslims that surround them especially when they are away from their immediate family. He concluded that the *Balik-Islam* phenomenon in the Philippines specifically in Mindanao could be an effective bridge to link the two religions [Islam and Christianity] thus improves the religious and cultural facets of the Philippine life (Lacar, 2001, pp. 41-57).

The other manifestation of a harmonious Muslim-Christian relationship in the Philippines is revealed in the study of Lacar, *Muslim-Christian Marriages in the Philippines: Some Tentative Generalization*. His study explains that the Muslim-Christian intermarriages in the Philippines have common patterns. These patterns are the couples' high level of educational and occupational attainment, late age at marriage, and prior geographic mobility away from their traditional home community. His study also explores the implications of these patterns to the Philippine educational system. Meanwhile, the findings of his study shows that Muslim-Christian intermarriages in the Philippines will rapidly grow, dominated by highly educated couples. While schools and places of employment will continue to provide many opportunities for social interaction hence increase the possibilities for cross-religious romance and marriage. He added that social change in its varied forms would take place as the highly educated couples can easily accept the changes of modernization. He concluded his study that schools play a pivotal role in the integration of the Muslims and Christians in the Philippines as an important factor of the Muslim-Christian intermarriages in the country (Lacar, 1972, pp. 77-82).

While the above studies clearly focused on Muslim-Christian relations. None of them, nonetheless, investigates Muslim students' attitude towards their non-Muslim teachers. Thus, investigating the perspective and opinions of Muslim students on who should teach HIS003 is a contribution to the filling in of gaps.

## **Methodology:**

The study, basically, employed a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative part is discernible in the survey participated by 101 Muslims students who are enrolled at the Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT). The survey tool was a questionnaire composed of five statements with responses gauged in the Likert Scale. This questionnaire was content validated by three experts in the field of history and piloted to 20 Muslim students.

To qualitatively substantiate the survey results, the researchers also employed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Two (2) sets of virtual FGDs were organized and participated by seven students each. These were conducted on November 26 and November 30, 2022, respectively. Highlights of the FGDs were recorded, transcribed, and translated.

To keep the confidentiality of the responses of the students who participated in the FGDs, they are given their corresponding codes. The following codes are used: FGD1 for the First FGD; FGD2 for the second FGD; M for Male; F for Female; and # for their sequence. Hence, when a code says "FGD1M5", the source refers to the fifth male participant of the first FGD. Subsequently, when a code says "FGD2F3", the source refers to the third female participant of the second FGD. As part of the ethical standards of research, the consent of all survey respondents and FGD participants were secured at the outset. Then, Thematic Analysis was employed in the analysis of the anecdotal data.

## **Results and Discussions:**

This part of the paper presents the profile of the survey respondents, their responses to the various items in the questionnaire, and the difference or similarity of the said responses.

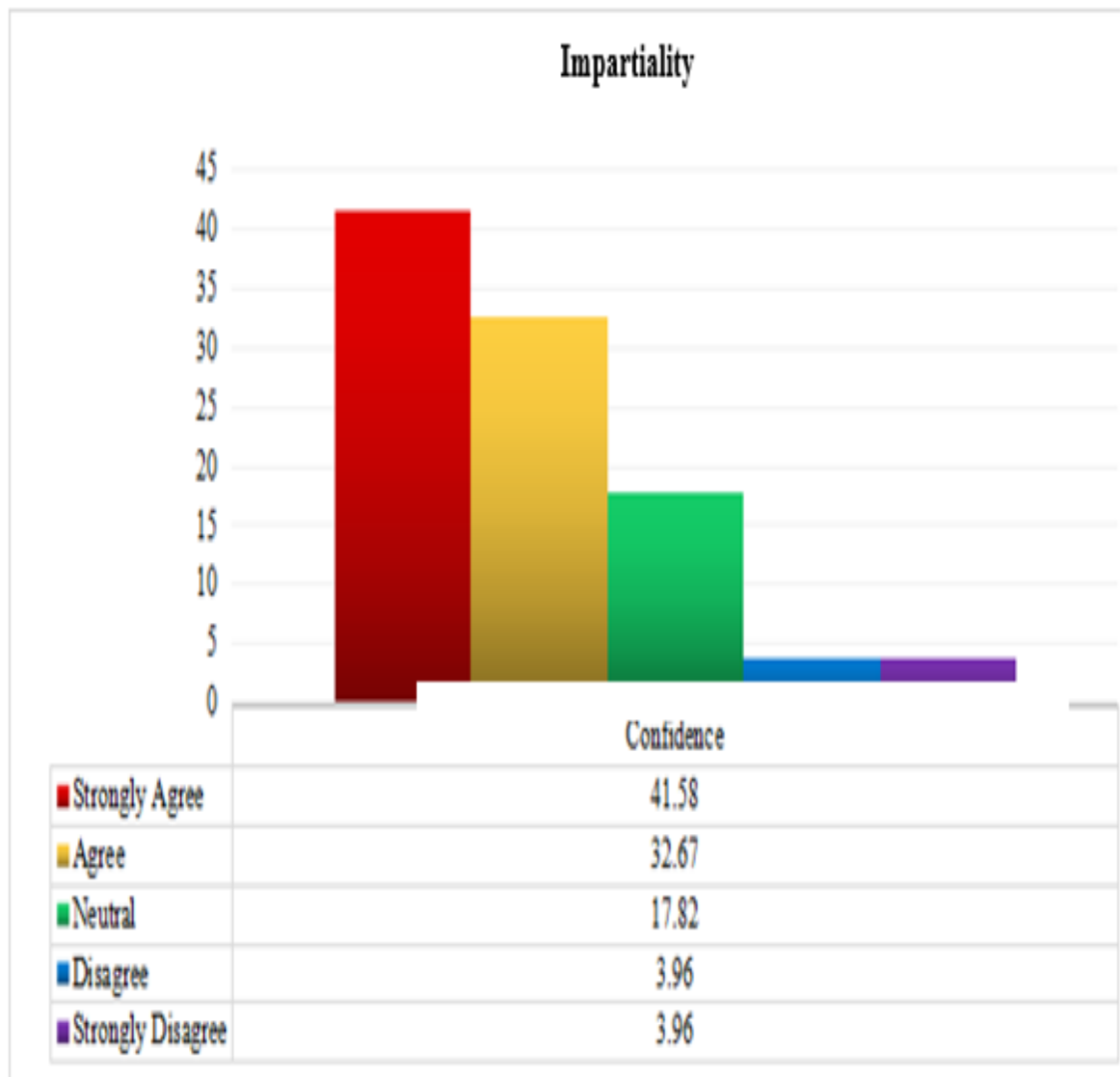
### ***Profile of the Respondents:***

The survey was participated by 101 Muslim Meranaw students in MSU-IIT who are enrolled in the first semester of academic year 2022-2023 or have completed the subject, HIS003 prior to the said semester. Of the 101 respondents, 47.52% are male while 52.48% are female; 50.5% are currently enrolled while 49.5% have already completed the course. Below is the summary of the demographic profile of the respondents:

**Table 1. Respondents’ Profile Summary on the Impartiality of the non-Muslim Teachers**

	Currently Taking	Completed	Total
Male	29	19	48
Female	22	31	53
<b>Total:</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>101</b>

One of the five (5) questions asked of the respondents was on whether or not they are confident that their non-Muslim teacher is impartial in teaching HIS003. Based on the responses given, 41.58% of them answered “Strongly Agree”; 32.67% clicked “Agree”; 17.82% were “Undecided”; 3.96% responded “Disagree”; and another 3.96% indicated “Strongly Disagree”. Adding the number of those who responded with strongly agree and agree yields seventy-five (75) individuals. This means that 74.26% of the respondents are confident that their non-Muslim teacher is impartial in teaching the course. This is obviously an overwhelming majority.



**Figure 1. On the Impartiality of non-Muslim Teachers**

The overwhelming confidence of the respondents that their non-Muslim teachers possess impartiality in teaching the course is discernible in the following comments:

In the focus group discussion conducted, one of the participants believe that his teacher is impartial in teaching HIS003 because he anchors his discussion to the existing facts. His teacher delivers his lessons in a neutral and open manner. He encourages his students, especially the Muslims to express their ideas and opinions to the class. In fact, he is confident that his teacher is impartial because he never heard him saying derogatory things about them. According to him:

*“My non-Muslim teacher is impartial in teaching the subject because he always based his discussion to the reference books, journals, and other related materials. During our class, he always ask us if we have questions and if not, to share our ideas and opinions about the topic. Regardless of our discussions, ideas, and opinions that we shared during our class, he never discriminated us or say something nasty about us especially our culture. That is why, for me, my teacher is impartial in teaching our subject (FGD1M1).*

Another FGD participant expressed a similar view. He stated that aside from the fact that his teacher anchors his discussions to the available and related sources, he also include and share his personal experiences to the Tri-People in Mindanao. He believed that by doing so, it makes their discussion engaging and relatable. He said:

*“My non-Muslim teacher is impartial in teaching HIS003 because he is knowledgeable about the subject. I noticed that my teacher is quite immersed to our culture, Muslim culture not just ours but also that of the IPs in Mindanao*

*through his personal experiences. Whenever he shares his encounters to our class, it makes our discussions true-to-life and engaging (FGD2M1).”*

Few of the participants, on the other hand, are confident that their teacher in HIS003 is impartial in teaching the subject because they believed that their department hired them due to their competence in achieving the core goals of the subject (FGD1M2, FGD2M2, FGD2M3, and FGD1F2).

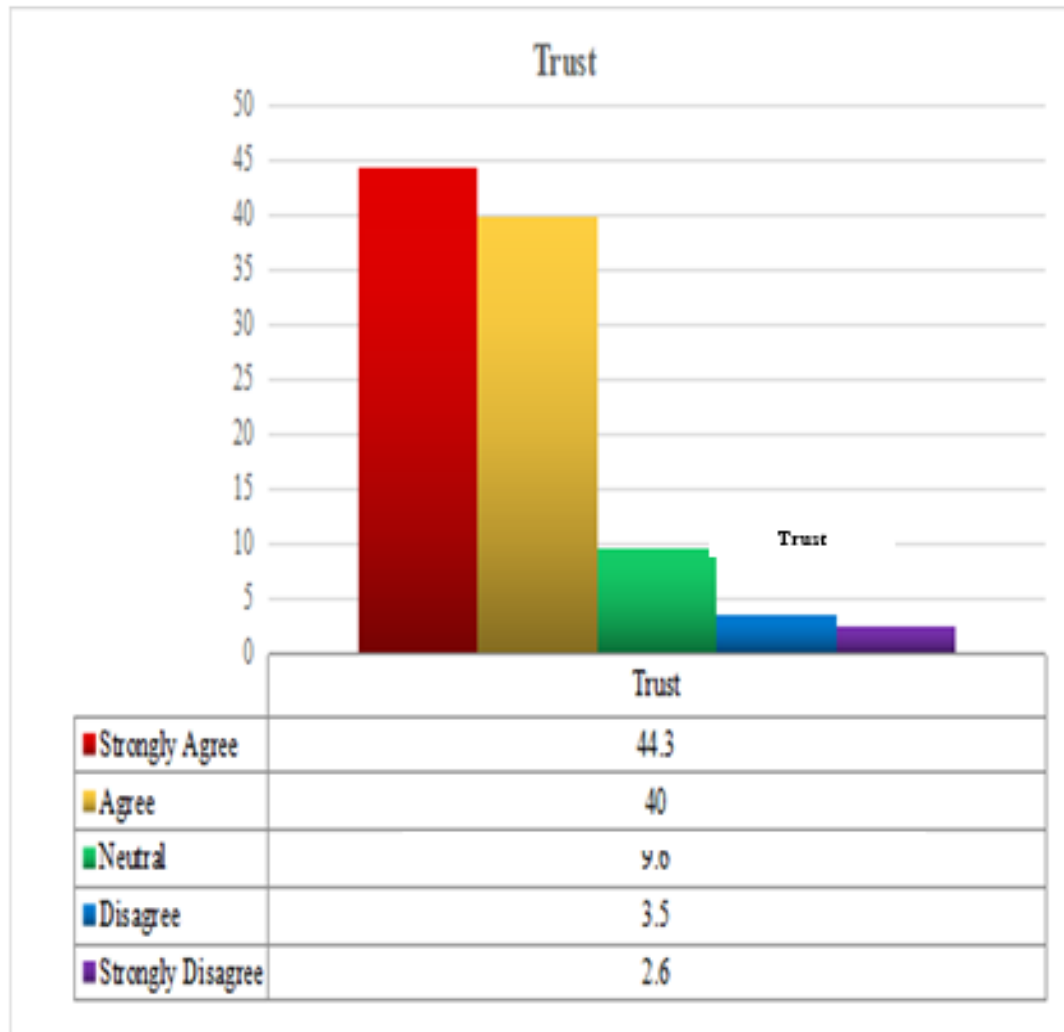
Although majority are confident in the impartiality of their non-Muslim teachers, a minority of the respondents were not that confident. One participant explains this:

*“My teacher in HIS003 encourages us to share our opinions and ideas about our discussion, however, there are times that she shares a generalize[d] idea or information about our culture. It was subtle but I noticed it. It was kind of offensive but I cannot speak up against it because I am the only one Muslim student in our class (FGD1F1).”*

Nevertheless, while the above opinion exists, a lone FGD participant only shared this.

#### ***On the Qualification of the non-Muslim teachers:***

The second question was on whether or not they can trust their non-Muslim teacher in teaching HIS003. Based on the data gathered, 44.3% responded “Strongly Agree”; 40% clicked “Agree”; 9.6% were “Undecided”; 3.5% answered “Disagree”; and only 2.6% responded “Strongly Disagree”. Summing up the number of those who responded strongly agree and agree yields a total number of eighty-four (84) individuals or 84.3% of the respondents who find their non-Muslim teacher trustworthy in teaching the course. Similarly, such figure is a compelling majority.



**Figure 2. On the Qualifications of the non-Muslim Teachers**

In the focus group discussion, the participants stated their reasons as to why they trust their non-Muslim teacher in teaching HIS003. Four of the participants posited the same views. Their trust to their teacher in teaching the subject is based on their qualifications. They know and acknowledge that the Department of History of MSU-IIT is competent and meticulous in accepting their faculty (FGD1M1, FGD1M2, FGD1F1 & FGD2M2). One of the participants emphasized:

*“I trust that my teacher in HIS003 is qualified in teaching the subject owing to the fact that he is hired by the Department of History in MSU-IIT. I believe that his credentials and experiences satisfied the qualifications of the department (FGD2M2).”*

In addition, another participant in the FGD stated that she trust his teacher in teaching HIS003 because of his credentials and experiences that are resonating during their class discussions and lectures. According to her:

*“I commend the qualities of our non-Muslim teacher which is very engaging and relatable to the students. It was very entertaining as well (FGD1F2).”*

On the contrary, two of the FGD participants believe that aside from the credentials and experience of the teachers, the ethnicity of the teacher teaching HIS003 should be part of the qualifications (FGD2M3 & FGD2M1). They believe that a Muslim teacher is more effective and credible in teaching the subject. One of the participants expressed:

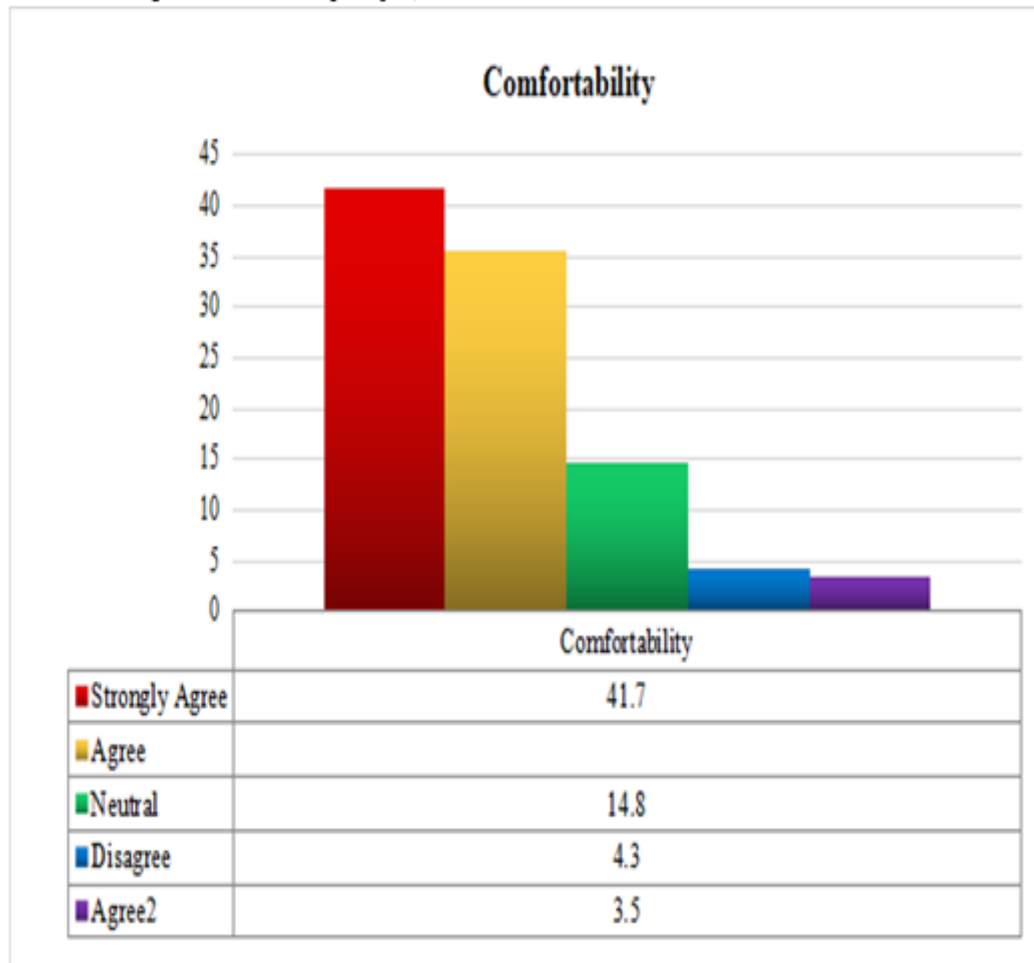
*“Although ethnicity should not be the sole determinant for a HIS003 teacher, it is a very strong determinant in the effectiveness of its teaching as to how the HIS003 teacher represents his or her ethnic background with delivering the modality of HIS003, and so I believe it is among if not the best qualifications, as to the instructor's ethnic background. There are many factors, but ethnic background*

*is a very influential determinant (FGD2M1)."*

Although two participants offered their contradicting opinion, it is worth noting that the majority of the FGD participants trust the credentials and experiences of their non-Muslim teacher in teaching HIS003.

***On Comfortability of Muslim Students with non-Muslim Teachers***

The third question was on whether or not they are comfortable in expressing their ideas and sentiments if their teacher is a non-Muslim. The graph shows that 41.7% of them "Strongly Agree"; 35.7% of them "Agree"; 14.8% of them were "Undecided"; 4.3% of them "Disagree", and 3.5% of them "Strongly Disagree". Lumping the figure of those who answered strongly agree and agree yields to seventy-seven (77) individuals or 77.4 % of the respondents. Although there are few of them who are undecided, the result still shows a favorable response of the majority.



**Figure 3. On the Comfortability of Muslim Students with non-Muslim Teachers**

In the focus group discussion, five (5) among the seven (7) participants expressed the same view that they are comfortable in expressing their ideas and sentiments to their class with the presence of their non-Muslim teachers because they show approachability and open-mindedness. They always encourage their students to speak up, share, and express their ideas and opinions to the class without judgment. Apart from that, the activities that are organized by their non-Muslim teachers help them to break tension and to form friendship with their classmates. (FGD1M2,

FGD2M3, FGD1F2, and FGD1M1). A participant shared with a positive remark:

*"I don't feel awkward in the class being the only Muslim student because I don't feel exclusion from the group. It was very enjoyable both our discussions and activities (FGD1F1)."*

While the majority of the FGD participants agree, two (2) participant give their uncertain perspectives about the topic:



One of the said two participants expressed that the level of comfortability of the Muslim students towards their non-Muslim teachers is dependent to their experience and teaching style. He believes that the non-Muslim teacher who is well immersed with the Muslim culture is more effective both in discussion and in forming a comfortable atmosphere during his or her lecture. According to him:

*“The better immersed the teacher in Muslim culture, the more effective the discussion. They can elaborate on Muslim clans here in the Philippines, as well as lore, coming from a Muslim background. It really depends on the teacher considering the comfortability of students in expressing their ideas and opinions (FGD2M1).”*

The other participant added that the comfortability of the Muslim students in expressing their opinions and sentiments to their non-Muslim teacher is dependent to both the topic and the situation. Although his teacher is open for ideas and opinions from his students, he is still uncertain because there are instances that he reserves his opinions to avoid confusion. He mentioned:

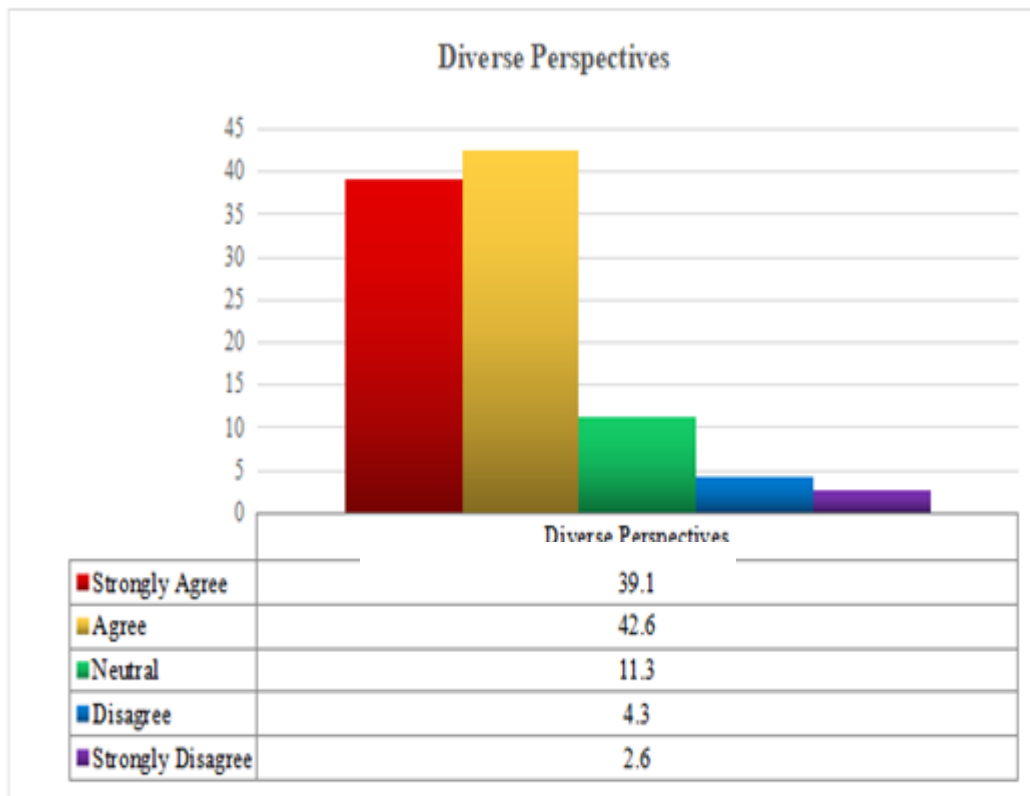
*“My comfortability depends on the situation and topic. For example,*

*when ask by the non-Muslim teacher if there are instances that I will keep to myself because I might be misunderstood. However, our teacher is very open to our ideas and opinions (FGD2M2).”*

Nevertheless, it should be noted that two (2) participants in the focus group discussion only expressed the opinion mentioned above. While the said participants are outliers, it is important to document their perspectives as other HIS003 Muslim students under a non-Muslim teacher in MSU-IIT may share this.

***On the non-Muslim Teachers’ ability to Provide Diverse Perspectives***

The fourth question was on whether or not their HIS003 non-Muslim teacher gives a diverse perspective in teaching the course. The data reveals that 39.1% answered “Strongly Agree”; 42.6% responded “Agree”; 11.3% were “Undecided”; 4.3% decided to “Disagree”; and only 2.6% indicated “Strongly Disagree”. Summing up the percentage of those who answered strongly agree and agree yields to eighty-two (82) individuals or 81.19% of the total respondents. Although there are few respondents who are uncertain, the majority still believes their non-Muslim teacher give a diverse perspective in teaching the course.



**Figure 4. On the non-Muslim Teachers’ Ability to Provide Diverse Perspectives**

In the focus group discussion, two (2) participants expressed similar opinions about the topic. They believe that their non-Muslim teacher provides diverse perspectives in teaching HIS003 because they use and based their discussions to several source materials relevant to the topic. They provide and discuss topics that have opposing perspectives to their students. Further, their non-Muslim teachers encourage their students to speak and express their ideas and opinions (FGD2M3 &FGD1F2). One of the participants stated:

*“My non-Muslim teacher in HIS003 is competent and knowledgeable. She provides us several source materials from different authors who have varying point-of-view about the topic. During our class discussion, she never failed to discuss the topics from different perspectives and she is open for our opinions about the topic (FGD2M3).*

The statement above agrees to one of the FGD participants. He believes that his non-Muslim teacher provides a diverse perspective in teaching HIS003 because he is open and respectful to their opinions. In addition, he provides them information, specifically about Muslim culture that even them [Muslim students] are unfamiliar with. He mentioned:

*“Based on my experience my non-Muslim teacher takes so much effort and interest in Muslim culture to the point in understanding more than what I have understood on my own culture (FGD1M2).”*

Furthermore, three other participants of the FGD expressed that their non-Muslim teacher provides them a diverse perspective because they are interesting and open to learn varying perspectives about their culture especially from a

non-Muslim teacher (FGD2M2, FGD2M1, & FGD1F1). A participant stated:

*“I think we should be open for different opinions from different religions, it’s also interesting as a Muslim to know that we can learn as well from the non-Muslim teachers... (FGD1F1).*

One participant, however, gives an opinion that is completely different from the opinions given by other participants. He believes that Muslim teachers can offer diverse perspectives in teaching HIS003 better than the non-Muslim teachers can because they are part of the group [Muslim community] and they have the first-hand experience about their culture. On top of that, he admits that there are instances during their class discussions that his non-Muslim teacher is subjective and shares a generalized information about them. He expressed:

*“I believe that the Muslim teachers can offer diverse perspectives in teaching HIS003 better than the non-Muslim teachers because the Muslim teachers have more experience than the non-Muslim teachers that they can share during the discussion. Since they are Muslims, they grew up with their culture. Also, in our HIS003 class, sometimes my non-Muslim teacher is subjective and general in explaining our [Muslim] culture (FGD1M1).*

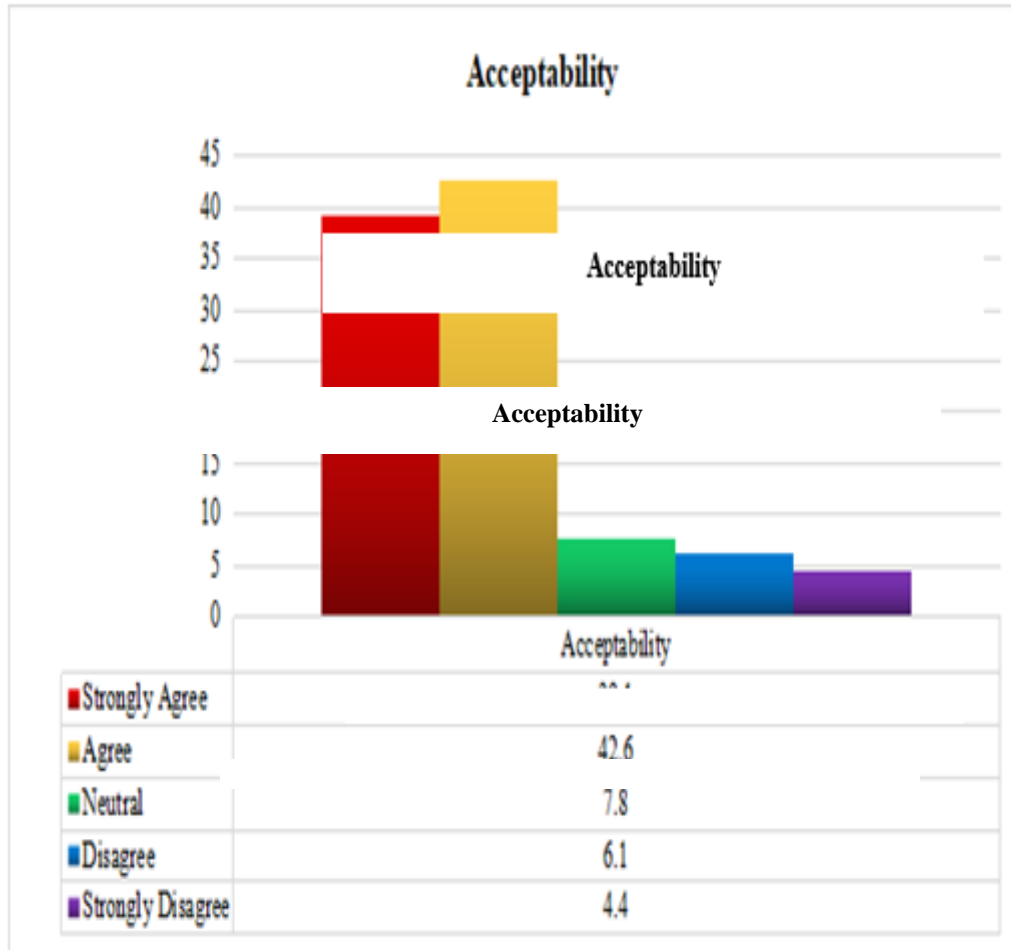
Based on the responses of the participants, it appears that there are varying opinions whether a non-Muslim teacher provides a diverse perspective in teaching HIS003. It is important that these opinions should be taken into consideration.

### ***On the Acceptability of Non-Muslim Teachers***

The fifth question was on whether or not it is acceptable for them if their teacher in HIS003 is a

non-Muslim. Based on the gathered responses, 39.1% answered “Strongly Agree”; 42.6% clicked “Agree”; 7.8% were “Undecided”; 6.1% tapped “Disagree”; and only 4.4% responded “Strongly Disagree”. Tallying the number of those who answered strongly agree and agree yield eighty-

two (82) individuals or 81.19% of the respondents finding it acceptable that HIS003 is handle by a non-Muslim teacher. Indeed, the number is an indication of the overpowering choice of the majority.



**Figure 5. On the Acceptability of Non-Muslim Teachers**

In the focus group discussion, the participants conveyed the reasons behind their responses about the topic. A participant expressed a positive remark that it is acceptable to have a non-Muslim teacher handling HIS003 to attain “balance” in teaching the subject. He added that having both a Muslim and non-Muslim teacher enable the students to learn the subject from different perspectives. According to him:

*“I believe that if the teacher of the subject, HIS003 is a Muslim, there is a tendency that the student will feel converted to Islam... the non-Muslim teacher can teach the subject in order*

*to have balance... there should be both Christian and Muslim teachers teaching HIS003 (FGD1M1).”*

Another participant shared the same response, he said:

*“I believe that a non-Muslim teacher offers an array and an exchange of information from both the teacher and the students. In simpler terms, the non-Muslim teachers will teach the subject incorporating his personal experience while he also learns from*

*his Muslim students. In this manner, both the non-Muslims be it the teacher and students are learning the culture and history of the Filipino Muslims (FGD2M1)."*

Furthermore, four of the participants shared similar sentiments in the acceptability of non-Muslim teachers in teaching HIS003. They believe that their non-Muslim teacher is competent and familiar to the cultural diversity of Mindanao. On top of that, they are teaching the subject in an engaging and relatable manner (FGD2M2, FGD1F1 & FGD1F2). One of the participants expressed:

*"I do not have any issue about a non-Muslim teacher who is teaching a subject to his or her Muslim students because they are apparently accustomed to it. As a matter of fact, our non-Muslim teacher is teaching HIS003 to us in an engaging, relatable, and logical manner. I believe that my non-Muslim teacher is open-minded and immersed to the complexity and diversity of the culture of Mindanao especially the Muslims (FGD2M3)".*

In as much as majority of the participants find it immensely acceptable that HIS003 is handle by a non-Muslim teacher, there is a participant who expressed an opposing response. According to him:

*"The subject [HIS003] will be "in-depth" if its teacher is a Muslim. He believed that the Muslim teachers could share narratives and or information that cannot be found from any book. Basically, the Muslim teachers have a high authority in teaching the subject compared to the non-Muslims (FGD1M2)".*

Based on the responses of the participants, it appears that there are varying opinions on the matter of the acceptability of the non-Muslim teachers in teaching HIS003 in MSU-IIT. It is

important that these opinions should be taken into consideration.

### **Conclusion:**

The controversies that arose over the fact that a significant number of non-Muslim teachers were teaching the History of the Filipino Muslims and Indigenous Peoples of Mindanao Sulu and Palawan led some to think that the course should be taught only by Muslim teachers. However, the study shows a positive perception and attitude of the Muslim Meranaw students towards their non-Muslim teachers, which subsequently connotes acceptability of the latter by the former. The paper shows this in five areas namely: students' confidence on their non-Muslim teachers; their trust towards them; their comfortability in expressing themselves in the presence of the non-Muslim teachers; their confidence on the non-Muslim teachers' ability to provide diverse perspectives, and the general acceptability of the said teachers by the Muslim Meranaw students.

On a final note, it is very important that in any debate, all stakeholders should be given space and voice. In this case, faculty members seemed to overlook that in the delivery of classroom instruction, the most important stakeholders are the students. It is just and proper to give these stakeholders the necessary space and voice.

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## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD)

FGD1M1 is a 4<sup>th</sup> year BA History student of the College of Arts and Social Sciences, MSU-IIT.

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