

# Practicing Ramadan inside the School Campus: Experiences of the Senior High School Muslim Students

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## ABSTRACT

Low endurance in religious activity engagement, particularly during Ramadan, presents a unique challenge for Muslim students in educational settings. This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of senior high school Muslim students observing Ramadan while attending school. Ten participants were selected through purposive sampling to provide in-depth insights into how they navigate academic and religious demands during this sacred month. The findings revealed two key themes: Attribute and Character development during Ramadan and Cultural Identity in the School Context. The first theme reveals that students relied on personal traits such as determination, perseverance, and resilience to cope with the exhaustion and mental fatigue of fasting. These attributes enabled them to stay focused academically, manage their energy, and balance religious observance with school responsibilities. Students emphasized the importance of inner strength and self-discipline in completing assignments and participating in classroom activities despite the challenges of fasting. The second theme, Cultural Identity, highlights how Ramadan practices, such as fasting, prayer, and reflection, serve as expressions of both faith and personal identity. Students discussed how their religious practices shaped their interactions within the school environment, despite sometimes facing limited accommodation for their religious needs. They found support from peers with similar cultural backgrounds, fostering a sense of community and solidarity that helped them stay motivated and connected. This study underscores the complex interplay between faith, identity, and academic life for Muslim students during Ramadan. Therefore, it calls for further investigation utilizing these themes to examine how Ramadan observance impacts students' personal attributes, character development, cultural identity, academic performance, well-being, as well as their social support networks. Consequently, such studies could contribute to the development of more supportive, understanding, and inclusive school environments for religiously diverse student populations, thereby ensuring that all students can engage in their faith while maintaining their educational experience.

**Keywords:** Practicing ramadan, school campus, experiences of the senior high school muslim students

## INTRODUCTION

The holy month of Ramadan is a deeply spiritual journey for Muslims worldwide, a time of intense devotion, reflection, and community. As I explore the experiences of Muslim students observing Ramadan, I am struck by the profound significance this month holds, not just as a religious obligation but as a transformative personal experience. Yet, the physical demands of fasting, particularly abstaining from food and drink from dawn till dusk, can cast a long shadow on the daily lives of those who observe it. For students, especially those in the crucial final year of high school, balancing the rigorous expectations of academics with the profound spiritual demands of Ramadan can be a delicate dance. As Hassan (2020) eloquently stated, "Fasting during Ramadan can lead to physiological changes which can impact cognitive function and overall well-being." (p.23). This resonates deeply with the lived experiences of many young Muslims, with low endurance in finding their energy, focus, and even their sense of self challenged during this sacred time. I can only imagine

the immense willpower and resilience required to navigate these challenges while striving for academic excellence.

This struggle is not confined to any one corner of the world. Building upon research in United Kingdom educational contexts, Latif et al. (2025) identified that disrupted sleep patterns, stemming from adherence to Western work schedules and Ramadan fasting, presented challenges to students, resulting in perceived impairments in cognitive function and mood; a phenomenon documented by increased fatigue and concentration difficulties among Muslim students globally. These young hearts, striving to excel in their studies while honoring their faith, find themselves navigating a complex landscape where physical exhaustion intertwines with the yearning for spiritual fulfillment. It fills me with a sense of admiration to witness their unwavering commitment to both their education and their faith.

In the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao, the challenges faced by Muslim students during Ramadan are significant. Studies have documented that fasting students often experience difficulties in concentration and class participation due to fatigue and hunger. For instance, Naparan and Balimbingan (2020) explored the experiences of Muslim students in a Catholic higher education institution in Region IX, Philippines, revealing that these students faced challenges such as compulsory attendance in religious activities and scheduling conflicts with prayer times, impacting their academic engagement. Similarly, Donato-Pua et al. (2024) investigated the impact of cultural integration on the academic performance of Muslim students, highlighting that cultural and religious practices, including fasting during Ramadan, influenced their educational experiences. These findings underscore the need for educators and policymakers to develop a deeper understanding of the lived realities of Muslim students during Ramadan, fostering an environment of empathy and support within educational institutions. The potential consequences of this struggle extend far beyond the walls of the classroom. The challenges faced by Muslim students during Ramadan extend beyond academics, deeply affecting their mental health and emotional well-being. Elshahoryi et al. (2025) conducted a comprehensive study examining the effects of Ramadan fasting on university students. Their research revealed significant changes in several key aspects of student well-being, including mental health, body composition, physical activity, and sleep outcomes. These findings underscore the intricate relationship between fasting and various dimensions of students' health and daily functioning.

Moreover, Elshahoryi et al. (2025) observed that students fasting during Ramadan experience distinct shifts in mental and physical health. The study highlights the challenges posed by fasting on students' academic and social lives, emphasizing the need for educational institutions to understand and address these unique challenges. By fostering empathy and creating supportive environments, educators and policymakers can better accommodate the needs of fasting students, ultimately promoting their academic success and overall well-being.

## **Statement of the Problem**

This study aims to understand the lived experiences and coping strategies of Muslim senior high school students with diminished stamina during Ramadan within the school setting. Specifically, this study seeks to answer: What are the lived experiences of Muslim senior high school students experiencing low endurance as they navigate the multifaceted challenges of observing Ramadan within the school environment?

## **Theoretical Lens**

This study is grounded in Cultural Identity Theory (CIT), as articulated by Collier and Thomas (1988), which posits that cultural identity is a dynamic and evolving construct. Rather than being a static or biologically determined trait, cultural identity is formed through one's identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that shares common symbols, meanings, and behavioral norms (Tetteh, 2013). It is shaped by ongoing lived experiences and social interactions within specific sociocultural contexts.

In the context of this research, cultural identity is defined as an individual's evolving sense of belonging to a cultural or religious community. This identity is influenced by shared values, beliefs, and practices, and is

particularly salient in environments such as secondary schools during Ramadan, where it is continually expressed, negotiated, and at times, challenged (Sebiru, 2025).

Two interrelated constructs are central to the formation and expression of cultural identity in this study: attribute and character. These concepts are critical for understanding the multifaceted nature of identity negotiation: Attribute refers to the visible and performative expressions of cultural identity, such as dress, dietary practices, and religious observances like fasting. These outward behaviors reflect an individual's alignment with communal norms and facilitate social recognition within the cultural group (Dermawan, 2018). Character, on the other hand, encompasses internalized moral and spiritual values, including patience, resilience, and self-discipline. These qualities, which are cultivated through religious reflection and practice, are integral to an individual's lived experience of faith and belonging (Very well Mind, 2023).

By applying Cultural Identity Theory (CIT), this study explores how Muslim senior high school students utilize both their external attributes and internal character to navigate the multifaceted challenges of observing Ramadan in a predominantly secular school setting. This theoretical framework provides a nuanced understanding of cultural identity as both performed and experienced, emphasizing how students negotiate their sense of self amid institutional expectations, peer interactions, and personal religious commitments (Collier & Thomas, 1988; Dermawan, 2018).

## METHODS

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to explore the lived experiences of Grade 12 Muslim senior high school students practicing Ramadan within a public academic setting in Kidapawan City. Anchored in a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study sought to uncover the depth of students' personal narratives, capturing how they navigate the intersection of religious observance and academic responsibility. Participants were purposively selected based on specific inclusion criteria, ensuring alignment with the research objectives. Data collection was conducted through In-Depth Interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD), allowing participants to articulate their challenges, adaptive strategies, and reflections during Ramadan. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the transcripts, which were carefully coded and organized into meaningful themes that aligned with the study's focus on cultural identity and character development. A complete record of the analytical process is available via this Google Drive link.

Ethical rigor and transparency were prioritized throughout the study. All necessary permissions were secured, and informed consent was obtained to ensure participants' rights were protected. Trustworthiness was upheld using Lincoln and Guba's four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. As a Christian researcher, I maintained cultural sensitivity and impartiality in representing the voices of Muslim students, aiming to portray their experiences with authenticity and respect. No personal or financial conflicts of interest were present. Additionally, artificial intelligence, specifically ChatGPT by OpenAI—was utilized solely for refining the clarity, structure, and coherence of the narrative. All data interpretation and ethical oversight were independently handled by the researcher. Grounded in the ethical principles of the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB), this study offers an empathetic and nuanced account of student experiences, contributing to culturally inclusive educational practices.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In my analysis of the study's findings, I've identified two key themes that stand out: Attribute and Character development in Practicing Ramadan, and Cultural Identity (further illustrated in Figure 1). To gain insight into these themes, I explored the lived experiences of Grade 12 Muslim senior high school students observing Ramadan on school campus. Framed by Cultural Identity Theory, the study prioritized students' narratives, collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. This emphasis on their personal experiences allowed me to investigate how these students navigate the complexities of faith, identity, and academic life during Ramadan, ultimately aiming to understand how they balance religious observance and educational demands within a diverse school setting.

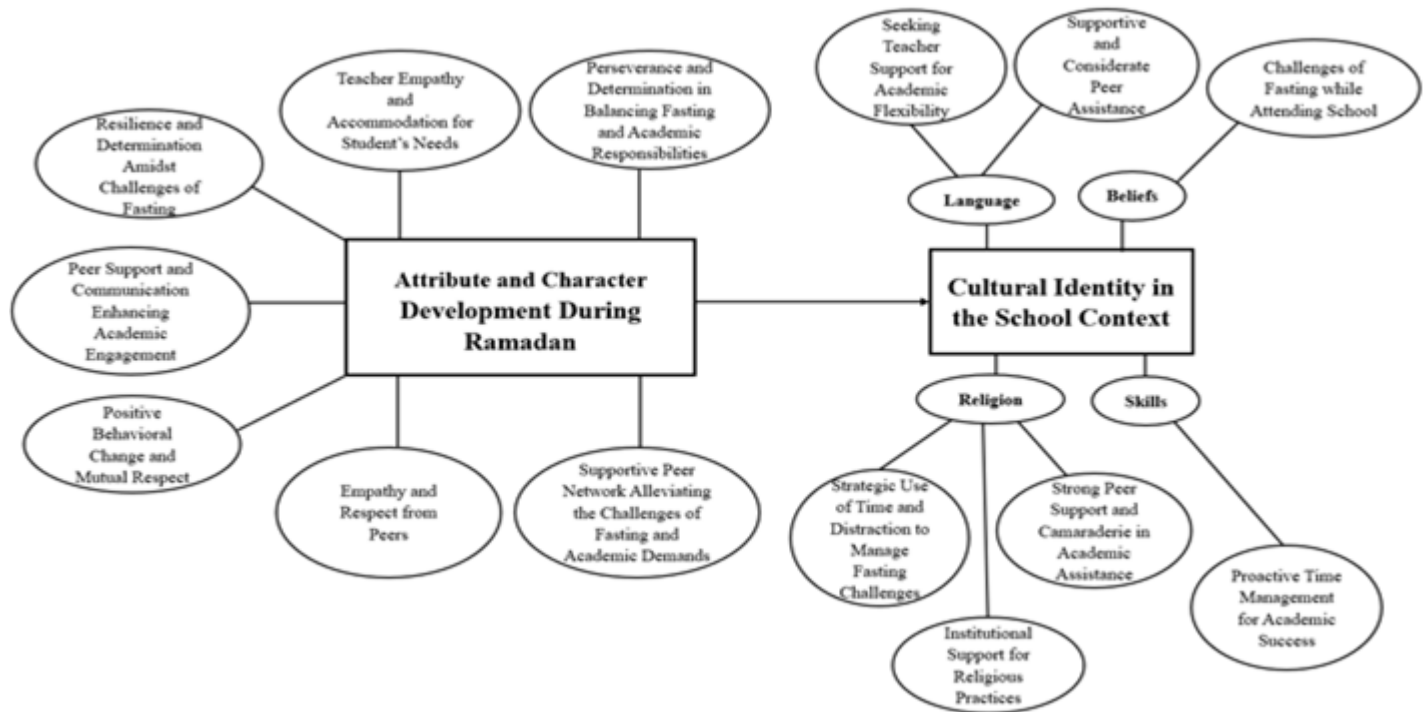


Figure 1: Themes and Sub-themes on the lived experiences of Senior High School Muslim Students in Practicing Ramadan inside the School Campus.

The first theme, "Attribute and Character Development during Ramadan," captured the personal transformations that students underwent during Ramadan, shaped by discipline, faith, and a deep sense of moral responsibility. Within this theme, five sub-themes emerged prominently: Perseverance, Teacher Empathy, Positive Behavioral Change and Mutual Respect, Resilience, and Peer Support. These sub-themes offered a comprehensive lens through which the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of observing Ramadan within the school environment were understood. Each sub-theme highlighted the students' ability to maintain their academic responsibilities while upholding their religious commitments, despite the physical exhaustion and mental challenges of fasting.

Building upon this, the second key theme, "Cultural Identity in the School Context," shed light on how students' religious practices during Ramadan served as affirmations of their cultural roots and spiritual beliefs. For many, fasting and prayer were not merely religious rituals but expressions of personal and communal identity that guided their behavior and interactions within the school setting. While some encountered limited institutional support or awareness regarding their religious needs, students often found strength and validation through shared experiences with peers of similar backgrounds. This sense of cultural belonging reinforced their motivation, encouraged solidarity, and fostered a resilient school-life balance. Moreover, these findings suggest that Ramadan observance goes beyond spiritual discipline—it becomes a formative experience that shapes character, reinforces values, and strengthens communal ties in multicultural educational environments.

### Theme 1: Attribute and Character Development During Ramadan

The study reveals that Ramadan significantly impacts the character development of Grade 12 Muslim students, fostering both observable attributes and deeper moral foundations. Ramadan's challenges and spiritual practices cultivate qualities like patience and self-discipline while enhancing students' moral compass (Bazna, Al-Khatib, & Darwich, 2020). This is vividly illustrated by one participant's experience: "*Lisod gyud kayo Ma'am kay nag Ramadan mi tapos taas among classroom, musaka pa mi sa 4th floor... effort gyud ang pag-transport pero nagalaban gihapon ko.*" (It's difficult, Ma'am, because we are fasting during Ramadan, and our classroom is on the fourth floor... it's really an effort to go up, but I keep fighting). This period encourages introspection and self-regulation, leading to personal growth as students navigate balancing their academic and spiritual responsibilities. As another participant articulated, the struggle to balance focus and responsibilities is real: "*Lisod mag-focus kay lutang ka sa klase, tapos naay mga activities na dili nako maasikaso tungod sa*



*gutom pero dapat dili jud mussurender para makab-ot ang goal.*" (It's hard to focus because you feel distracted in class, and there are activities that I can't attend because of hunger, but I must not give up to achieve my goal). The development of these attributes and character traits is particularly important during adolescence, a crucial time for identity formation. Overall, Ramadan provides a framework for self-improvement and strengthens students' commitment to their faith (Wahab, Ahmad, & Sulaiman, 2021).

### Perseverance and Determination during Ramadan

Perseverance and determination emerge as key themes in the experiences of Muslim students fasting during Ramadan, reflecting the discipline and resilience cultivated through religious practices. As Al-Saggaf (2020) notes, fasting during Ramadan requires significant self-regulation, enhancing students' ability to manage stress and maintain focus despite physical challenges. This is evident in the students' accounts of navigating academic demands alongside fasting, with one participant articulating: *"Lisod gyud kayo Ma'am kay nag Ramadan mi tapos taas among classroom, musaka pa mi sa 4th floor. Effort gyud ang pag-transport pero nagalaban gihapon ko."* (It's difficult, Ma'am, because we are fasting during Ramadan, and our classroom is on the fourth floor... it's really an effort to go up, but I keep fighting). This perseverance aligns with research suggesting that religious practices, such as fasting, provide individuals with the inner strength to persevere during difficult times (Abu-Raiya, Pargament, & Krause, 2020). A sentiment echoed by another student who stated: *"Lisod mag-focus kay lutang ka sa klase, tapos naay mga activities na dili nako maasikaso tungod sa gutom pero dapat dili jud mussurender para makab-ot ang goal."* (It's hard to focus because you feel distracted in class, and there are activities that I can't attend because of hunger, but I must not give up in order to achieve my goal).

### Teacher Empathy and Accommodation for Student's Needs

It highlights the significant role educators play in supporting Muslim students observing Ramadan. Students shared how teacher understanding and flexibility—such as adjusting deadlines or allowing breaks—positively impacted their academic success and well-being during this challenging time. This aligns with findings from Ali et al. (2021) and Yousaf et al. (2023), which stress that teachers support, including accommodating fasting students' needs, can improve both academic performance and emotional health. One student remarked: *"Considerate with our situation especially hectic kayo among schedule last time tong Ramadan kasi Grade 12 student, and there's so many activities."* (They are considerate of our situation, especially since our schedule was hectic during Ramadan because we are Grade 12 students, and there were so many activities). Additionally, when teachers demonstrate cultural sensitivity and understanding, they create an inclusive environment where students feel respected and supported, which can boost motivation and reduce feelings of isolation (Sleeter, 2012). Another participant shared: *"The teachers po, regarding for the activities like kung meron po bang mga gawain na ah... nakakapag-break ng fasting is ini-exempt kami nila kami nila and the way nare-respect nila kami."* (The teachers, regarding the activities, like if there are activities that... break the fast, they exempt us from them, and the way they respect us). Ultimately, these experiences underscore the importance of culturally responsive teaching, where educators proactively engage with students' needs to foster both their academic and emotional success during Ramadan.

### Positive Behavioral Change and Mutual Respect for Cultural Practice

Ramadan promotes personal growth and strengthens social connections among Muslim senior high school students. Fasting helps students develop self-discipline, patience, and better impulse control, aligning with Yılmaz and Çelik's (2021) findings that fasting enhances self-regulation. One participant shared: *"Ginaingon sa akung mga classmate nga, 'uy nagbag-o na siya, di na siya kapalamura ug muhatag na siya ug respect.'" (My classmates told me, 'Hey, she's changed, she doesn't curse anymore, and she gives respect now,' because I'm not allowed to curse during fasting). The communal nature of Ramadan fosters empathy and compassion, motivating students to engage in acts of kindness, which resonates with Bazna et al. (2020). Additionally, students experience a greater sense of unity and mutual respect, as Ramadan promotes interfaith understanding (Haleem & Abdel-Hadi, 2022). One participant shared: *"Pagka-abot sa Ramadan didto, natingala among classmate... nakuha na nako to siya hantud paghuman na jud sa Ramadan..." (When Ramadan came, my classmates... were surprised that I just stayed put.)**

## Resilience and Determination Amidst Challenges of Fasting

Muslim senior high school students exhibit resilience in managing the physical, emotional, and social challenges of Ramadan while balancing academic responsibilities. They utilize strategies like adjusting sleep patterns, staying hydrated, and maintaining a positive attitude to cope with the demands of fasting, consistent with the findings of Ali et al. (2021), who noted that healthy lifestyle practices improve well-being during Ramadan. One participant shared: *“Ginagamit nako ang breaktime para magpahuway ug maka-save ug energy para maka-focus sa klase.”* (I use my break time to rest and save energy so I can focus on class). Their determination to uphold religious practices, despite academic pressures and social distractions, reflects a strong commitment to faith, as noted by Mirghani et al. (2020). Another participant said: *“Lisod mag-focus kay lutang ka sa klase... pero dapat dili jud musurender para makab-ot ang goal.”* (It's hard to focus because you're out of it in class... but you shouldn't surrender to achieve the goal).

## Peer Support and Communication in Enhancing Academic Engagement

Peer support and communication are essential in enhancing academic engagement for Muslim students during Ramadan as they manage the physical, emotional, and social challenges of fasting, such as fatigue and hunger (Yousaf et al., 2023). One participant shared, *“I was able to overcome it because I have supportive seatmates who would tell me through chat, this is what needs to be submitted... this is what's required.” And if I had any questions, I could rely on my seatmates.* Peer support helps students stay focused on their academic responsibilities and fosters a sense of community (Ali et al., 2021). Another participant emphasized mutual respect, stating, *“The way they respect us, when they eat, they go far away, so we don't smell the food they're eating.”* Open communication and empathy promote a positive learning environment, helping students balance academic and religious duties, ultimately enhancing their overall educational experience.

## Theme 2: Experiencing Cultural Identity in the School Context

The study reveals that experiencing cultural identity during Ramadan on the school campus is a dynamic process, intertwining personal faith, communal practices, and academic responsibilities. Students navigate the challenges of fasting, school activities, and academic work while upholding values like discipline, empathy, and respect. Their commitment to maintaining fasting rituals amidst academic life reflects a deep connection to their faith and cultural identity. Shared Ramadan experiences foster mutual respect, cultivating a sense of belonging and pride. Additionally, students actively express their cultural identity through language, beliefs, and adaptive skills, enhancing cultural competence and promoting inclusivity in the school environment. This dynamic experience reflects the evolving nature of cultural identity, as students navigate the challenges of balancing religious and academic commitments, aligning with the findings of Schwartz et al. (2020) and Kiang et al. (2021).

## Experiencing Language Identity During Ramadan in a School Setting

The study reveals the significant role of language in shaping cultural and religious identity during Ramadan in a school setting. Language serves not just for communication but as a medium to express faith, cultural values, and personal experiences, reinforcing students' social and cultural identities. Students use language to navigate academic and personal life, advocate for academic flexibility, and foster supportive peer relationships, promoting mutual respect and belonging. One student shared: *“I-approach nako ang teacher ug mag-ask ko kung pwede tagaan pa ko ug time para mapasa nako ang assignments.”* (I approach the teacher and ask if I can be given more time to submit my assignments). Language also aids in educating peers about Ramadan, enhancing empathy and inclusivity. Another participant shared: *“Mag-explain ko sa mga teachers about sa fasting and ask for consideration like extensions sa deadlines sa projects or missed activities.”* (I explain to the teachers about fasting and ask for consideration, like extensions for projects or missed activities). These findings align with the views of scholars like De Fina (2020) and Spolsky (2020), emphasizing language's role in identity and social connection.

## Experiencing Cultural Beliefs During Ramadan in the School Context

The study investigates the nuanced experiences of Muslim students navigating their cultural beliefs during

Ramadan within a school environment, emphasizing how faith-based practices intersect with academic responsibilities. This interaction between religious observance and educational demands highlights the need for culturally responsive and inclusive school environments (Ahmed & Iqbal, 2022; Kumar & Dagistanli, 2021). One participant expressed this tension by stating, *"It's difficult because when you arrive at school, it's like you're always not in the mood, and the activities feel like you can't attend to them right away because you're still out of it"*. Such reflections underscore how fasting can lead to physical and emotional fatigue, affecting students' readiness and engagement in academic tasks. Another participant echoed this challenge, saying, *"When there are essays or activities that need to be done right away, it's hard to focus because my mind is tired"*. These statements illustrate the fatigue and reduced focus caused by fasting, which aligns with BaHammam et al.'s (2012) findings that cognitive abilities like attention and memory decline during fasting, especially in the afternoon. The study underscores the importance of supportive school policies that respect students' religious and cultural needs.

### Experiencing Islamic Faith During Ramadan in a School Setting

The results of the study reveal that Muslim senior high school students effectively navigate the demands of Ramadan by balancing their religious practices with academic responsibilities. One participant shared: *"Ginagamit nako ang breaktime para magpahuway ug maka-save ug energy para maka-focus sa klase."* (I use my break time to rest and conserve energy so I can focus on class). Students engage in fasting, prayer, and reflection, which not only strengthen their spiritual connection but also foster self-discipline and empathy (Wahab et al., 2021). The communal aspects of Ramadan, such as shared meals and prayers, significantly contribute to a heightened sense of belonging and community (Kaya & Kalkan, 2021). Institutional support, including designated prayer spaces and flexibility in academic requirements, plays a critical role in enabling students to maintain this balance (Abdelrahman, 2022). Another participant revealed: *"Binigyan kami ng time para gud mag pray. May Prayer room kasi dito."* (We were given time to pray. There is a prayer room here). Moreover, peer networks provide essential emotional and academic support, reinforcing solidarity and resilience during Ramadan (Ali et al., 2021). With strategic time management and strong institutional and peer support, students successfully integrate their religious practices with their academic commitments, overcoming the challenges posed by the holy month.

### Developing Adaptation Skills in Practicing Ramada

The study reveals that practicing Ramadan within the school setting helps Muslim students develop valuable adaptation skills. Students employ practical strategies to manage fasting, academic responsibilities, and spiritual devotion, demonstrating resilience and resourcefulness. As stated by one participant: *"Ginagamit nako ang breaktime para magpahuway ug maka-save ug energy para maka-focus sa klase."* (I use breaktime to rest and save energy so I can focus on class.). They adjust study schedules, seek support, and maintain alertness, highlighting their adaptability (Lazarus & Folkman, 2020). Proactive time management, balancing study, prayer, and rest, reflects their self-discipline and perseverance (Duckworth, 2020). This is further justified by another participant who said: *"Mag-time management para dili mag-cram. Important kaayo nga buhaton dayon ang mga activities."* (Manage time properly to avoid cramming. It is very important to complete the activities right away). Using break periods for rest and prayer integrates spirituality into their daily routine (Koenig, 2020). Additionally, adjusting academic expectations demonstrates their flexibility and emphasizes the importance of inclusive education (Banks & Banks, 2020).

### Implications And Future Directions

The study's findings indicate potential avenues for future qualitative research, suggesting the emerging sub-themes could function as salient indicators within the constructs of attribute and character development during Ramadan, and cultural identity in the school context. For instance, a focused investigation into "Seeking Teacher Support for Academic Flexibility" could employ discourse analysis to examine student-teacher communication and evaluate the efficacy of academic accommodation strategies on student outcomes. Similarly, a longitudinal study could assess the impact of Ramadan fasting on students' cognitive function, sleep architecture, and emotional well-being, potentially informing the development of targeted interventions. Furthermore, research employing quantitative methods could explore the correlation between "Proactive Time

Management for Academic Success," academic achievement, and perceived stress levels. Finally, social network analysis could provide insights into the role of peer support networks in fostering resilience and well-being during Ramadan.

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