

Thriving in College: A Qualitative Exploration of High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Philippine Higher Education Landscape



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ABSTRACT. This study explored the experiences of students diagnosed with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HF ASD) in higher education. It also investigated academic challenges in the mainstream, learning the coping strategies and opportunities of the existing special support programs. Data were analyzed through the integration of Yin's five phases of analysis, ensuring that it complements the stages of the multiple case study methodology and a structured, in-depth exploration of the data. The study enlisted a diverse group of participants across the Philippines. Findings underscored the resilience and adaptability of the participants to enhance a transformative impact of education for the special student population. Relevant concerns related to social interactions, the importance of inclusive environments, and the significance of self-advocacy, empowerment, and familial and peer support for academic success are highlighted. In conclusion, the study recommends the establishment of on-campus counseling services tailored to HF ASD students and advocates for the fostering of inclusive and supportive higher education environments.

This research contributes valuable insights for developing targeted interventions and support systems to enhance the overall well-being and success of HF ASD students thriving in the college setting.

1.0. Introduction

In 2019, The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that 10 Filipinos over 15 years old had some impairment. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) cases in the Philippines was estimated to be 500,000 in 2008 by the Philippine Department of Health (Lambatin, 2018). There has been little effort put into evaluating the number of students with ASD in higher education. However, the presence of this special population cannot be ignored nor denied presently. In a 2016 study, a team has identified common areas of difficulty experienced by students with ASD including "limited interpersonal competence, managing competing demands in postsecondary education, and poor emotional regulation" (White, et al., 2016). In examining the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Filipino college students diagnosed with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HF ASD), this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the existing body of literature on autism spectrum disorders and higher education. By exploring the lived experiences of these students within the campus environment, the research can

provide useful information for developing a targeted and culturally sensitive campus-based counseling program that can address the specific needs of this population (Adreon, Durocher, 2007). This endeavor is driven by the broader goal of fostering inclusivity and enhancing the overall well-being and academic success of individuals with HF ASD pursuing higher education (Anderson, et al., 2017) in the Filipino context.

Currently, as more students diagnosed with ASD enroll in mainstream classrooms, this type of setting "can lead to academic and social benefits due to reduced isolation and stigma" (Camargo, et al., 2014). Existing evidenced-based interventions have only rarely included school-based interventions, particularly those geared at fulfilling the post-school transition needs of students diagnosed with ASD (Ames et al., 2015). This implies an essential need for the school counseling profession to rise within the ranks of the school multidisciplinary team to meet the challenges of serving these students. The primary motivation for undertaking this study is to increase awareness of how individuals with ASD fare in higher education through their first-hand experiences.

Students with HF ASD can be seen within the college milieu, but the available services to these

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students seem to be lacking. As described in a 2019 study, schools offering “transition planning and systematic non-academic social and emotional supports from the start of the college experience as well as specific training for faculty, staff, and peers” (Accardo, et al., 2019) can help students with ASD succeed as they graduate and transition to the workforce. In this light, this research focuses on these students and the issues that affect them at school. This research also illuminates their experiences within the classroom setting and the suitability of the benefits to their needs derived from the school’s programs and services. Specifically, it focuses on the role of Guidance and Counseling services and school-wide programs in a learning environment in assisting students with HF ASD.

A wealth of literature exploring various aspects of neurodevelopmental characteristics, executive functioning, well-being, and social challenges can be observed as associated with HF ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder, n.d.). Despite this, a notable research gap exists in the specific context of Filipino college students navigating school campuses. Addressing this research gap is essential for developing targeted interventions and support mechanisms tailored to the Filipino higher education context. Understanding these demographics’ specific challenges is crucial for enhancing inclusivity, fostering academic success, and improving overall well-being. The Philippines’ diverse cultural context

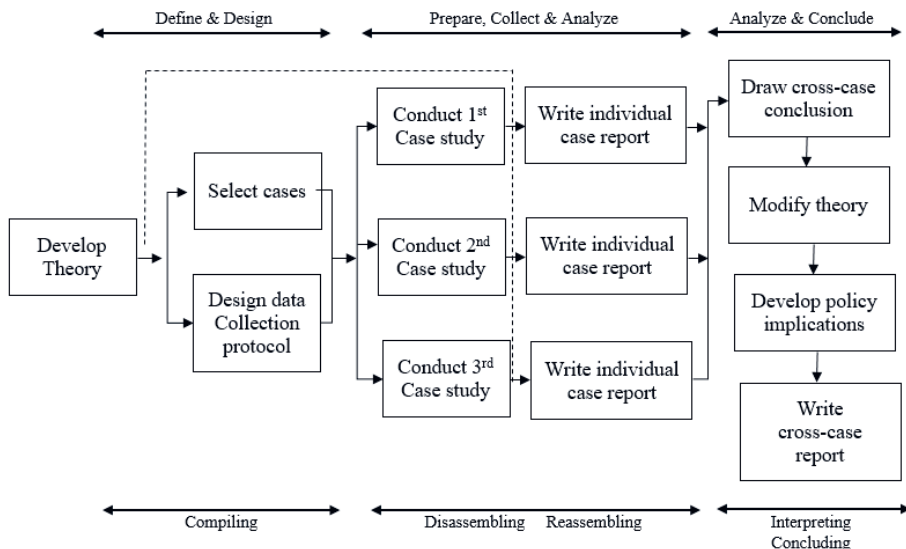
adds complexity to their experiences, necessitating a nuanced exploration of how these individuals navigate academic, social, and emotional aspects of campus life. By bridging this research gap, future researchers may consider contributing valuable knowledge that informs policies, practices, and programs aimed at creating a more supportive and inclusive environment for Filipino college students with HF ASD.

2.0. Methodology

Research Design. The research employed a qualitative research design, which focused on capturing the perspectives and experiences of college students diagnosed with HF ASD. Yin’s (2015) multiple case study approach provided the framework for this research, facilitating an in-depth exploration of participants’ stories. The qualitative research design, guided by Yin’s (2015) approach, enabled the researcher to capture the richness of participants’ narratives. Furthermore, it gathered detailed and contextually rich data through semi-structured interviews, providing insights into the participants’ viewpoints, coping mechanisms, and interactions within the academic environment. Verbatim transcriptions of interviews were utilized to maintain the authenticity of participants’ voices and stories.

Participants and sampling technique. The study enlisted a diverse group of participants, each contributing a unique perspective to the exploration of the campus experiences of Filipino college students

Figure 1
Data Analysis Procedure



diagnosed with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HF ASD). A total of ten (10) college students met the criteria for inclusion in this study, where eight (8) were males and two (2) were females. Participants were recruited from private colleges and universities in Metro Manila, nearby provinces, including as well a state university in Visayas.

The sampling procedure employed in this study is purposive sampling, a deliberate and thoughtful approach chosen for its ability to select participants based on specific criteria that align with the research objectives. Purposive sampling is particularly suitable for studies aiming to explore in-depth experiences and perspectives within a particular population, such as college students diagnosed with HF ASD. The criteria for selection included factors like the type of degree pursued, the academic institution attended, the year level, age, and gender. The study employed a combination of qualitative measures to gather in-depth and nuanced data on the campus experiences of Filipino college students diagnosed with HF ASD. A set of predetermined questions was utilized to guide the interviews, ensuring consistency across participants while allowing room for participants to share unique insights. All interviews were recorded through audio or video to ensure accuracy and thorough analysis, depending on the chosen interview mode. This step ensured the fidelity of the data and maintained ethical standards in representing participants' voices (Olson, 2018).

Data Analysis Procedure. The researcher utilized Yin's (2015) Five Phases of Analysis as the foundation for developing a thorough data analysis plan for this investigation. This well-established methodology was specifically developed to methodically facilitate the extraction of significant insights from qualitative data, guaranteeing a systematic examination of patterns, themes, and linkages in the dataset (McCrorry, 2018). For a comprehensive analysis of this study, Yin's (2015) Five Phases of Analysis and the Multiple Case Study Methodology Flow were applied. Data analysis involves five steps: compiling data, disassembling data, reassembling data, interpreting data, and concluding data. Compiling data necessitates gathering all relevant information, like interview transcripts and observational notes. The collected data is then broken down into manageable units or segments through this stage of disassembling data. The next stage refers to reassembling data, where similar data points are grouped to identify common patterns or themes. The obtained patterns or themes undergo the interpretation stage, which involves analyzing data within research objectives to gain deeper insights. Finally, the analysis is accomplished with concluding data.

Data collection and analysis. This integration

allows for a structured and in-depth exploration of the qualitative data in the Define and Design stage of the case study flow. A theoretical framework was developed to align with the formulation of the theory and guide the case selection. During this stage, the compiling phase of data analysis effectively managed the various data sources utilized in the study.

The Disassembling and Reassembling phases of Yin's (2015) data analysis were integrated into the "Prepare, Collect and Analyze" phase of the case study flow. The data were systematically broken down using coding methods, enabling the natural emergence of patterns and themes. During this process, it became essential to examine the unique campus experiences of the study participants, allowing for reference to and challenging existing theories on school counseling and ASD support based on the new findings.

In the "Analyze and Conclude" phase of the multiple case study flow, cross-case conclusions were made by comparing the findings obtained. This phase entailed discerning patterns, themes, and variations among the cases. By leveraging the findings from these comparative analyses, the researcher could adjust the original theory.

During the "Interpreting" phase, the reassembled data drew out deeper meanings and implications. In the "Concluding phase," the final step of the data analysis process involved formulating recommendations for future research within the domain of study. The Data Analysis Plan, incorporating Yin's (2015) Five Phases of Analysis, provided a detailed method for dissecting and understanding the data. Simultaneously, the Multiple Case Study Methodology Flow offered a structured approach to the overall research design and progression. These approaches to analyzing qualitative data ensured the study was thorough, systematic, and grounded in empirical data and theoretical understanding.

In alignment with Sunday et al.'s (2020) recommendations, the research adopts a multiple case study method as a methodological framework to uncover the experiences of students diagnosed with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HF ASD) in developing a school counseling program. This aims to shed light on the guidance and counseling program from the perspective of HF ASD students, explore its implementation, and understand the outcomes. Yin's (2015) case study method is deemed suitable for studying current phenomena within real-life settings, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are unclear.

3.0. Results

By exploring their academic journeys, social interactions, self-advocacy, and familial and peer support, the results comprehensively understand the

multifaceted challenges and triumphs these students encounter within the campus environment.

Academic Experiences

The participants expressed the concept of “academic experiences” through interviews and anecdotal narratives regarding their own experiences inside their separate educational institutions. The thorough examination of the expressed themes resulted in identifying three subthemes: adaptable learning approaches, provisions and assistance, and an additional category for experiences of anxiety or powerlessness.

Learning Styles. Six (6) of the ten (10) participants expressed their views towards their learning styles. Most of the participants were having difficulties in terms of adjusting to the pace of the lessons being taught. Others also expressed difficulties during their online classes and yearned for more face-to-face classes. The transition to online education emerged as a pivotal aspect of the learning experience for participants. Some of these experiences refer to adjusting to the heavy reliance on technology, navigating online platforms, and completing tasks in virtual environments (Gelbar et al., 2014; Ecang & Petalla, 2022).

In some subjects, more lessons focus more on learning the topic. Those stuff I appreciate hands-on because they give me too much comfort to try to attempt learning (Participant 1, personal communication, May 29, 2023).

Support Services and Accommodation. Among the ten (10) participants, four (4) voiced that they thrive well in an environment where their needs are accommodated. The support services ranged from personalized care, support groups, group counseling, and/or friendly/safe spaces where they feel more at ease. The positive impact on students’ motivation and persistence underscores the importance of fostering a supportive and understanding academic environment (Alverson et al., 2019). It further strengthened the holistic development of every learner because of the functionality of programs, services, and school support directly visible to cater to the needs of students (Laureta & Dioso, 2020).

Weakness *ko talaga yung Math*, ma’am. Although *magaling naman po yung prof ko nun, ako lang talaga yung problem nun. Buti nabawi ko kasi siguro mabait din yung prof.* (Mathematics is my huge weakness, Ma’am. Though my professor was

effective in teaching the said subject, it’s me that’s experiencing a great struggle learning it. Because of the professor’s kind understanding, I was able to catch up and pass the subject.) (Participant 8, personal communication, April 7, 2023).

School Achievements and College Graduation. More than half of the participants expressed their joy whenever they are recognized for their accomplishments, whether big or small. Their overall goal is to graduate with a degree in their hands. Two (2) of them also explained that they graduated with Latin honors despite the adversities they have faced as a student in the Autism Spectrum. The findings resonate with research by Reis et al. (2021), reinforcing the idea that students with ASD can succeed academically. The success stories of participants highlight the significant influence of a degree on this group, instilling hope and emphasizing the crucial role of accessible education (Reis et al., 2021).

... my grades are exceptional. I got high grades even. This will surprise you, I got cum laude in my graduation (Participant 4, personal communication, May 29, 2023).

Social Interactions and Relationships

The participants expressed the theme “social interactions and relationships” through interviews and anecdotal stories about their experiences within their respective campuses. A detailed analysis of the articulated themes yielded two subthemes: challenges with communication and other situations and campus environment and friendly spaces.

Challenges with communication and other experiences. As students diagnosed with HF-ASD, most of the participants (7 out of 10) expressed difficulties in communicating their needs properly. They also explained that there were tendencies to be misconstrued due to the inherent difficulties associated with their condition. The findings, aligned with Madriaga’s (2010) research, wherein it emphasized that difficulties with social contact and communication are persistent issues for individuals with ASD. The study extends this understanding to college students with Asperger syndrome, highlighting that these challenges persist even in higher education.

I became quite popular, but I was also the target of being teased just because I am different (Participant 2 personal communication, May 29, 2023).

I begin to feel awkward with the opposite sex. I started to become conscious that relationships became awkward with the opposite sex (Participant 10, personal communication, May 29, 2023).

Self-advocacy and Empowerment

The participants expressed the theme “self-advocacy and empowerment” through interviews and anecdotal stories about their experiences within their respective campuses. A detailed analysis of the articulated themes yielded four subthemes: communication of needs, participation in college activities, awareness and unhelpful behaviors, and appreciation and self-growth.

Awareness and Unhelpful Behaviors. Awareness of unhelpful behaviors, according to five (5) out of ten (10) participants, provides them with insight as to what they need to change in order to grow. This provides introspection and allows them to correct their behaviors accordingly. The discussion of emotional and cognitive development among college students with ASD, as explored by Miles (2019), aligns with the participants’ journey toward self-regulation and emotional intelligence. Recognizing and correcting harmful behaviors emerge as crucial steps for the overall growth of individuals with HF ASD, emphasizing the significance of interventions that promote self-awareness and advocacy (Miles, 2019).

I just talk directly, and sometimes, I talk without thinking that I intensely hurt people and hurt their feelings. I mean, I offended people. I sometimes talk without thinking, and then I message just because I am rude and impolite. I was the only one who was quite mean because I lacked control of emotions (Participant 5, personal communication, May 29, 2023).

Communication of needs. Seven (7) out of ten (10) participants viewed communication as of paramount importance. They also feel that for them to be able to advocate for themselves, they have to learn how to communicate effectively. Subsequently, they have more difficulty communicating online than face-to-face. They also determined that approaching people can be stressful, but it fosters a better understanding of each other’s needs. The participants’ journey underscores the importance of fostering encouraging settings that facilitate the development of resilience, self-expression, and the capacity to collaborate within group dynamics (Longtin, 2014).

First is the lack of social capabilities, such as speaking. I tend to forget words that fit in the context. Another factor is the language barrier. Our dialect in my town has distinct terms from other towns in my province. I talk less because of the few words prepared on hand. I am not capable of narrating stories to be comprehensible (Participant 4, personal communication, July 10, 2023).

Recognition of Strengths. Five (5) out of ten (10) participants expressed their views regarding their newfound appreciation of their self-growth and strength. In doing so, they hone their skills, establish meaningful and healthy relationships, and utilize their strengths to augment their weaknesses. The study stressed the significance of embracing one’s situation and recognizing inherent abilities as markers of increasing self-assurance and perpetual growth. The participants’ journey reflected the essence of feeling empowered to navigate life’s obstacles through essential self-acceptance (Myrvold et al., 2021).

Being aware of my weaknesses and utilizing my strengths. I utilize my strengths of communicating by using my talents in music and interests. I also do art as a form of self-expression and writing, such as editorials and theses. I also do editorial cartooning to express concerns in society. I also read about history and pop culture, and I was inspired by Stephen Jay Gould on associating random cultures with natural history. I always make something fun out of a boring activity just to enjoy it, like associating it with my interest. This is why I do not settle for mediocrity (Participant 9, personal communication, July 10, 2023).

Family and Peer Support

The participants expressed the theme “family and peer support” through interviews and anecdotal stories about their experiences within their respective campuses. A detailed analysis of the articulated themes yielded two subthemes: Support groups in School, Peer Networks, Active Involvement with School Activities, and Functional Home and Family Dynamics.

Support groups in School, Peer Networks, and Active Involvement with School Activities. The participants indicated that building a peer network is important in helping them understand the nuances of social behavior and forming lasting relationships with people other than their family members. It also serves

to strengthen their sense of belongingness and sense of self-worth. Three (3) out of 10 participants viewed participation in college activities as a way to improve themselves. It involves active participation and taking leadership roles:

In the academy, that is when peers became the friendliest, safest place I've been. They do not tease me and such. Although I still tend to avoid them when I decide to just be with myself, students are very helpful (Participant 1, personal communication, May 29, 2023).

I may not be as good as them, but I could be capable of being with those people *at dun ko sila na-appreciate* (...and that's how I truly appreciate them). (Participant 7, personal communication, April 10, 2023).

The study aligns with the research conducted by Gobbo (2016), emphasizing the significance of social experiences in the developmental trajectory of individuals with ASD. Gobbo's findings resonate with the current study's focus on the active participation of students in college organizations and the positive effects of such involvement on their overall college experience.

Functional Home and Family Dynamics. Creating a strong bond at home first has given the participants the confidence to build relationships and connections outside their homes. The secure and supportive atmosphere at home served as a springboard, instilling confidence and emotional well-being that extended to interactions outside the familial setting. This home-based foundation gave participants the necessary emotional resources to navigate social challenges and engage with the broader community. The findings align with Hillier et al. (2018, 2021)'s studies emphasizing the positive impact of strong family support on students with ASD. It underscores that adolescents with ASD fare better in school, and overall, when they experience a loving and accepting family setting.

... another factor in surmounting these struggles is the support and trust of family and peers. It serves as a motivation to achieve anything I want (Participant 4, personal communication, July 10, 2023).

Existing Supportive School Programs

The participants expressed the theme "campus accessibility and inclusion" through interviews and anecdotal stories about their experiences within

their respective campuses. A detailed analysis of the articulated themes yielded two subthemes: active involvement with school activities and career preparation and transition.

Campus Accessibility and Inclusion. Two (2) out of the ten (10) participants expressed the importance of active involvement with school activities. This is because they found out that they can learn from the group about how to interact with people, and they also feel good about themselves whenever they experience accomplishments of their own. The student affairs office emerges as a pivotal resource, particularly in matters related to extracurricular activities. The emphasis on groups advocating for neurodiversity students highlights a commitment to community building and providing students with a platform to voice their concerns within the broader student population. This underscores the importance of inclusive representation and support structures beyond academic realms. Therefore, there is a need to maximize student services to address the special population and the whole academic community to be better equipped with coping strategies in building the resiliency and well-being of college students (Valladolid, 2021).

Then *si* Sister M, *napakakind niya din po* (Sister M is unconditionally kind). She is a nun, an instructor, and a school counselor. She often messages me positive messages and about God. She and Ma'am C are the people I often chat with when I need advice or just simply some people *na makikinig sa problem ko* (readily available to listen to my problems). (Participant 3, personal, communication, April 22, 2023).

Ang tulong talaga ng guidance sa high school ko, yung inopen nila yung kanilang Guidance Office as safe space for you (a great help I received from our guidance office was when they opened their doors as a safe space for students in need). (Participant 8, personal, communication, April 7, 2023).

Campus Environment and Friendly Spaces. Friendly spaces, according to the participants, are spaces where they feel safe and free from discrimination. As individuals with HF-ASD, most of them are prone to sensory overload. These friendly spaces serve as a sanctuary where they can slowly calm down and regulate themselves. It can also serve as a venue for them to recharge their social batteries. For students grappling with HF ASD, the

calming and open areas on campus are more than just physical spaces—they serve as safe refuges. When the academic demands become overwhelming, these areas offer a respite, allowing students to retreat to a peaceful corner where they can process their thoughts and emotions. The significance of such spaces goes beyond practical utility; they become havens for students to recharge and confront academic challenges with renewed resilience.

It is pretty relaxing being in my school, the trees, and the environment. Sometimes, you just really walk around in silence and alone, and you feel a sense of calmness. So many things that you could do here, and you do not feel very overwhelmed. I feel that when it comes to dealing with sensory overload, as a side note, sometimes being alone helps to quell overload and just find something that could keep more at peace. It is something that I hope to keep up with (Participant 9, personal, communication, May 18, 2023).

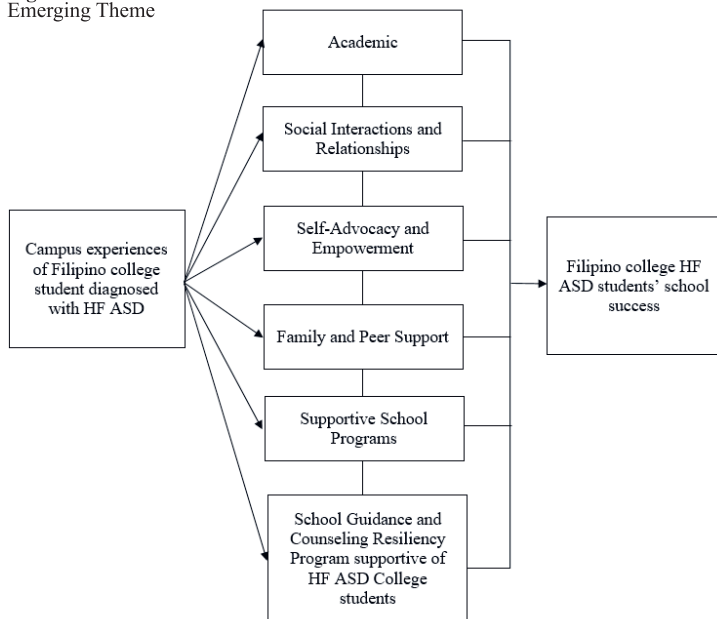
Emerging Theme

The diagram in Figure 2 shows the emerging themes based on the results of the current study. These key themes were identified in this study on the campus experiences of Filipino college students with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HF

ASD). At its foundation, it acknowledges the broad experiences of these students on campus. Branching out from this base are interconnected themes that collectively influence the student’s academic success. These themes include “Academic Experiences,” which underscores the resilience and adaptability of students with ASD in navigating the challenges of higher education. The student’s ability to adjust to learning styles, coupled with the support services and accommodations provided by colleges, paves the way for academic success and eventually results in the completion of undergraduate programs. Thus, this theme highlights the transformative power of education for individuals with ASD and meaningfully offers them hope for a brighter future. Secondly, the theme of “Social Interaction and Relationships” emphasizes the communication struggles faced by students with ASD in college settings. It is evident that the sensory overload triggered by academic tasks often hinders their social interactions. This theme stresses the need for continued efforts to create inclusive and supportive environments that address the unique social challenges of students with ASD.

Moreover, the concept of “Self-advocacy and Empowerment” sheds light on the process of personal development and resilience exhibited by these participants as they acquire the ability to effectively express their capabilities. The process of developing self-advocacy skills is indicative of an individual’s strength to succeed in the realm of higher

Figure 2
Emerging Theme



education. On the other hand, “Family and Peer Support” highlights the crucial significance of support groups, family dynamics, and peer networks in facilitating the academic achievements of individuals with ASD. The students’ active participation in extracurricular activities inside the school setting and the consistent unconditional support provided by their families make substantial contributions to their academic accomplishments.

Furthermore, the subject matter of “Existing Supportive School Programs” elucidates the significance of campus accessibility, inclusivity, and amicable environments in reinforcing the scholastic progression of college students diagnosed with ASD. These programs serve a key role in establishing a climate conducive to the academic success of these students. A notable aspect of the diagram is the feedback loop from the central outcome—students’ school success—back to ‘School Guidance and Counseling Program supportive of HF ASD college students. It suggests that the success of these students can be used to refine and enhance the Guidance and Counseling Services provided to them specific to resiliency programs.

4.0. Conclusion

In conclusion, this comprehensive study provides insights into the diverse encounters of university students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). By conducting a rigorous examination of the gathered data and integrating insights from other scholarly sources, our research has revealed numerous significant themes that shed light on the experiences of these students as they navigate higher education. To foster a higher education atmosphere that is more inclusive and supportive for students with ASD, several key recommendations can be implemented. It is imperative that institutions of higher education prioritize the establishment of on-campus counseling services specifically designed to address the distinct requirements of students diagnosed with ASD. Study findings suggest that these adolescents may benefit from school-based interventions that address their unique learning styles, social connections, self-advocacy, and family support systems. To enhance the overall success and well-being of individuals with HF ASD, it highlights the significance of colleges and universities fostering inclusive and supportive environments. Contributing to a more inclusive and fair higher education landscape, this research is a foundational step toward improving the quality of life and educational experiences of college students on the autism spectrum.

5.0. Limitations of the Findings

The survey’s sample recruitment procedure is

a major limitation. Due to the socially demanding nature of volunteering, these students may exhibit more motivation and social competence than the average ASD college student. Those who took part all went to or graduated from highly selective institutions. Because ASD students’ experiences may vary in less selective or smaller schools, this aspect reduces the study’s generalizability. It is possible that this study did not account for the specific difficulties and possibilities that students in other classrooms faced.

There is a higher chance of error and unpredictability in the data collected when online and on-site interviews are conducted. The response quality and depth may be impacted by the fact that the dynamics of communication might vary between the two formats. Being a pioneering study, it ventures into the unexplored ground. However, it may be the first of its kind to document the success of Filipino young adults with HF ASD in higher education within the cultural context and local literature. The study may have had methodological and interpretive biases due to the lack of previous local research on the topic. The lack of longitudinal data in the study makes it difficult to draw any firm conclusions on the social and academic outcomes for college students with HF ASD over the long run. To further understand the effects of these students’ college experiences on their results after graduation, longitudinal studies would be ideal. Lastly, a limitation of the study is that it does not include a comparison group that could help put the unique experiences of students with HF ASD into context, such as neurotypical students or students with other disabilities. A more complex picture of the unique difficulties and opportunities faced by this group could have been revealed via a comparative approach.

6.0. Practical Value of the Paper

The study’s results are highly seen as valuable for CHED programs aimed at helping students with HF ASD. Some steps in this direction include funding research into the demographics and needs of neurodivergent young adults thriving in college settings. This endeavor will effectively lead to training teachers and support staff in the higher education unit on inclusive teaching approaches and initiatives to help create a more accepting and supportive classroom for students with HF ASD. Inclusionary educational programs and services should be developed in response to the study’s conclusions. Several areas may be emphasized to ensure that these programs and services are tailored to the real requirements and concrete learning needs of students with HF ASD. These areas of emphasis for future strategies refer to mental health treatment, social skills training, career counseling, and academic help.

7.0. Directions for Future Research

In the initiation of future research, the role of university counselors and mental health professionals in academic settings must be considered in maximizing the support for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Other research may further explore meaningful counseling strategies and effective school counseling programs. Professional and objective research may also be taken as another angle leading to functional academic services. This direction of research aims to empower the special student population to self-advocate and make informed decisions about their educational advancement. To be specific, longitudinal studies following the college experiences of individuals with ASD are looking at how this group of student's social and academic lives is affected by the cultural attitudes of Filipinos towards neurodiversity.

8.0. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/ or publication of this article.

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