

# Lived Experiences of Non-Catholic Students at St. Vincent's College Incorporated During Lambigit Festival

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of non-Catholic students participating in the Lambigit Festival, a Catholic faith and cultural celebration at St. Vincent's College Incorporated in Dipolog City, Philippines. Using a transcendental phenomenological research design guided by Amedeo Giorgi's method, the research aimed to uncover the essence of participation among non-Catholic students within a predominantly Catholic academic setting. Ten purposively selected participants, all non-Catholics who actively joined the Lambigit Festival during the 2023–2024 school year, were interviewed through semi-structured sessions conducted in English and Filipino, depending on participant preference. Social Identity Theory served as the theoretical lens to examine how group affiliation, identity negotiation, and intergroup dynamics influence the students' experiences. The conceptual framework centered on the participation of non-Catholic students and identified interconnected themes: their festival experiences, motivations, emotional responses, significant moments, and participation in relation to personal beliefs. Key findings revealed that non-Catholic students experienced inclusion, joy, curiosity, and respect while maintaining personal faith boundaries. Their involvement was shaped by academic motivation, cultural learning, social interaction, and interfaith dialogue. This study highlights how inclusive religious-cultural events like the Lambigit Festival can foster interfaith understanding, respect for diversity, and a deeper sense of belonging among students of different beliefs, enriching both personal development and community harmony. The study concludes that the Lambigit Festival serves as an effective platform for interfaith engagement, fostering social cohesion and mutual respect among students of diverse religious backgrounds. Through the lens of Social Identity Theory, findings suggest the festival promotes an inclusive superordinate identity as "Vincentian students" while allowing participants to maintain distinct religious identities.

**Keywords:** Non-Catholic students, Lambigit Festival, Social Identity Theory, Catholic Institution, Interfaith Dialogue, Cultural Participation, Dipolog City

## INTRODUCTION

Catholic schools are widely established across the Philippines, offering various levels of education and forms of formation to diverse student populations. Notably, many of these institutions are not exclusively Catholic but serve individuals from different religious backgrounds, particularly in Mindanao (Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 2012). This inclusivity has fostered unique educational environments in which students of varying faith traditions coexist and participate in predominantly Catholic practices, traditions, and celebrations. Such environments also reflect broader processes of identity negotiation among students navigating multiple religious influences, as interfaith exposure plays a critical role in shaping young people's cultural and religious identities (Khan, 2025).

Religious festivals are prominent features of social life worldwide and often account for substantial

expenditures, even in economically disadvantaged societies (McCleary & Barro, 2019). Beyond religious observance, these festivals fulfill multiple functions, including reinforcing communal identity, commemorating patron saints, and promoting social cohesion and entertainment (Muhammad, Musa, & Hussain, 2013). In many Roman Catholic countries, particularly those influenced by Spanish culture, towns and cities celebrate patron saint festivals dedicated to holy figures regarded as protectors of specific localities (Henrich, 2024). More recently, festivals have also been recognized as catalysts for broader social transformation, serving as avenues for unity, renewal, and intercultural dialogue across diverse populations (Onuorah, 2025).

Within this broader context, the Lambigit Festival serves as a notable example of a Catholic school-based celebration. Since its establishment in 2007 at St. Vincent's College Incorporated in Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte, the festival has evolved into a meaningful expression of faith centered on honoring San Vicente Ferrer. Initially conceptualized as a platform initiative of Ms. Campus Personality Razel Triff Eguia, the Lambigit Festival has grown into a significant institutional tradition (Conol, 2019). Its name, derived from the Visayan term signifying unity—one beat, one dance, and one Vincentian spirit—reflects its core purpose of fostering solidarity within the Vincentian community. Over time, the festival has played a crucial role in reinforcing the institution's mission, vision, and goals, particularly in promoting unity among its members (Castillion, 2023).

This emphasis on unity is particularly significant, as festivals serve as important mechanisms for strengthening community ties and preserving cultural heritage. They function as platforms for collective participation and shared meaning-making. Moreover, research indicates that the cultural benefits derived from festivals are generally perceived similarly across individuals, regardless of religious affiliation, suggesting that religion does not necessarily determine individuals' perceptions of these benefits. In line with this, religious festivals can also function as shared spaces where diverse groups negotiate meaning, belonging, and collective identity (Onuorah, 2025).

Existing literature on Catholic education suggests that non-Catholic students can derive meaningful benefits from studying in Catholic institutions. Similarly, Hickey (1983) examined how the inclusion of non-Catholic students has influenced Catholic schools, noting that participation in religious activities may contribute to their spiritual development while also raising concerns regarding religious relativism and implications for evangelization. Complementing this perspective, contemporary scholarship highlights the value of shared religious education in fostering mutual understanding, respect, and dialogue among students of diverse faiths (Nelson, 2025).

However, despite these documented benefits, there remains limited research specifically examining non-Catholic students' experiences during Catholic religious festivals within school contexts. While previous studies have explored Christian students' participation in religious celebrations, insufficient attention has been given to how non-Catholic students perceive and navigate these predominantly Catholic events. Sahin (2018) explored non-Christian students' experiences in Christian-dominated school settings in Turkey, highlighting the importance of respectful dialogue and mutual understanding; however, comparable studies within the Philippine context remain scarce.

Different religious groups may encounter distinct challenges within Catholic educational environments. Muslim students, for instance, may face challenges related to prayer accommodations, dietary restrictions, and representation, although inclusive practices—such as providing designated prayer spaces and halal food options—can help address these concerns (Esposito, 2010). Members of Iglesia ni Cristo (INC) may refrain from participating in festival dances due to doctrinal beliefs emphasizing modesty and separation from worldly practices (Fajardo, 2019). Similarly, Jehovah's Witness students may encounter challenges related to their principles of neutrality and non-participation in certain extracurricular activities (Bergman, 1999). These varied experiences further highlight how students actively negotiate their religious identities within shared institutional spaces (Khan, 2025).

The importance of understanding these experiences is further supported by educational theories emphasizing the role of religion and spirituality in student development. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that religion and spirituality play significant roles in motivation, and unmet needs related to religious expression may negatively affect students' well-being (Alghamdi, 2020). Furthermore, Joseph Durlak et al.

(2011) emphasized that educators must be responsive to students' diverse needs, recognizing that learners progress at different rates and require supportive environments that respect their beliefs. A safe, inclusive, and nurturing educational setting is therefore essential in facilitating students' holistic development.

Catholic schools consequently bear a particular responsibility in welcoming students of diverse faiths. These institutions are called to uphold their mission while fostering inclusivity, guiding all students—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—toward meaningful encounters with faith, while remaining sensitive to religious diversity within the framework of new evangelization. In this regard, shared religious experiences and educational practices can serve as bridges that promote dialogue and mutual respect across faith traditions (Nelson, 2025).

Despite this recognition, a significant gap persists in understanding the lived experiences of non-Catholic students during Catholic religious festivals in Philippine educational settings. This gap is particularly relevant in the context of St. Vincent's College Incorporated, which serves a religiously diverse student population. While the Lambigit Festival aims to promote unity and transcend religious differences, its meaning and impact on non-Catholic students remain underexplored. Existing studies have largely focused on Christian participants, with limited attention given to how non-Catholic students perceive their participation, experience inclusion, and negotiate their identities within such events.

In response to this gap, the present phenomenological study aims to explore the lived experiences of non-Catholic students who participated in the Lambigit Festival at St. Vincent's College Incorporated. Specifically, it seeks to generate insights that may inform inclusive practices and enhance the overall campus experience for students from diverse religious backgrounds. Furthermore, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how religious diversity is navigated within Catholic educational institutions and how such institutions can better support all learners while sustaining their Catholic identity and mission.

## Research Questions

The main purpose of this study is to determine the lived experiences of non-Catholic students at St. Vincent's College Incorporated during the Lambigit Festival. It seeks to explore the following questions:

1. What has been the experience of non-Catholic students during the Lambigit Festival?
2. Why do non-Catholic students choose to participate in the Lambigit Festival?
3. What do non-Catholic students feel when participating in the Lambigit Festival?
4. What specific moments during the Lambigit Festival have had a significant impact on non-Catholic students?
5. How do non-Catholic students navigate their participation in the Lambigit Festival in relation to their beliefs?
6. How does the Lambigit Festival impact the non-Catholic students at St. Vincent's College Incorporated?

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a transcendental phenomenological research design, guided by Amedeo Giorgi's phenomenological method, to explore and understand the lived experiences of non-Catholic students who participated in the Lambigit Festival. Transcendental phenomenology is a qualitative approach that seeks to capture the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals while bracketing the researcher's preconceptions to reveal the shared meaning of the experience. Giorgi's method provides a systematic framework for analyzing interview data and identifying core themes and meanings. This design was selected to capture the richness and complexity of participants' subjective realities, enabling an in-depth understanding of the meanings and emotions associated with non-Catholic students' participation in the Lambigit Festival within a specific cultural and religious context.

In terms of the research locale, the study was conducted at St. Vincent's College Incorporated, a Catholic institution in Dipolog City, Philippines, known for its academic excellence and commitment to producing globally competitive students. The institution's Catholic character, reflected in its traditions, religious observances, including the annual Lambigit Festival, and institutional values, provided a unique research environment. The presence of non-Catholic students within this predominantly Catholic setting created an interfaith dynamic, allowing for an examination of how students navigate participation in a major Catholic event while maintaining their own religious beliefs and identities.

Given the nature of the study, purposive sampling was employed to select ten (10) participants based on specific criteria: (1) they were non-Catholic students enrolled at the institution, and (2) they had actively participated in the Lambigit Festival during the 2023–2024 academic year. This sampling technique ensured that participants possessed relevant experiences aligned with the research objectives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten (10) students from diverse religious backgrounds, enabling the collection of rich and varied perspectives. The participants represented multiple denominations, including Born Again Christians, The Alliance, Iglesia ni Cristo (INC), Islam, Steadfast in Christ Jesus, and Seventh-day Adventist. This diversity was essential in capturing a comprehensive understanding of how students from different faith traditions experience and interpret participation in a Catholic religious festival. To protect their identities, all participants were assigned pseudonyms throughout the study.

With regard to the research instrument, an interview guide composed of open-ended questions was developed to elicit in-depth responses, allowing participants to articulate their experiences in their own words while maintaining alignment with the study's focus. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by three experts in educational research who provided feedback on the structure and relevance of the questions. The interview guide was further evaluated and approved by the research adviser prior to data collection.

For the data-gathering procedure, participants were first provided with informed consent forms outlining the study's objectives, procedures, and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. They were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at times and locations convenient to the participants to promote comfort and openness. Although the interview guide was prepared in English, both Filipino and English were used during the interviews, depending on participants' language preferences, to facilitate more natural and comprehensive responses. All interviews were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder to ensure data accuracy and authenticity. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim, producing detailed transcripts for analysis. Follow-up interviews were subsequently conducted to clarify and validate initial interpretations, thereby strengthening the accuracy and depth of the findings. This process of member checking enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

In terms of data analysis, the study followed Giorgi's phenomenological method, which involves four key steps. First, each transcript was read in its entirety to gain a holistic understanding of the participant's experience. Second, the transcripts were reread to identify meaning units, or segments of text that captured significant aspects of the participants' experiences. Third, these meaning units were transformed into psychologically sensitive expressions articulated in more abstract and conceptual language. Finally, the transformed meaning units were synthesized into a coherent general structure that reflected the essential aspects of the participants' experiences as non-Catholics participating in the Lambigit Festival. This structure integrated both shared patterns and individual variations. The final stage involved constructing a rich, descriptive narrative that conveyed the essence of the phenomenon and provided insights into how non-Catholic students navigated their participation in the festival.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. It focused exclusively on non-Catholic students who participated in the Lambigit Festival during the 2023–2024 academic year at a single Catholic institution. As such, the findings reflect the specific experiences of the ten participants and may not be generalizable to other contexts or populations. Furthermore, the study concentrated solely on the Lambigit Festival and did not explore other dimensions of non-Catholic students' experiences within the broader Catholic educational environment. Finally, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced potential biases, such as recall bias and social desirability effects.

## RESULTS

This chapter presents the analysis and the interpretation of data collected during the research study on the experiences of non-Catholic students at St. Vincent's College Incorporated during the Lambigit Festival. This chapter seeks to give thorough knowledge of the themes arising from the collected data, illuminating the experiences of non-Catholic students taking part in the Lambigit Festival.

### Non-catholic students' participation in the Lambigit Festival

From the responses of non-Catholic students, several major themes emerged that explain why they chose to participate in the Lambigit Festival. These include academic motivation, cultural exposure and respect, social interaction and inclusivity, personal passion and expression, and faith and coexistence. This general theme explores the fundamental reasons behind non-Catholic students' participation in an essentially Catholic religious and cultural event. It tries to grasp the "lived experiences" and the interpretations students attach to their involvement.

#### Academic Motivation and Institutional Requirements

A recurrent and pragmatic reason expressed by many participants revolves around the need to meet academic expectations, gain grades, or avoid penalties.

*"Actually, Ma'am, what really motivated me to participate in the Lambigit Festival was because of the grade, Ma'am." – Daniel (Pentecostal Born Again)*

*"It was also helpful for the Grades." – Cersei (Islam)*

*"Also, to aim extra points to my grades and to avoid fines." – Jeremy (SDA)*

*"The first thing that motivates me to participate in the lambigit festival as a non-catholic student was the instructor said they will give plus points." – Jericho (Born Again)*

These demonstrate how academic incentives were a compelling motivator. For students balancing religious identity with academic responsibilities, participation becomes a practical decision, rather than purely spiritual or social. However, these incentives often lead to meaningful engagement despite the initial motivation being grade-related.

#### Social Interaction and Inclusivity

Several participants emphasized the importance of friendship, social bonding, and feeling part of a wider community.

*"My friends, it is very enjoyable and fun." – Chloe (Born Again)*

*"My participation in the Lambigit Festival, as a college student allowed me to contribute... I participated the Lambigit festival and had the opportunity to connect with other participants." – Jong (Born Again)*

*"It's helped me connect with more students and understand the local culture better." – Tina (Born Again)*

*"That's why we just stick together, like when going home or during break time after practice, we stay together and talking about God. That's also why I don't feel left out." - Bless (Steadfast in Christ Jesus)*

These highlight how students found comfort and joy in group experiences and peer involvement. The festival served as a medium to foster unity and belongingness across religious lines. Even those who preferred to stay close to fellow non-Catholics found a place of mutual understanding and companionship.

## Cultural Exposure, Understanding, and Respect

For some participants, the Lambigit Festival was a gateway to experiencing and appreciating Catholic traditions without compromising their beliefs.

*“So, it's like learning new things and also socializing with other students as we are celebrating the Lambigit festival.” - Joy, (The Alliance)*

*“...it enriches my college experience by exposing me to different religious backgrounds because it allows me to engage with them through meaningful discussions.” – Shek (INC)*

*“even if I'm not a catholic one but I respect the said event in my institution and it can't affect to me being what is my own belief.” – Jeremy (SDA)*

These underscore a conscious and respectful openness to cultural diversity. The participants do not see participation as religious compromise but as a chance to build interfaith respect and understanding. This cultural receptivity helps bridge differences in an academic environment.

## Personal Passion and Self-Expression

Another driving factor was the personal love for performing arts or engaging in physical and expressive activities.

*“What motivates me to participate, despite being a non-Catholic, is my passion for dancing.” - Shek (INC)*

*“I love to dance and be part of something bigger than myself.” – Tina (Born Again)*

*“One thing that motivates me to participate the Lambigit festival is to gain physical activities and it can benefit my healthy lifestyle.” – Jeremy (SDA)*

This reflects the intersection of self-expression and institutional celebration. For many students, the festival serves as a stage not just for religious festivity but also for individual passions, particularly in performing arts, which become a point of personal joy and fulfilment.

## Faith, Coexistence, and Personal Growth

Some students expressed a deeper spiritual insight that came from coexisting respectfully in a Catholic context.

*“to continue and hold onto your faith.” – Bless (Steadfast in Christ Jesus)*

*“it's a treasure for me because this event is once in a year but the memories are eternal.” – Jeremy (SDA).*

Students engage in the festival not only as external observers but also as internal reflectors of their own beliefs. The space becomes one for interfaith dialogue, learning, and mutual growth, allowing them to maintain their own spiritual integrity while also appreciating others.

## Non-Catholic students' feelings when participating in the Lambigit Festival

This theme captured the emotional and affective experiences of non-Catholic students as they engaged with the Lambigit Festival. It explored the range of feelings, from positive emotions to the challenges they navigated.

## Joy and Enjoyment in Participation

Though not sharing the Catholic faith, most of the participants' dominant theme is the happiness and enjoyment

they experienced during their Lambigit Festival participation. The festive character of the event, the chances for performance, and the friendship among colleagues went beyond religious lines to produce a good shared experience.

*“Happy and blessed. There is no such difference and that's why I feel positive and enjoyment.” – Chloe (Born Again)*

*“Actually, what I felt at that time was happiness...” – Daniel (Pentecostal Born Again)*

*“I enjoyed it right away because I got to know others that also participated the Lambigit festival.” – Cersei (Islam)*

*“Yes, I enjoyed it despite not being catholic because I know we all come together in unity.” – Jong (Born Again)*

*“Mix emotions ,I enjoy it a lot...” – Jeremy (SDA)*

*“Joy, excitement, a sense of belonging, and pride in our performance.” – Tina (Born Again)*

*“I was happy and amazed because of how nice the Lambigit festival is.” – Jericho (Born Again)*

This happiness emphasizes how the Lambigit Festival is not only a religious event but also a campus-wide cultural celebration where students of all religions may have fun, connection, and a feeling of celebration. Their emotions imply that the Lambigit Festival appeals to people outside of its religious background by means of inclusive experiences via the arts, cooperation, and community development.

### **Respectful Boundary-Setting and Personal Faith Maintenance**

Some participants indicated an internal effort to maintain respect for their own beliefs while participating. These responses reflect a balance between respecting the Catholic tradition and staying grounded in their personal faith systems.

*“Actually, for me, I just participated out of respect, Ma'am, for my own beliefs as well. I wouldn't judge it in that way.” – Daniel (Pentecostal Born Again)*

*“For me, I just setting my boundaries since I have my own belief and I perform for myself and to my team and I respect them because I know they offer it to Senyor San Vicente Ferrer.” – Jeremy (SDA)*

*“I balanced it by knowing that we have different beliefs.” – Jericho (Born Again)*

This indicates that participation in interfaith or religious events requires a nuanced understanding of one's own convictions. The non-Catholic students' ability to engage in the festival while setting personal boundaries reflects a mature approach to interfaith harmony, showing how religious identity can coexist with cultural involvement when framed with respect and intentionality.

### **Curiosity and Openness to Cultural and Religious Learning**

Several participants revealed that their participation was a moment of curiosity and learning about Catholic practices. Rather than viewing the Lambigit Festival as foreign or exclusionary, they embraced it as an educational and enlightening opportunity.

*“I feel a mix of curiosity because I didn't expect that I would still be able to join... I want to witness and understand about Catholic traditions.” – Shek (INC)*

*“...there's excitement for the new experience and learning the new environment...” – Joy (The Alliance)*

This open attitude to learning indicates that the Lambigit Festival promotes interreligious understanding by

giving non-Catholic students close access to observe Catholic customs. The expressed curiosity shows a need not only to participate but also to understand, which is fundamental for mutual respect in many intellectual and cultural contexts.

### **Shared Values and Human Connection**

Several participants emphasized that beyond religious identity, what unites them is a shared humanity and commitment to values like kindness, respect, and unity.

*“For me, I focus on universal values like kindness and respect, regardless of whether someone is Catholic or not.” – Shek (INC)*

*“...you shouldn't criticize. That's why we don't have the right to judge others.” – Bless (Steadfast in Christ Jesus)*

*“...we are united by a single Vincentian spirit, despite not being catholic, I came to understand their beliefs.” – Jong (Born Again)*

It shows that non-Catholic students consider their involvement as a gesture of unity rather than as a religious compromise. The Lambigit Festival turns into a venue where celebration is based on shared values instead of shared doctrines. This supports the inclusive character of institutional traditions and helps to strengthen social cohesiveness.

### **Mixed Emotions and Physical Challenges**

Despite the overall positivity, participants also acknowledged the physical and emotional challenges involved, such as exhaustion from long practice hours and navigating emotional tensions arising from interfaith involvement.

*“Actually, what I felt at that time was happiness, and the tiredness, that just never really goes away.” – Daniel (Pentecostal Born Again)*

*“The hunger wouldn't go away because the practice sessions were very long, but it was worth it... even also with a lack of sleep...” – Bless (Steadfast in Christ Jesus)*

*“I have mixed emotions because there's excitement for the new experience...” – Joy (The Alliance)*

*“I had different emotion while participating the lambigit festival...” – Jericho (Born Again)*

These accounts show that while participation was generally positive, it did not come without physical fatigue and internal emotional negotiations. The “mixed emotions” express the tension between religious distinctiveness and cultural participation, but these were managed well by the students and transformed into valuable experiences.

### **Non-Catholic students' participation in the Lambigit Festival with their beliefs**

#### **Respect for Others' Beliefs and Practices**

Respect is the most recurring and dominant lens through which non-Catholic students approach participation in the Lambigit Festival. Many participants emphasize that respect allows them to engage with Catholic traditions without compromising their faith.

*“For me, it's respect because we have different beliefs. So each of us should really have respect for what others believe in and their practices, and also for their way of worshipping God.” – Joy (The Alliance)*

*For me, it's just about respect, whatever belief someone else has, I really just respect it.” – Bless (Steadfast in Christ Jesus)*

*“I joined their prayers but I didn’t as a respect even I’m not catholic but they give me excuses and they respect me as well as how I respect them.” – Jeremy (SDA)*

This emphasis on mutual respect allows these students to be present and engaged in a predominantly Catholic celebration while maintaining their own religious integrity. It highlights their emotional intelligence and interfaith sensitivity in a multicultural school environment.

### **Strategic Participation for Academic and Social Reasons**

Many participants admit to participating due to practical incentives such as grades, attendance, avoidance of fines, and peer influence.

*“I did not do any much adjustment. The additional grade.” – Chloe (Born Again)*

*“Actually, it's for attendance because it's really needed there to avoid fines, so we should also participate.” – Joy (The Alliance)*

*“I joined the Lambigit festival for some reasons: my grades, the physical activities, and also because of my classmates.” – Jong (Born Again)*

*“For me because of Grades and physical activities and to avoid fines.” – Jeremy (SDA).*

These reveal a pragmatic approach to participation, wherein the festival becomes less about religious symbolism and more about meeting academic requirements and social involvement. Students manage to compartmentalize their faith while fulfilling institutional expectations.

### **Personal Boundaries Based on Religious Convictions**

Some students outline clear lines they will not cross due to religious prohibitions, indicating personal discipline and awareness of doctrinal boundaries.

*“I will just join, but I won't make the sign of the cross because it is forbidden in our religion as Muslims.” – Cersei (Islam)*

This articulation demonstrates that while there is openness to cultural participation, core theological boundaries are non-negotiable. It reflects how participants assert their identity even in inclusive environments.

### **Focus on Shared Values and Cultural Learning**

Several students highlight how they reframe their participation by focusing on universal themes like unity, community, service, and celebration, rather than the religious elements of the festival.

*“I focus on the shared values like love, compassion, and also service, which truly transcends our religious boundaries.” – Shek (INC)*

*“I reconcile my personal beliefs with the religious nature of the Lambigit Festival by focusing the community, respect, and shared celebrations.” – Jericho (Born Again)*

*“I see it as an opportunity to appreciate a different cultural expression, focusing on the universal themes of celebration and community.” – Tina (Born Again)*

This framing enables students to participate meaningfully without internal conflict. It also reflects an evolving mindset in which non-Catholic students find value and insight in interfaith exposure, promoting cultural empathy and learning.

## Non-catholic students' significant moments during the Lambigit Festival

This theme explored how non-Catholic students navigated their own religious beliefs and practices while participating in the Lambigit Festival. It focused on the strategies they used to reconcile their personal faith with their involvement in a predominantly Catholic event.

### Experience of Inclusion and Non-Discrimination

Many participants expressed a strong sense of being welcomed and included, regardless of their religious background. These moments of inclusion had a positive emotional and social impact, contributing to feelings of unity.

*“During Community Day because everyone is welcome even if you're not a Catholic student. Like what I said earlier there is no such difference in belief.” – Chloe (Born Again)*

*“Yes, during the Lambigit Festival, I felt included despite being non-Catholic. They treated me as part of them because there was no discrimination stating that if you are not Catholic, you cannot participate in the celebration.” – Joy (The Alliance)*

*“Even those who are not Catholic also engaged in participating in the Lambigit Festival activities. Learning that made me feel like no one was excluded and that we were actually included in the activities.” – Shek (INC)*

*“Yes, it's okay, they included me anyway despite being a non-Catholic student.” – Cersei (Islam)*

This is due to the strong emphasis on community integration during the festival. Events like Community Day appear to embody the inclusive Vincentian spirit, resonating with participants and removing barriers between Catholic and non-Catholic students.

### Strengthened Respect and Cultural Understanding

Some students gained deeper understanding and appreciation for Catholic traditions. This did not necessarily influence their religious beliefs but opened up space for intercultural respect and dialogue.

*“It gave me more insight into the traditions of my classmates and the local community, fostering respect.” – Tina (Born Again)*

*“I understood what the Lambigit is and its true meaning. As a non-Catholic, I also shared my beliefs with the Catholics, and all of us were united without any conflict.” – Jong (Born Again)*

*“They show me what their beliefs is and how they act like a professional in order to have a better relationship with one another.” – Jeremy (SDA)*

These moments reflect the festival's potential as a cultural dialogue, promoting mutual understanding. The inclusion of non-Catholic students allowed them to observe and respect traditions outside of their own, creating fertile ground for acceptance and empathy.

### Affirmation of Personal Faith and Belief Boundaries

Several participants highlighted how specific moments helped them reflect more deeply on their own beliefs. For some, the religious differences became more apparent, leading to internal affirmation of their own faith.

*“I saw how much the Catholics believe in the Saints and his miracle wich is we do not believe in Saints because we believe in one God.” – Jericho (Born Again)*

*“My beliefs didn't hinder my participation, because joining the Lambigit festival was my own choice, regardless of my faith.” – Jong (Born Again)*

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*“Sometimes my time and schedule can take away from my personal devotional life, so I limit my time. Also, I wake up early for our living God, so I am truly devotional, I just balanced.” – Bless (Steadfast in Christ Jesus)*

This is a form of internal negotiation. The exposure to religious symbolism and practices not aligned with their own beliefs prompted students to revisit or even reinforce their spiritual boundaries and values while maintaining openness.

### **Mutual Respect Through Teamwork and Acknowledgment**

For some, meaningful impact came not through the rituals themselves but through human interactions, being thanked, appreciated, and respected by Catholic peers and teachers.

*“When my teammates and even teachers specifically thanked me for my effort and enthusiasm.” – Tina (Born Again)*

*“They show me respect and courage in order to show my support and effort to them.” – Jeremy (SDA)*

This underlines the relational aspect of the festival. It is not just the religious activities but the interpersonal recognition and solidarity that made the experience impactful.

### **Sense of Wonder and Observation of Differences**

A few participants recalled specific moments where they were simply intrigued by the differences in religious expression and how others worship, even if they didn't share the same perspective.

*“I noticed they had a different kind of you know, if you looked at it, there was a different way they performed compared to us.” – Daniel (Pentecostal Born Again)*

*“It brightened my perspective because it showed me the importance of faith. I also learned more about the significance of faith in our lives and how faith can be a source of strength and unity as well.” – Shek (INC)*

These points of moments of discovery occur when participants are exposed to expressions of faith and tradition that were unfamiliar but thought-provoking. It impacted how they see the role of faith and community in a broader context.

### **Experiences of non-Catholic students during the Lambigit Festival**

This theme encapsulated the overall experiences of non-Catholic students who participated in the Lambigit Festival. It covered a range of feelings, observations, and interactions that shaped their perception of the event.

### **Unity Amidst Religious Diversity**

This highlights the strong sense of belonging and unity that non-Catholic students experienced despite religious differences.

*“I felt like I was Catholic too since I joined in with the others.” – Cersei (Islam)*

*“...I see the vibrant and enjoyment and also the togetherness of every students.” – Jeremy (SDA)*

*“...our closeness wasn't awkward at all.” – Shek (INC)*

*“Lambigit is not just about dancing it's also about unity, getting to know each other and welcoming one another.” – Jong (Born Again)*

Many participants expressed feelings of inclusion and harmony, underscoring how the festival served as a platform for interfaith solidarity. These sentiments suggest that the Lambigit Festival transcended its Catholic roots to foster community-wide unity and connection, especially among the youth.

### **A New and Eye-Opening Religious-Cultural Experience**

Students reflected on how participating in Lambigit offered them a new cultural and religious perspective.

*“My experience during the Lambigit as a non-Catholic was memorable and a new experience.” – Joy (The Alliance)*

*“...it was nice to experience and what do you believe.” – Jericho (Born Again)*

*“...it allowed me to witness and understand the traditions of the Catholic faith...” – Shek (INC)*

This reflects the originality and educational worth the festival presents for students from non-Catholic backgrounds. Participants expressed interest, openness, and interreligious learning since they had not found such kinds of dedication in their own faiths. These comments imply growing religious awareness of diversity and literacy.

### **Respect and Inclusion from the Catholic Majority**

Students noted that they were respected and not marginalized despite their different beliefs.

*“...even though I'm not Catholic, I was still considered and included by them.” – Cersei (Islam)*

*“...they don't really base it on who our companions are.” – Bless (Steadfast in Christ Jesus)*

*“...it's really okay even though I'm non-Catholic, Ma'am, it's still nice.” – Daniel (Pentecostal Born Again)*

This emphasizes how strongly non-Catholic participants felt inclusion. Their exchanges with Catholic colleagues and professors seemed to be characterized by mutual respect, so allowing complete participation with the event. It shows how well the festival created a safe environment for students of different faiths.

### **Enjoyment, Fun, and Social Bonding**

Several participants emphasized the fun aspects of the festival and how it allowed for friendship-building.

*“...my memorable experience during Lambigit Festival is the community day.” – Chloe (Born Again)*

*“I enjoyed the dancing. I also meet new friends...” – Jong (Born Again)*

*“I was happy because there were a lot of jokes... That's why I was very happy, and my time wasn't wasted.” – Bless (Steadfast in Christ Jesus)*

*“...I enjoy a lot and I showed my total support to my team...” – Jeremy (SDA)*

*“...it was also fun because I met new friends.” – Jericho (Born Again)*

Aside from spiritual exposure, the Lambigit Festival became a memorable social event. Students highlighted how enjoyable the activities were and how they fostered camaraderie. These experiences enhance their sense of community, suggesting that festivals like Lambigit serve as bonding platforms beyond their religious significance.

### **Physical Engagement and Academic Motivation**

Some participants mentioned the physical and academic motivations tied to the festival.

*“...the opportunity for grades, physical activities, and exercising both mind and body.” – Jong (Born Again)*

*“...it was very tiring but it was also fun...” – Jericho (Born Again)*

*“...it was really tiring, Ma'am, and then it was really stressful like that.” – Daniel (Pentecostal Born Again)*

The inclusion of physical and academic incentives in the Lambigit Festival played a role in motivating students. While fatigue was noted, the overall tone remained positive, suggesting that the benefits—both physical and academic—outweighed the stress. This reveals a functional dimension of the festival as well, aligning it with the students' academic and personal development goals.

### **Curiosity, Intrigue, and Interfaith Dialogue**

Some participants shared how their involvement sparked curiosity among others or themselves.

*“...seminarians... were curious about me as a non-Catholic... They had many questions for me why I joined.” – Joy (The Alliance)*

This reflects how the festival opened doors for interfaith conversations, even among seminarians and non-Catholic students. This interaction shows a mutual curiosity that can lead to deeper understanding and religious coexistence.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Experience of non-Catholic Students during the Lambigit Festival**

The experiences of non-Catholic students during the Lambigit Festival extend beyond mere participation and reflect complex processes of intergroup interaction, identity negotiation, and social cohesion within a culturally embedded religious event. Rather than simply expressing feelings of unity, the findings demonstrate how shared cultural practices create inclusive social spaces that transcend religious boundaries. This supports scholarship emphasizing that cultural and religious events can function as platforms for intercultural dialogue and cooperation (Nelson, 2025; Onuorah, 2025).

Anchored in Social Identity Theory, these experiences suggest a shift from rigid in-group and out-group distinctions toward a more inclusive superordinate identity. According to Social Identity Theory, individuals derive part of their self-concept from group membership, and intergroup harmony becomes more likely when individuals perceive themselves as belonging to a shared group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this context, non-Catholic students' sense of belonging reflects a process of recategorization, where identities such as “students” or “festival participants” become more salient than religious differences. This aligns with findings that inclusive social contexts can reduce intergroup bias and foster tolerance in culturally diverse settings (Verkuyten et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the reported experiences of inclusion and respect indicate the presence of positive intergroup conditions that facilitate mutual understanding and empathy. Interfaith education literature highlights that meaningful engagement, particularly through shared experiences, enhances intercultural competence and promotes respect for diversity (Jackson, 2019; Deardorff, 2020). In this regard, the Lambigit Festival can be understood as an informal learning environment that supports intercultural dialogue and strengthens social cohesion among students of different religious backgrounds.

### **Non-Catholic students' participation in the Lambigit Festival**

Participation among non-Catholic students reflects a dynamic interplay of institutional expectations, social belonging, and personal agency. While academic incentives initially motivate involvement, these motivations often evolve into deeper social and cultural engagement. This progression highlights the role of structured school activities in facilitating meaningful intercultural interaction.

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, participation represents a process of identity negotiation rather than assimilation. Students maintain their religious in-group identity while simultaneously affiliating with a broader institutional group. Research suggests that individuals in multicultural environments often develop multiple or hybrid identities, allowing them to engage across group boundaries without compromising their core beliefs (Verkuyten, 2018). Similarly, studies on interfaith identity formation indicate that individuals can navigate multiple cultural and religious affiliations in ways that promote both personal integrity and social inclusion (Khan, 2025).

Moreover, the emphasis on social interaction reflects the fundamental human need for belonging. Empirical evidence demonstrates that a strong sense of belonging enhances engagement, motivation, and positive social outcomes in educational settings (Allen et al., 2018). Thus, participation in the festival is not merely compliance with institutional requirements but a meaningful avenue for fostering inclusion and strengthening community ties.

### **Non-Catholic students' feelings when participating in the Lambigit Festival**

The emotional experiences of non-Catholic students, characterized by joy, excitement, and a sense of unity, underscore the role of cultural events in fostering positive social and emotional connections. Shared participation in such events can generate a sense of collective belonging, reinforcing interpersonal relationships and group cohesion.

At the same time, the presence of boundary-setting behaviors highlights the complexity of intergroup engagement. From a Social Identity Theory perspective, individuals actively maintain their in-group identity while interacting with members of other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This balance between participation and identity preservation reflects a healthy negotiation of social identity, where individuals engage openly while remaining grounded in their own beliefs. Research suggests that a secure sense of identity can facilitate openness to diversity and reduce defensiveness in intergroup interactions (Verkuyten, 2018).

Additionally, the curiosity and openness expressed by participants indicate the development of intercultural competence. Frameworks of intercultural learning emphasize that exposure to diverse perspectives, when accompanied by reflection and dialogue, enhances empathy and reduces prejudice (Deardorff, 2020). These findings suggest that the festival provides opportunities for meaningful engagement with religious diversity.

### **Non-Catholic students' significant moments during the Lambigit Festival**

The significant moments described by participants highlight the importance of meaningful interaction in fostering positive intergroup relations. Experiences of inclusion, recognition, and intercultural understanding demonstrate that active engagement, rather than passive exposure, is essential for promoting social cohesion.

These findings are consistent with intergroup contact theory, which posits that positive interaction under appropriate conditions reduces prejudice and improves intergroup attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Within the framework of Social Identity Theory, such interactions facilitate cognitive recategorization, allowing individuals to perceive members of other groups as part of a shared social identity. This process contributes to the reduction of stereotypes and the development of mutual respect (Verkuyten et al., 2019).

Furthermore, engagement with diverse religious practices can prompt reflection and reinforce personal beliefs while fostering respect for others. Interfaith education research supports the idea that encountering different belief systems can deepen self-understanding and promote intercultural sensitivity (Jackson, 2019).

### **Non-Catholic students' participation in the Lambigit Festival with their beliefs**

Participation in the festival, in relation to personal beliefs, is characterized by respect, strategic engagement, and a focus on shared values. Rather than adopting the religious meanings of the event, non-Catholic students engage through universal values such as respect, compassion, and community. This reflects a mature form of intercultural participation that prioritizes coexistence without requiring assimilation.

From a Social Identity Theory perspective, this behavior represents identity management strategies, where individuals maintain positive distinctiveness while minimizing intergroup conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Research on intergroup toleration further suggests that emphasizing shared values can promote cooperation while preserving group differences (Verkuyten et al., 2019).

This aligns with contemporary perspectives in interfaith education, which emphasize dialogue grounded in shared human values rather than doctrinal agreement (Nelson, 2025). Cultural festivals, therefore, function as important spaces where individuals can engage across differences, fostering both unity and respect for diversity (Onuorah, 2025).

The findings indicate that the Lambigit Festival contributes to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by serving as a dynamic model of inclusive and experiential learning. It fosters intercultural competence, encourages critical reflection, and promotes respect for diversity, all of which are essential components of global citizenship education.

At the same time, the festival promotes peaceful coexistence and strengthens social cohesion, demonstrating how educational institutions can actively cultivate inclusive environments. Rather than viewing diversity as a challenge, the Lambigit Festival reframes it as a valuable resource for learning and community-building, thereby reinforcing the role of cultural events in advancing both educational and societal goals.

## CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative study on the participation of non-Catholic students in the Lambigit Festival in Dipolog City, Philippines, reveals a complex yet largely positive experience characterized by themes of unity, cultural exposure, respect, enjoyment, and academic motivation. Initially driven by pragmatic reasons, participation often evolves into meaningful social and cultural engagement, reflecting students' strong capacity for interfaith interaction. Participants' experiences were predominantly positive, marked by feelings of enjoyment and a sense of belonging. These were accompanied by a conscious effort to maintain personal faith boundaries alongside a genuine curiosity to learn about Catholic traditions. Significant moments frequently involved experiences of inclusion, the cultivation of mutual respect, affirmation of personal beliefs, and meaningful connections with peers through shared activities. From the participants' perspectives, their involvement was guided by a strong respect for others, strategic navigation of institutional expectations, clear articulation of personal boundaries, and an emphasis on universal values and cultural learning. Analyzed through the lens of Social Identity Theory, these findings suggest that the Lambigit Festival has the potential to foster a more inclusive superordinate group identity among students. This, in turn, reduces the salience of religious out-group distinctions and promotes positive intergroup relations. Furthermore, the study highlights the contribution of interfaith and intercultural engagement to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), through the promotion of intercultural understanding, and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), by fostering inclusive and respectful interactions within the educational community. Overall, the Lambigit Festival emerges as a compelling case illustrating how local cultural traditions can serve as platforms for fostering social cohesion among young people in diverse environments, effectively bridging religious differences.

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