

Validated Voice: How Filipino University Students Make Sense of Life Challenges in Classroom Guidance

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ABSTRACT

Guided classroom discussions may offer university students an accessible setting for expressing personal and academic difficulties, but little is known about how students interpret their helpfulness. This qualitative descriptive survey examined how Filipino university students made sense of life challenges through such discussions and which relational conditions supported or constrained perceived helpfulness. Students from multiple programs at a public state university in the northern Philippines completed a 17-item open-ended online questionnaire. Row-level screening of 1,746 raw respondent records retained 1,707 respondent records for analysis. Responses were analyzed manually using conventional inductive qualitative content analysis, supported by collaborative analytic review and targeted comparison of selected interpretations with counselor and teacher accounts. Validated voice is presented as an interpretive relational model for classroom-embedded guidance, connecting four categories: carrying challenges privately; validation through direct voice or vicarious recognition; reappraising challenges and reconsidering help-seeking; and recognizing struggle as shared. Boundary and ambivalent accounts linked incomplete safety, limited participation, and low personal relevance with more qualified or limited perceptions of helpfulness. The Philippine case suggests that familiar educational settings may become psychologically usable, but nonclinical, entry points to support when acknowledgment, nonjudgment, students' control over participation, and referral boundaries are protected. The cross-sectional open-text data cannot establish intervention effectiveness, causal change, subsequent service use, or representativeness.

Keywords: Classroom Guidance; Help-Seeking; Qualitative Survey; Relational Safety; University Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

The reaction of university students to their personal, academic, and social problems is influenced not only by individual coping strategies but also by relationships, educational environments, and sociocultural contexts. In the Philippines, Alejandria et al. (2023) identified family dynamics, academic pressure, religion, and the practice of pagdamay, or sharing another person's burden, as salient dimensions of university students' well-being. Cleofas (2024) likewise found that family, peer, school-climate, and national-level factors were associated with mental well-being and psychological distress among Filipino college students following pandemic restrictions. Read together, these findings position students' life problems and distress within relational and socioecological contexts rather than as solely individual concerns.

Seeking-help attitudes may similarly be marked by a kind of duality. Stigma and resistance to seeking help, poor mental health literacy, self-reliance, and the containment of issues within the family and known persons may serve as barriers to seeking help among Filipinos, whereas social support and perceived need may facilitate it (Martinez et al., 2020). A systematic review of university students found that self-reliance, stigma, and poor mental health literacy were common barriers, whereas social encouragement may function as a facilitator (Lui et al., 2024). Meta-analysis research has also shown sociodemographic differences in perceived need for treatment and treatment-seeking or treatment receipt among college students (Pei et al., 2024). This dichotomy aligns with the process-based approach according to which the recognition of problems and expression of

distress, identification of an acceptable help source, and readiness to disclose these issues are the stages preceding, but not equivalent to, help-seeking per se (Rickwood et al., 2005). Taken together, these findings seem to indicate that relationships can help preserve problems in confidentiality while making support more conceivable.

Universities have looked at curriculum-embedded interventions as accessible means of preventive or universal support. Nevertheless, a review of 46 curriculum-embedded university interventions showed heterogeneity, frequently inadequate sample sizes, lack of consistency in reporting, and lack of any evidence showing the positive impact of such interventions on the mental health or well-being of university students (Upsher et al., 2022). Five university disciplines qualitative research revealed that university students saw curriculum-embedded well-being as being related to interactions with peers, teachers, communication, and non-judgmental, pressure-free environment, yet some doubted its personal applicability to them (Upsher et al., 2023). An analysis of peer-support programs within higher education systems similarly indicated some positive results with regards to peer mentoring and peer learning but highlighted significant differences and limitations in research quality, preventing any definitive conclusion with regards to effectiveness (Pointon-Haas et al., 2024). Within the Philippine educational environment, Mananggit et al. (2026) indicated preliminary feasibility and usability of a culturally responsive digital mental health literacy intervention that included professionally led online group discussions, yet explicitly called for further effectiveness testing using larger samples. These examples illustrate an open relational issue, since even though the availability of curriculum-integrated services increases, their usability can be dependent on perceptions of non-judgment, engagement and relevance.

Guided classroom discussions occupy a distinct position between informal peer interaction and formal counseling. They may allow students to reflect on personal, social, or academic difficulties within a familiar educational setting without requiring immediate engagement in individual counseling. Yet institutional availability alone does not establish perceived helpfulness. Because these discussions occur in familiar yet authority-structured groups, students may need to negotiate whether to speak, listen, remain silent, or seek individual support. The central question, therefore, is not whether group discussion is inherently effective, but which relational conditions make the experience meaningful or personally relevant.

Theoretical and Conceptual Orientation

The current research utilized an approach that is theoretically and conceptually multi-layered as opposed to being deductive in nature. The theories were applied post-induction in categorizing different aspects of perceived helpfulness as opposed to being a-priori coding categories. Research conducted in relation to Filipino culture and university students highlighted that there are certain barriers for help seeking including stigmatization, self-reliance, poor mental health literacy, and inability to disclose problems in addition to encouraging social influences enabling the perception of help-seeking (Martinez et al., 2020; Lui et al., 2024). Rickwood et al.'s (2005) process model made it clear that recognizing or expressing a difficulty and identifying a helpful source are different from help service utilization.

In this context, person-centered theory provided sensitizing concepts of empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard, which were used to interpret students' accounts of feeling heard and acknowledged rather than to assume that Rogers's therapeutic conditions operated in classroom guidance (Rogers, 1957). Self-determination theory provided complementary concepts of autonomy and relatedness, while recognizing competence as the third basic psychological need specified by the theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Psychological-safety scholarship sensitized the analysis to interpersonal risk associated with speaking in groups; because Edmondson's (1999) construct concerns a shared team-level climate, the present study uses the narrower term perceived relational safety for respondent-level accounts.

Meaning-making theory furnished conservative terminology for the interpretation of reported reappraisal, differentiating between making meaning and meanings made, as well as adjustment (Park, 2010). Sikolohiyang Pilipino brought culturally relevant terms such as *kapwa* and *pagdamay* (Enriquez, 1994; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000) into use as comparative context. Research on student voice provided a point of departure wherein students are viewed as knowledgeable participants in interpreting educational intervention instead of

passive consumers of adult-planned programs (Cook-Sather, 2006). More recent higher-education scholarship further distinguishes student voice from formal representation and partnership, emphasizing that students' perspectives can have interpretive value without implying that they possess institutional decision-making power (Matthews & Dollinger, 2023). Recognition by proxy was kept as an inductively derived phenomenon found in the classroom which was not outlined in Rogers's dyadic construct and described how students recognize their own issues within their peer's narratives without asserting that the therapeutic conditions set out by Rogers function similarly in classroom guidance.

Research Gap and Study Purpose

Previous studies have thus demonstrated the relational and cultural context of the mental well-being and help-seeking behavior of Filipino college students, whereas the emerging literature on curriculum-embedded well-being underscores the importance of peer and faculty relations. Within the literature reviewed here, comparatively little attention has been given to how students make sense of support encountered through repeated guided discussions within familiar classroom groups, particularly where accessibility coexists with peer visibility, variable self-disclosure, and facilitator authority.

This distinction is important because guided discussion in classrooms is neither psychotherapy nor regular interaction among peers. It involves both institutional availability and interpersonal visibility and might involve recognition not only through talking but also through listening. Examining students' accounts can clarify how an established educational setting becomes—or fails to become—psychologically usable as a setting for support. A qualitative survey allows analysis of a broad range of narratives in a large corpus while retaining students' open-ended responses, although it lacks the depth of interviews and cannot measure intervention efficacy (Braun et al., 2021; LaDonna et al., 2018).

Accordingly, the study asked: How do Filipino university students interpret guided classroom discussions in relation to their life challenges, and what relational conditions shape perceived helpfulness? The study aimed to construct *validated voice* explicitly as an interpretive relational model for classroom-embedded guidance, grounded in recurring and divergent accounts across the survey corpus, rather than generate a formal grounded theory or test causal effectiveness.

METHOD

Design and Reporting Framework

The survey research in this study was conducted under the framework of qualitative descriptive survey design. While qualitative surveys are effective in providing various points of view via open texts while maintaining anonymity of the participants and reducing interviewer biases, qualitative surveys are incapable of conducting real-time probing (Braun et al., 2021). The use of inductive qualitative content analysis method was justified by the structure of the data set which consisted of structured free-text responses, and the objective of the research which required the identification of recurring themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). SRQR standards were followed in the reporting of the findings.

The grounded theory approach was not utilized in the study. The data collection process was done in one round only; theoretical sampling was thus not possible and participants could not be followed up. The following categories and their relationships should therefore be seen as a model for cross-account relationships that needs validation, not as a saturated theory.

In keeping with qualitative description and content analysis, the research utilized a naturalistic or contextual perspective. Respondents' responses were viewed as situational and influenced by the survey instrument and the classroom setting and not direct or comprehensive measurement of students' feelings. The theories and cultural issues discussed above were utilized only as sensitizing concepts after developing the categories.

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Setting, Participants, and Recruitment

The survey was administered at a public state university in the northern Philippines. The guided classroom discussions had been conducted face to face approximately once per month across four consecutive semesters during Academic Years 2023–2024 and 2024–2025. Each session lasted approximately 60–90 minutes, used English, Tagalog, Iloko, or code-switched combinations of these languages as appropriate, and was facilitated by guidance counselors, guidance associates, or faculty members. Eligible respondents were currently enrolled students aged 18 years or older who had attended at least one guided classroom discussion. Attendance-based eligibility was verified using the corresponding session-attendance records. No minors were included. The screened analytic corpus included students from computer technology, food processing and service management, garments technology, electrical and electronics technology, automotive technology, elementary education, accountancy, nursing, and values education. The source records identified both first- and second-year students among the respondents, although complete year-level denominators were unavailable.

Following the discussion cycle, the researchers distributed the online questionnaire to students whose participation in at least one classroom-guidance session was documented in the attendance records. Survey participation was voluntary, and no financial incentive, course credit, or other compensation was provided. The analytic export did not contain a complete invitation denominator or a final participant profile linked to the screened sample. A defensible response rate and exact program- and year-level denominators therefore cannot be reported, limiting assessment of selection bias and representativeness.

Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

The 17-item questionnaire was constructed by the guidance counselors as a reflective tool for program evaluation, as opposed to an instrument of psychometric measurement. Its domains covered topics that were consistent with the objectives of the guided discussion and the research question: handling school and life pressures; views about the discussion session; sense of safety and being heard; issues discussed; perceived shift in perspectives; realizations or follow-up actions after the session; alternative scenarios without the discussions; suggestions for improvement; and what it means to be heard. There was an additional item that gave room for reflection. No scales were constructed and there is no claim that the tool measures any latent variable. The archived documents from the study do not indicate that any pilot testing or content validation was done; this is cited as a study limitation.

The questionnaire was completed once through an online survey. Responses varied in length, and item-level nonresponse occurred. Students responded in English, Tagalog, Iloko, or code-switched combinations of these languages. Analysis was conducted using the original response text to preserve participants' intended meanings. Only excerpts originally written in English are reported as verbatim quotations; translated material is not presented as participants' exact English wording. The form did not include dedicated name or email fields, and direct identifiers volunteered in open-text responses were removed before analysis.

Multilingual Analysis and Language Handling

The multilingual character of the dataset was treated as an interpretive consideration rather than as a purely technical translation issue. All members of the research team were competent in English, Filipino/Tagalog, and

Iloko, the principal languages represented in the dataset and used in the study setting. This linguistic competence enabled the researchers to analyze responses directly in their original-language and code-switched forms rather than relying on an English-translated analytic dataset. Coding was conducted from the original-language responses so that locally meaningful expressions, shifts in register, and code-switched meanings were not prematurely standardized through translation. Where an expression was ambiguous or culturally dependent, its meaning was considered in relation to the surrounding response and the respondent's answers to other questionnaire items; interpretations requiring clarification were revisited during collaborative analytic review. Because the analysis remained anchored in the original multilingual text, the study did not use a formal translation-back-translation procedure for the complete corpus. This approach preserved the linguistic form in which participants expressed their experiences but also means that interpretation depended on contextual reading of multilingual and code-switched responses. To avoid overstating translation equivalence, the manuscript reports verbatim quotations only when the original response was written in English.

Data Management

The dataset used for analysis was de-identified before coding. The research records, including the de-identified response export, respondent-level screening log, evolving coding record, analytic notes, quotation-verification record, and targeted triangulation documentation, will be retained by the research team for five years.

Data Screening

The cleaned database contained 1,746 raw respondent records (Excel rows). Row-level review identified no fully empty records and no records that could be confirmed as duplicate submissions. Five groups contained identical response sets and were flagged for review; because the preserved records did not provide evidence that these represented duplicate submissions, all were retained as distinct respondent records. Screening excluded 39 records that contained no interpretable study-relevant information across the session-related questions, including responses consisting only of N/A, punctuation, or material unrelated to the guided discussions.

Screening was conducted at the respondent level using the complete set of available questionnaire responses for each respondent. Short responses were retained when they provided interpretable information relevant to at least one study question. There was no automatic limit on word count, character count, or number of unanswered items. The reconstructed logs contain the original Excel row number, indication of eligibility, content evaluation, answer-match indicator, final decision, and one primary reason for every exclusion made.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed manually utilizing traditional inductive qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The unit of analysis was the whole set of responses from each individual participant, which made it possible to interpret meanings revealed in one question with regard to the respondent's responses to other questions. The first author went through and coded all 1,707 participant responses several times, creating initial descriptive codes consistent with the wording used by the participants and the meanings of their responses. The process of coding was not guided by any pre-existing codebook. Throughout the process, related codes were grouped provisionally, overlapping or ambiguous codes were combined or improved, and general codes were specified in case of ambiguity or lack of boundaries revealed in later responses. Earlier coded material was reconsidered when changes in code definitions or category boundaries affected its interpretation. Category adequacy was evaluated across the complete fixed corpus through continued comparison with supporting, ambivalent, skeptical, unchanged, and other disconfirming accounts.

The other researchers served as analytic reviewers rather than as independent coders of the complete corpus. Their review was targeted and periodic. At designated stages, they examined selected respondent-level records, preliminary codes, emerging categories, category definitions, and alternative interpretations. Review discussions considered whether proposed codes adequately represented the source responses, whether apparently similar codes reflected meaningfully distinct experiences, whether category boundaries had become too broad, and whether skeptical, ambivalent, unchanged, or otherwise disconfirming accounts were being accommodated

rather than absorbed into predominantly positive interpretations. Analytic disagreements were treated as opportunities to refine the framework rather than resolved through numerical voting or statistical agreement. When reviewers questioned the fit of a code, the breadth of a category, or an interpretation that extended beyond the source text, the relevant records were revisited and the coding record or category description was clarified, narrowed, merged, differentiated, or otherwise revised where warranted. This process challenged the primary analyst's interpretations while preserving primary-analyst responsibility for coding the full corpus; it is therefore not presented as independent double-coding or inter-coder reliability testing.

After preliminary category development, selected respondent-level accounts, provisional categories, and emerging interpretations were compared with contextual accounts from counselor and teacher informants familiar with the classroom-guidance setting. The informants were invited to comment on contextual fit, identify plausible alternative explanations, question assumptions, and suggest clarifications to category descriptions or terminology. The feedback received was captured in triangulation notes specific to context and used to revise interpretations wherever appropriate. The informants did not individually code the entire survey corpus, and hence their feedback was not inclusive of every response, every code, every category, and every component of the interpretive model used. Thus, the technique was considered contextual validation and not full validation of the analysis.

Following collaborative discussion and examination of relationships between the categories identified, an overall interpretation of the meaning-making process by the students was constructed. The interpretation was deliberately tested against cases that included disengaged cases, unchanged cases, skeptical cases, and other cases along boundaries. In this way, the core pattern of validated voice, four categories that relate to one another, and three boundary conditions were formed. Since the survey corpus was fixed and single wave in nature, theoretical sampling and saturation were not considered. Analytic adequacy was instead supported by coding the complete retained corpus and examining whether the category structure could accommodate recurring, divergent, and disconfirming accounts. The model is presented as an interpretive account within this corpus rather than as an exhaustive or saturated theory.

Collaborative review was used to challenge and refine interpretations rather than to calculate statistical agreement. Because the additional researchers did not independently code the same predefined sample using a finalized codebook, no inter-coder-reliability coefficient or Cohen's kappa was calculated. Category percentages were not reported because categories overlapped, item-level missingness varied, and the analysis was not designed as a prevalence study. Absence of a phrase was not interpreted as absence of an experience, and the findings were not used to make population estimates or causal claims.

Researcher Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

Researcher reflexivity centered on the team's institutional familiarity and professional commitment to student guidance. These positions could sensitize the researchers to relational aspects of the data while also encouraging favorable interpretations of the sessions. As a response to this potential threat, this analysis kept those accounts which were critical, skeptical, ambivalent, and unchanged; did not exclude short but understandable negative accounts; utilized focused analytic review and selective contextual comparison; and excluded the treatment of retrospective perceptions as an evidence of success of the intervention.

Credibility was supported through full-corpus coding by the primary analyst; rereading of each respondent at the item level; development of an evolving coding record and analytic notes; peer debriefing and targeted, periodic analytic review by the other researchers; consideration of skeptical, ambivalent, unchanged, and other disconfirming accounts; verification of illustrative excerpts against the raw export; and focused contextual corroboration of selected findings with counselor and teacher informants. Because the contextual review focused on selected excerpts only, it was used to assess contextual fit and refine interpretations, not to verify all codes or the entire model. The concise audit trail for corpus preparation, coding, collaborative review, category construction, focused contextual corroboration, and evidence verification is presented in Supplementary Table S1.

Participant feedback on some interpretations was informally collected; however, since the participants did not undertake a systematic review of the categories developed and the interpretation framework developed, the exercise cannot be described as a form of member checking. Thus, this research study does not make claims about having undergone member checking, coding reliability, theoretical sampling, and theoretical saturation. Confirmability was established through the reconstructed screening log, coding log, analytic notes, revisions, alternative interpretations, and the quotation verification list. Transferability is supported through description of the institutional, program, and session context, while dependability remains bounded by the retrospective reconstruction of screening decisions and the partial scope of triangulation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics clearance for the research study was obtained from the Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU) University Ethics Board in 2024, before administration of the research questionnaire and collection of research data. Participation was limited to students aged 18 years or older; no minors were included. Before participation in the research, prospective participants were informed about the study, including that they would subsequently be invited to complete a questionnaire concerning their experiences and perceptions of the guided classroom discussions. Written informed consent was obtained prior to research participation. Participation in the research was voluntary and was distinct from attendance in the classroom-guidance activities. Attendance at a classroom-guidance session did not obligate students to complete the subsequent questionnaire, and students were free to decline survey participation without academic, guidance-service, or other adverse consequences. No financial incentive, course credit, or other compensation was provided. The questionnaire did not request names or email addresses in dedicated fields. Identifying information volunteered in open-text responses was removed before analysis, no identifying material appears in the reported excerpts, and the dataset used for analysis was de-identified before coding.

RESULTS

The analysis generated *validated voice* as an interpretive relational model for classroom-embedded guidance, comprising four analytically related and non-mutually-exclusive categories and three qualifying boundary conditions: incomplete safety, limited participation, and low personal relevance. The category of validation through direct voice or vicarious recognition encompassed acknowledgment experienced either through direct expression or while listening to peers. Recognition of shared struggle was described as a form of vicarious recognition, alongside reappraisal, or as a reported meaning in its own right. Boundary and ambivalent accounts showed that imperfect relational conditions were associated with varied reports of helpfulness and reappraisal. These elements co-occurred in different combinations across respondent-level accounts and are not presented as causal stages, a clinical process, or a universal pathway.

Participant labels are manuscript identifiers retained from the quotation-verification record and do not correspond to names. Because the identifiers were preserved from that record, labels appearing in the final report are nonconsecutive. Excerpts were checked against the raw export; accidental repeated spaces were normalized, while original wording, grammar, and capitalization were retained. Categories can overlap within one respondent-level account. The excerpts are presented for analytic illustration rather than prevalence and include category-supporting, ambivalent, and disconfirming accounts.

Table 1 Validated voice as an interpretive relational model for classroom-embedded guidance

Analytic element	Analytic category or qualifying condition	Interpretation
Reported contextual condition	Carrying challenges privately	Students described personal or academic burdens managed through self-reliance, restricted disclosure, or a limited circle of support.
Relational condition	Validation through direct voice or vicarious recognition	Acknowledgment could be experienced through being heard directly or through recognizing one's own concerns in peers' accounts.

Analytic element	Analytic category or qualifying condition	Interpretation
Reported interpretive change	Reappraising challenges and reconsidering help-seeking	Students described seeing the problem, themselves, or the acceptability of asking for help differently; this did not establish actual service use.
Reported meaning	Recognizing struggle as shared	Recognition that difficulty was not uniquely personal was described as vicarious recognition, alongside reappraisal, or as a reported meaning in its own right.
Qualifying boundary conditions	Incomplete safety, limited participation, or low personal relevance	Across different accounts, these conditions accompanied both reported reappraisal and little or no session-related change.

Note. Categories are analytically related and may overlap within the same account. Recognition of shared struggle may function as vicarious recognition, appear alongside reappraisal, or be reported as a meaning in its own right. The order and labels summarize cross-sectional associations and should not be read as evidence of causation, temporal sequence, or universal progression.

Carrying Challenges Privately

Students described academic, interpersonal, family, or personal difficulties that were managed internally or within a restricted circle, including while they attended the discussions. The accounts included students who remained private and students who reflected vicariously on peers' disclosures. P01's self-reliance later also marked a genuine limited-reappraisal case, whereas P02 showed that reflection could occur without personal disclosure.

P01: "I usually don't speak up during these kind of sessions, but i can hold out on my own usually or tell my family about them"

P02: "personally, i haven't been able to share life challenges in these sessions because i feel the fear of being judged by the crowd. but with the challenges that were shared by other students, such as difficulties in coping with stress and more, i was able to reflect things and apply it to myself."

Validation Through Direct Voice or Vicarious Recognition

A central interpretive pattern concerned the quality of acknowledgment. The accounts distinguished merely being allowed to speak from feeling understood and emotionally recognized. *Validated voice* therefore refers to a relational experience in which a student's account was treated as worthy of attention and emotional acknowledgment. Direct validation is illustrated by P05's paired responses below; vicarious recognition is illustrated by P02's account in the preceding category. P12's later boundary account shows the converse condition of perceived judgment and premature problem-solving.

P05: "It indeed feels safe and I feel heard because I believe it is what it is supposed to make us feel, it gives us that assurance that we are understood and that our feelings are valid."

P05: "It fills so empowering knowing that people hear you. It gives me the assurance that it's okay to feel what I feel."

Reappraising Challenges and Reconsidering Help-Seeking

Within respondent-level accounts, acknowledgment or vicarious recognition was reported alongside changes in perspective. Students described becoming more aware of their emotions or viewing a problem as more manageable. The acceptability of asking for help is illustrated by P07 in the next category and by P10 in the boundary accounts; these statements indicate reconsideration rather than verified service use. Because categories

overlapped, a single account could support both reappraisal and shared-struggle interpretations. The survey design cannot establish when these shifts occurred or whether they persisted; the claims remain grounded in respondents' retrospective descriptions.

P05: "I believe it does help me see my problem differently because I get to have another point of view of it if one of my classmate also experienced it but he/she looks at it different from how I look at it, as well as when they then give insights."

P06: "Yeah, sometimes when we talk, I hear other people's ideas, and it makes me think about my own stuff in a new way, like maybe it's not as big of a deal as I thought. It can also help me realize I'm not the only one going through something, which makes it feel a bit easier."

Recognizing Struggle as Shared

Hearing peers describe comparable experiences also contributed to a sense that struggle was shared rather than uniquely personal. Students described recognizing that their difficulties were not uniquely their own. Shared struggle did not mean that the source of a problem had been resolved; rather, it was accompanied by reduced feelings of isolation and, as illustrated in P07's account, greater perceived acceptability of asking for help. This category is analytically distinct from validation: validation concerns how an account is acknowledged, whereas shared struggle concerns what students come to recognize through similarity with others' experiences.

P07: "I realized that I'm not alone in my struggles and that it's okay to ask for help."

P08: "I have been able to reflect on my problems with time management and stress. It helped to know i am not alone and that others feel the same."

Boundary and Ambivalent Accounts: When Safety, Participation, or Relevance Was Limited

Pattern existed but not just in a binary sense. Participants P09 and P10 expressed feelings of incomplete safety/inadequate time alongside an expression of perspective change in other parts of the same set of responses. Their narratives thus constitute examples of ambivalence; although the relational context was not complete, there was still an element of reappraisal as well.

P09: "No, because sometimes I feel judged, and it seems like others don't fully understand my side or what I'm going through." In the same response set: "Yes, these discussions help me see my problems differently by shifting my perspective. For example, instead of focusing on how overwhelming my financial struggles are, I learned to reframe it as a challenge that I can manage with better planning and prioritization."

P10: "I feel safe most of the time, but sometimes I don't feel fully listened to because there's not much time to talk." In the same response set: "One time it clicked for me was when I realized it's okay to ask for help and not handle everything on my own."

Other interpretations explicitly restricted the suggested interpretation in their response. P01 linked the change to oneself and not to the sessions; P11 regarded the topic as repetitive or of little applicability; while P12 indicated that judgment and premature problem-solving displaced acknowledgment. These instances of limited or no reappraisal indicate that perceived helpfulness was not uniform across participants. Low personal relevance and incomplete relational safety were also evident in these accounts.

P01: "I do not know what to share because these sessions didn't really changed me, i myself changed my own self"

P11: "They help me reflect. However, these reflections rarely make it to action." Elsewhere in the same response set: "No. I find them redundant actually. I'm sorry."

P12: “Growing up, I never really had anyone to talk about and reflect on my problems with. I learned from a very early age how to manage my own emotions. Reframing perspectives and understanding self-awareness are all lessons I forced myself to learn without anyone's help. So, no. These discussions never really helped.”

P12 added: “Many of the sessions I have ever attended always failed to acknowledge the problem and go directly into judging and fixing.”

Category percentages are not reported because categories overlap, item-level missingness varies, and the analysis was not designed as a prevalence study. Screening dispositions were reconciled at respondent level. No frequency statements were used to estimate prevalence, and absence of a phrase was not interpreted as absence of an experience.

DISCUSSION

This study suggests that students' accounts of meaning-making in guided classroom discussions centered analytically on acknowledgment experienced through direct expression or vicarious recognition. Accordingly, *validated voice* is proposed as an interpretive relational model for classroom-embedded guidance: a noncausal account of how private burden, relational acknowledgment, reported reappraisal, and recognition of shared struggle were connected across students' accounts. It is not a clinical model, a sequence that all students follow, or evidence that classroom guidance produces therapeutic change. The categories overlapped, and participants described perspective change despite incomplete safety, as well as little personal relevance, self-directed change, or no session-related reappraisal. Person-centered theory provides the primary relational comparison, whereas self-determination theory, student-voice scholarship, Filipino relational concepts, psychological safety, meaning-making, and help-seeking models are used as sensitizing contrasts rather than as theories tested by the study.

Validated voice does not propose validation, psychological safety, relatedness, student voice, or peer recognition as newly discovered phenomena. Its contribution lies in specifying how these relational processes may become interconnected within classroom-embedded guidance. Acknowledgment is interpreted alongside Rogers's (1957) relational emphasis on empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard; relatedness and autonomy are considered in relation to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000); perceived relational safety adapts Edmondson's (1999) concern with interpersonal risk without claiming a shared classroom climate; and student-voice scholarship foregrounds students as knowledgeable interpreters of educational experience (Cook-Sather, 2006; Matthews & Dollinger, 2023). The current model incorporates all of these ideas but includes an empirical differentiation between direct voice and vicarious recognition. Acknowledgment might be received either through personal disclosure and being listened to or through noticing elements of one's own experience in another student's story without making any disclosures. Validated voice can thus be defined as a relational configuration where acknowledgment is possible through speaking and/or listening, where participation is under the control of the student, and shared experiences of struggle increase the psychological availability of reconsideration and considering support. Thus, the focus of the current model shifts from merely disclosure to a more general issue of making voice psychologically useful in the context of educational institution where the power structures exist. This model does not provide anything new and universal in terms of concepts and causality but aims at offering an interpretation of how acknowledgment, autonomy, relational safety, direct voicing and vicarious recognition work in class guidance situations. The boundary conditions established in the data, such as safety being not complete, participation being limited, and the personal relevance being low, are an important part of the model since they define the conditions under which accessibility does not necessarily mean helpfulness.

The findings can be interpreted in relation to person-centered theory in a classroom-embedded, non-therapeutic setting. Rogers (1957) proposed empathic understanding and nonjudgmental acceptance as conditions that can support change, and students' distinction between being listened to and being understood is consistent with this relational emphasis. Rogers's formulation primarily concerns direct psychological contact and communicated empathic understanding in a dyadic therapeutic relationship. By contrast, vicarious recognition in the present corpus occurred when students recognized their own concerns in peers' accounts without personally disclosing. It is therefore treated as an inductively generated classroom pattern not specified in Rogers's dyadic formulation, rather than as evidence that his therapeutic conditions operated in this setting. The present data do not

demonstrate therapeutic change; they suggest that some students regarded direct or vicarious acknowledgment as meaningful. A session may provide relevant guidance content yet still be experienced as relationally insufficient when correction, ridicule, or dismissal is anticipated.

The pattern can also be read alongside relatedness and autonomy in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) for there were some accounts that were compatible with the possibility that recognition supported reflection, while P02's non-disclosure could reflect protected autonomy, perceived relational risk, or both. The present data cannot determine whether remaining silent represented freely chosen participation or participation constrained by anticipated judgment. P10's limited opportunity to speak further illustrates why connection must be considered alongside students' control over whether and how they participate. Because competence and need satisfaction were not measured, this remains an interpretive comparison rather than a test of self-determination theory. The analytic association between private burden and recognition of shared struggle also aligns with student-voice scholarship (Cook-Sather, 2006), but the present evidence concerns relational recognition of students' experiences as meaningful rather than redistribution of institutional power. Validated voice may therefore occur without students acquiring influence over program design, governance, or institutional decision-making.

However, a discussion of the Philippines brings both a culturally resonant comparison and added complexity to our understanding. Specifically, *pagdamay* or sharing another person's burden assisted Filipino university students in handling mental health challenges, while according to Martinez et al. (2020), stigma and self-reliance acted as barriers for help-seeking. In a grounded theory study of Filipino university students with psychological problems, Serrano and Reyes (2023) have highlighted similar factors: social connection, seeking help, external validation, and understanding that peers experience similar struggles as an integral part of coping and adjustment. Recognition of shared struggles on the part of students may be interpreted through the lens of *kapwa*, which is defined as the relational principle where the individual self is created with others (Enriquez, 1994; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000), even though participants were not asked to interpret their experiences in such cultural terms. The current model conceptualizes shared struggle not only as a downstream effect but rather as something that may contribute to the recognition of one's problem, re-appraisal, and reduction of the perception of one's struggle being unique. Some participants, however, felt judged in such a way that it made them keep things private. It seems that being relationally oriented does not always imply disclosure or even psychological safety, despite offering opportunities for recognition. In an international context, one could say that the Philippine example is illustrative of a general concept for universities: familiar educational environments may be psychologically usable as non-clinical points of access, as long as the concepts of recognition, non-judgment, student choice, and pathways to private professional help are secured.

The boundary and ambivalent categories put into question any easy explanation of benefit. In the case of P09 and P10, for example, the perception of judgment or lack of discussion time might have gone hand-in-hand with the report of reappraisal without eliminating perceived helpfulness because of relational concerns. On the other hand, P01, P11, and P12 referred to self-directed change, irrelevance, repetition, or judgment that superseded acknowledgment. These cases point to the conditions of time, trust, relevance, and non-judgmental response that should be investigated further. The examples seem similar to asymmetrical perceptions of interpersonal risk examined in the literature on psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), yet in the current study it is the perception of individual rather than group-level phenomenon. In other words, the category of perceived relational safety was used since the individual's account rather than the group-level climate was analyzed. Personal relevance was kept as an inductively developed boundary condition and is consistent with concerns raised in the literature on well-being studies embedded in the curriculum (Upsher et al., 2023). The findings also require restraint in interpreting meaning-making and help-seeking. In Park's (2010) terms, the reported reappraisals are closer to retrospective accounts of meanings made than evidence of durable adjustment. Similarly, statements that asking for help was acceptable correspond to recognition and willingness within Rickwood et al.'s (2005) help-seeking process; they do not establish actual disclosure to a professional, referral uptake, or service use.

The student accounts describe concerns about judgment, insufficient opportunity to speak, and low personal relevance. These concerns provide a rationale for considering broader professional safeguards when disclosure occurs in a group: informed choice, explicit confidentiality limits, non-coercive participation, facilitator

competence, private alternatives, and clear referral pathways. These safeguards are proposed as ethical and implementation responses to identified risks, not as effects demonstrated by this survey. They are also consistent with professional counseling standards emphasizing informed consent, confidentiality and its limits, role clarity, competence, and referral when indicated (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Professional Regulation Commission [PRC], 2008). Classroom guidance should complement, rather than replace, individual counseling, crisis response, or other professional care.

Implications for Practice and Research

For practice, the model points to five provisional commitments for counselors and other facilitators: voluntary disclosure, legitimate listening-only participation, nonjudgmental response, visible referral pathways, and clear facilitator boundaries. These commitments were not tested as active ingredients and should be piloted, adapted to institutional capacity, and evaluated prospectively. This caution is consistent with recent higher-education evidence: peer-support approaches remain heterogeneous in quality and effects (Pointon-Haas et al., 2024), while systematic review evidence indicates that social support can be protective for university students experiencing mental health difficulties but that access to adequate support remains uneven (Vicary et al., 2025). Before a session, the guidance office should prepare a protocol stating that attendance does not require personal disclosure; explaining that students may speak, pass, listen, write anonymously, use paired reflection, or request private follow-up; clarifying confidentiality and its limits in a group; and specifying referral and crisis procedures (ACA, 2014; PRC, 2008). Facilitators should establish agreements against ridicule, interruption, comparison, moralizing, and unsolicited advice. They should acknowledge the concern before problem-solving and ask whether a student wants listening, reflection, information, or possible options. Silence should not be treated as disengagement because the findings indicate that vicarious recognition may occur without direct disclosure.

Boundaries of the facilitator are especially crucial in the setting of an authority-based classroom. Guidance in the classroom ought to retain its nature of being psychoeducational and preventive without turning into group therapy. Sensitive information should not be discussed in public beyond what is needed to address the student and proceed with the necessary protocol of safety issues and possible follow-up with a professional. Confidentiality promises which are not possible to keep within the group should not be made. If the faculty member acts as a facilitator, he or she should inform the group that no matter what a participant discloses and participates in, it will not influence his or her grades and involve, if possible, the non-evaluating guidance co-facilitator. Every session should end with an anonymous check-out line and clearly stated counseling, referral and crisis intervention resources. A de guidance coordinator will keep track of de-identified data on check-outs and referrals at the program level, whereas any individual follow-ups will be consistent with the process of consent, confidentiality, and institutional safeguards. Evaluation of the program needs to be conducted independently on measures of perceived safety, opportunity for participation, relevance, satisfaction, help-seeking intention, use of services, and psychological outcomes instead of equating them. Perceived safety, participation, and relevance may be assessed immediately after the session ends, whereas service use and maintenance of reappraisal will depend upon pre-set intervals of follow-up. For research, the proposed model should be examined prospectively. Interviews or focus groups could probe how acknowledgment is recognized, why some students remain distrustful, and how cultural values shape disclosure. Multi-site studies could assess transferability across programs and institutions.

A mixed-methods design could test whether perceived relational safety is associated with subsequent help-seeking while preserving qualitative inquiry into how, for whom, and under what conditions the discussions are experienced as useful. Future work should also distinguish individual perceptions of relational safety from a shared classroom climate and should document whether reported reappraisal persists over time. Such prospective testing is particularly important because a recent umbrella review found that evidence for psychosocial interventions among university students varies considerably in strength and certainty, with many associations supported by low or very low certainty evidence (Muriago et al., 2026).

Strengths and Limitations

A major strength is the breadth of the 1,707-record analytic corpus across multiple academic programs, which enabled examination of a broad range of convergent and divergent meanings while retaining skeptical, ambivalent, brief, and less-positive accounts. The open-ended format enabled students to describe meaning in their own terms, and the absence of dedicated name or email fields may have supported candid disclosure. The analysis used respondent-level review across open-text items, verified illustrative excerpts against the preserved raw export, and separated interpretive categories from prevalence claims. The reconstructed screening log provides mutually exclusive row-level dispositions, while targeted analytic review, targeted contextual corroboration, and deliberate examination of boundary cases strengthened interpretive challenge without being misrepresented as statistical coding reliability or comprehensive validation.

Several limitations constrain interpretation. First, the cross-sectional, retrospective design cannot establish causality, temporal ordering, or durability of perceived change. Second, open-text surveys usually provide less contextual depth than interviews and do not permit clarification or probing (LaDonna et al., 2018). Third, the single-institution, self-selected corpus limits transferability, and response rate cannot be evaluated without a verified invitation denominator. Fourth, institutional insider roles and facilitator authority may have encouraged socially desirable accounts despite the absence of dedicated name and email fields. Fifth, the original screened working file and contemporaneous row-level disposition record were unavailable, so screening was reconstructed retrospectively from the preserved raw export. Although the reconstruction applied explicit respondent-level rules and produced a documented screening log that reconciles 1,746 raw records to 1,707 retained records, it cannot establish with certainty that every reconstructed disposition reproduces the original screening decision or recover unrecorded historical judgments from the initial screening period. Sixth, counselor and teacher contextual corroboration covered selected findings only and should not be interpreted as validation of the entire coding structure or model. Seventh, informal participant feedback was not systematic member checking. Eighth, the instrument was developed for reflective program evaluation and was not formally validated as a measurement scale. Finally, the study did not measure clinical outcomes, referral completion, or subsequent help-seeking; the findings concern reported meaning-making, not intervention efficacy.

CONCLUSION

In this single-institution qualitative survey, students' accounts linked meaningful classroom guidance with feeling heard, acknowledged, or represented in peers' experiences; however, these experiences were neither uniform nor shown to produce subsequent change. Validated voice is therefore offered as an interpretive relational model for classroom-embedded guidance, not as a clinical mechanism or causal pathway. It brings together reported connections among private burden, acknowledgment, reappraisal, recognition of shared struggle, and the perceived acceptability of asking for help, while boundary and ambivalent accounts show how incomplete safety, limited participation, and low personal relevance can qualify or interrupt those connections. Classroom guidance may provide an entry point to support, but it remains distinct from and cannot replace confidential counseling, crisis response, or other professional care. Prospective, multi-site, and interview-based research should examine whether these reported meanings persist and whether willingness to seek help is followed by actual help-seeking. Internationally, the Philippine case offers a proposition for examination rather than a universal claim: familiar educational settings may become psychologically usable, but nonclinical, entry points to support when students retain choice over disclosure, receive nonjudgmental acknowledgment, and can move through clear facilitator and referral boundaries to private professional care.

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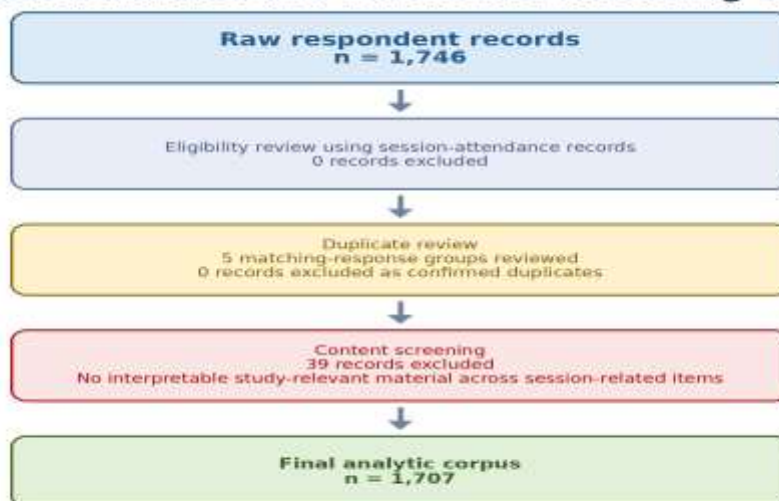
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Supplementary Material

Supplementary Figure S1

Reconstructed and reconciled respondent-record screening flow from raw respondent records to the analytic corpus

Reconstructed and reconciled screening flow



Note. The reconstructed row-level audit confirmed attendance-based eligibility for the raw respondent records. Five groups of matching response sets were reviewed and retained because no evidence established duplicate submissions. Thirty-nine records were excluded because they contained no interpretable study-relevant material across the session-related questions. The complete screening log provides one disposition and primary reason for each raw row.

Supplementary Table S1

Concise analytic audit trail from raw responses to the interpretive model

Analytic stage	Material examined	Analytic action	Documented output
Corpus preparation	1,746 raw respondent records	A reconstructed respondent-level audit confirmed attendance-based eligibility, retained matching response sets as distinct respondent records, and excluded 39 records with no interpretable study-relevant content.	Reconstructed screening log and reconciled sample-flow record: 1,707 retained records
Familiarization	Retained respondent-level response sets across the 17 questionnaire items	The primary analyst repeatedly read each respondent's answers as a connected set and recorded preliminary observations.	Familiarization notes and initial analytic observations
Initial coding	Screened analytic corpus (n = 1,707)	The primary analyst generated inductive codes close to participants' original wording.	Evolving coding record with preliminary definitions
Collaborative review	Selected response sets, codes, and provisional categories	The other researchers examined code fit, overlap, boundaries, disconfirming accounts, and alternative interpretations. Differences were discussed and revisions documented.	Refined codes, clarified boundaries, and revised category descriptions
Category and model development	Refined codes and ambivalent, skeptical, unchanged, or other boundary accounts	Related codes were consolidated into four analytically related categories. Relationships were examined against ambivalent, skeptical, unchanged, and other divergent accounts.	Central pattern of validated voice, four related categories, and three qualifying boundary conditions
Evidence and contextual review	Illustrative excerpts, corresponding raw responses, and selected counselor/teacher contextual accounts	Selected excerpts were checked against the raw export. Counselor and teacher informants were asked about selected findings to clarify contextual fit, question assumptions, and consider alternative readings; this did not cover the full corpus or model.	Verified quotation record and documented contextual corroboration of selected findings

Note. The primary analyst coded the 1,707-record corpus, while the other researchers conducted targeted analytic review and peer debriefing. Selected findings also underwent targeted contextual corroboration with counselor and teacher informants. These procedures strengthened interpretive credibility but did not constitute independent double-coding, statistical inter-coder-reliability testing, comprehensive triangulation, or formal member checking. The reconstructed screening log records the disposition of all 1,746 raw rows.