

Exploring Causes of School Dropout Among Students-at-Risk: A Basis for Guidance and Counseling Intervention Program

Alfie C. Alcoy

Oriental Mindoro National High School, Division of Calapan City, Philippines
alcoyalfie@gmail.com; alfie.alcoy@deped.gov.ph

Date Submitted:

April 23, 2026

Date Accepted:

May 19, 2026

Date Published:

June 14, 2026

DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.20685010

ABSTRACT

This study explored the causes of school dropout among students at risk of dropping out (SARDOs) in selected public secondary schools in the Division of Calapan City and developed a guidance and counseling intervention program grounded in localized evidence. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was used. The qualitative phase involved in-depth interviews with 15 students who had dropped out, supported by triangulation with relevant informants. The resulting themes informed a researcher-developed questionnaire administered to 154 SARDOs from Oriental Mindoro National High School, Canubing National High School, and Bucayao National High School. The instrument demonstrated acceptable-to-very-good internal consistency across the personal ($\alpha = .92$), family ($\alpha = .86$), social ($\alpha = .85$), and school-related ($\alpha =$

$.93$) domains. Thematic analysis identified four interconnected themes: personal, family, social, and school-related factors. Quantitative results showed that personal factors obtained the highest mean ($M = 2.57$, $SD = .60$), followed by family factors ($M = 2.55$, $SD = .43$), social factors ($M = 2.51$, $SD = .43$), and school-related factors ($M = 2.42$, $SD = .27$). Key concerns included uncertainty about the future, limited financial support, fear of criticism and rejection, and perceptions that some topics or policies were insufficiently responsive to students needs. Based on the integrated findings, a guidance and counseling intervention program was proposed, including KAPE-MUSTAHAN, SHINE, TAHA-MUSTAHAN, financial-assistance referral, peer-assisted tutoring, school-guidance collaboration, and teacher capacity-building. The study concludes that dropout risk is multifactorial and requires coordinated, context-sensitive support from schools, families, peers, and community partners.

Keywords: *school dropout, students at risk of dropping out, guidance and counseling, mixed-methods research, student retention, secondary education*

INTRODUCTION

Education is central to personal development, social participation, and long-term economic opportunity. When students leave school before completing secondary education, the consequences extend beyond academic interruption. Dropout can affect employment prospects, psychosocial well-being, family conditions, and community development. Rumberger (2011) emphasized that school dropout is not usually caused by a single event; rather, it develops through the interaction of personal, family, school, and community conditions over time.

In the Philippine public-school context, the Department of Education has implemented the Dropout Reduction Program to help schools identify and assist students at risk of dropping out. The program encourages schools to analyze risk factors and incorporate responsive interventions into school-improvement planning (Department of Education, 2010). Early identification is important because persistent absenteeism,

disengagement, poor academic performance, and weak support systems may signal increasing vulnerability (Hammond et al., 2007; Hoff et al., 2020).

The need for localized evidence is particularly important in the Division of Calapan City. School records cited in the source manuscript identified students who were no longer participating in learning activities across several public secondary schools during School Year 2024-2025. Oriental Mindoro National High School, Canubing National High School, and Bucayao National High School recorded the highest reported cases and were selected as the research sites. These local conditions demonstrate the need to examine how personal concerns, family circumstances, peer relationships, and school experiences combine within the specific context of the learners.

This study explored the lived experiences of students who had dropped out and measured the extent to which identified factors were experienced by enrolled SARDOs. It also developed a guidance and counseling intervention program intended to support prevention, early response, family engagement, peer assistance, and school-based collaboration. By integrating narrative evidence with quantitative results, the study sought to provide a practical basis for more context-sensitive student-retention initiatives.

Literature Review

School Dropout as a Multifactorial Process

School dropout is commonly understood as a process rather than an isolated decision. Alexander et al. (2001) described dropout through a life-course perspective in which early risk factors at home and school may accumulate over time. Goldschmidt and Wang (1999) likewise explained that withdrawal from school can emerge through a developmental process shaped by behavior, engagement, and context. These perspectives support the need to examine multiple domains rather than rely on a single explanation.

Risk factors may include chronic absenteeism, low academic engagement, health concerns, weak family support, social difficulties, and school-related experiences. Hammond et al. (2007) organized dropout risks across individual, family, school, and community categories. In a similar manner, the present study grouped the localized concerns of SARDOs into personal, family, social, and school-related factors.

Protective conditions also matter. Knesting (2008) emphasized the value of supporting students persistence, while the American Psychological Association (2007) highlighted the need for comprehensive responses to the dropout dilemma. These studies suggest that intervention programs should strengthen both academic assistance and psychosocial support.

Personal, Family, and Social Factors

Personal factors may involve negative self-perceptions, low confidence, uncertainty about the future, health concerns, and difficulty regulating emotions. Students who repeatedly interpret academic challenges as evidence that they are incapable may gradually disengage from school. Such conditions underscore the importance of counseling approaches that help learners identify strengths, challenge unhelpful beliefs, and develop realistic goals.

Family conditions may either protect students or increase their vulnerability. Financial instability, limited emotional support, strained relationships, unequal treatment, and limited encouragement can weaken a learners motivation to remain in school. Rumberger (2011) and Hammond et al. (2007) recognized the importance of family background and support in understanding dropout risk. Family-oriented interventions are therefore necessary when students concerns extend beyond the school setting.

Social factors are also relevant because students need a sense of belonging. Fear of judgment, criticism, rejection, and difficulty participating in group activities may contribute to avoidance and absenteeism. Peer mentoring and structured opportunities for supportive participation can help students rebuild confidence and strengthen their connection to the school community.

School-Related Factors and Guidance Interventions

School conditions can influence students' decisions to remain engaged. Learners may become discouraged when they perceive lessons as disconnected from daily life, teaching approaches as unresponsive, or school policies as insufficiently considerate of student circumstances. The Dropout Reduction Program recognizes the value of school-level planning and targeted intervention in addressing these concerns (Department of Education, 2010).

Guidance and counseling interventions can provide an organized response to dropout risk. Carreon and Banaag (2019) discussed the management of intervention and support programs for students at risk of dropping out in secondary schools. Effective interventions may include counseling, home visitation, peer assistance, academic support, referral systems, and collaboration among counselors, teachers, parents, and administrators.

Mixed-methods research is suitable for intervention development because it connects the depth of students' narratives with the broader patterns captured through quantitative assessment. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) explained that mixed-methods designs allow researchers to integrate qualitative and quantitative evidence when a complex problem cannot be adequately understood through one form of data alone.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. The qualitative phase was conducted first to explore the lived experiences of students who had dropped out and identify context-specific themes. These themes served as the basis for developing the quantitative questionnaire. The quantitative phase then measured the extent to which the identified factors were experienced by enrolled students at risk of dropping out. The two sets of findings were integrated to guide the development of the proposed intervention program. This procedural description reflects the actual sequence reported in the source manuscript, although the thesis text also referred to a convergent parallel design.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in three public secondary schools in the Division of Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro: Oriental Mindoro National High School, Canubing National High School, and Bucayao National High School. These schools were selected because they had the highest reported dropout cases in the local school records cited in the source manuscript for School Year 2024-2025.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The qualitative phase involved 15 purposively selected students who had dropped out. Participants were selected because their experiences were directly relevant to the phenomenon being studied. Triangulation was supported through information from parents or guardians, advisers, teachers, peers, or other relevant informants. The quantitative phase involved 154 enrolled students identified as at risk of dropping out. The study used a quota-based allocation across the participating schools, informed by the reported populations and calculated sample requirements: Oriental Mindoro National High School (87), Canubing National High School (33), and Bucayao National High School (34).

Research Instrument

The quantitative instrument was researcher-developed. Initial items were generated from the qualitative interviews and organized under four domains: personal, family, social, and school-related factors. Experts, including professionals in psychometrics, guidance and counseling, statistics, and language, reviewed the instrument for clarity, relevance, technical correctness, and content alignment. A four-point scale was used: 3.26-4.00, highly experienced; 2.51-3.25, experienced; 1.76-2.50, less experienced; and 1.00-1.75, not experienced. Internal-consistency estimates were reported as follows: personal factors, $\alpha = .92$; family factors, $\alpha = .86$; social factors, $\alpha = .85$; and school-related factors, $\alpha = .93$.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher obtained the necessary permissions before collecting data. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected dropped-out learners. Interview responses were transcribed and reviewed, and thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns. In the quantitative phase, the validated questionnaire was administered to the SARDO respondents in the participating schools. The completed questionnaires were retrieved, checked, encoded, and prepared for analysis. Findings from both phases were subsequently compared and integrated.

Data Analysis

Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the stages described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Frequency counts and percentages summarized the respondent profile. Means and standard deviations described the extent to which the four categories of dropout-related factors were experienced. The integration process compared the qualitative themes with the quantitative patterns and used the combined evidence to formulate the proposed guidance and counseling intervention program.

Ethical Consideration

Participation was voluntary. The study observed informed consent and, where applicable, parental or guardian permission for minors. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained in handling the responses and in presenting the findings. The final journal submission should include the confirmed institutional ethics-review reference number, when available.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lived Experiences of Dropped-Out Learners

The thematic analysis identified four major factors associated with dropout experiences: personal, family, social, and school-related concerns. The themes show that learner disengagement was shaped by interacting conditions rather than by a single cause. Personal concerns included negative self-perceptions and health issues. Family concerns included limited support and financial difficulty. Social concerns involved discomfort, criticism, and fear of rejection. School-related concerns involved perceived irrelevance of some topics, outdated teaching strategies, teacher behaviors, and rigid policies.

Table 1. *Themes and Subthemes Emerging from the Qualitative Phase*

Theme	Subtheme	Illustrative codes
Personal factors	Irrational thoughts; health issues	Self-doubt, comparison with others, lack of confidence, uncertainty, recurring illness
Family factors	Lack of family support; financial difficulty	Limited encouragement, unstable income, strained relationships, unequal treatment
Social factors	Social disengagement; social criticism	Discomfort in groups, fear of rejection, criticism, limited sense of belonging
School-related factors	Topics, teaching strategies, teacher behaviors, policies	Perceived lack of real-life relevance, limited interaction, discouragement, rigid rules

The qualitative themes are consistent with the view that dropout is a cumulative process. Learners described discouragement, financial difficulty, health problems, and fear of social judgment. These accounts indicate that school-retention strategies must combine psychosocial, academic, family, and institutional responses rather than focus exclusively on attendance monitoring.

Profile of the Students at Risk of Dropping Out

The quantitative phase involved 154 SARDO respondents. The source manuscript reported an equal distribution between the 12-16-year-old and 16-18-year-old groups, with a mean age of 15.5 years and a standard deviation of 1.76. The respondents were predominantly male (59.70%). The largest parental-status category was separated parents (41.56%), while blue-collar work was the dominant parental occupational classification

(68.18%). Half of the respondents were in junior high school. Among senior high school respondents, the General Academic Strand had the largest share (16.23% of the total sample).

Table 2. *Profile of the Quantitative Respondents*

Profile variable	Category	Frequency / percentage
Age group	12-16 years old	77 / 50.00%
Age group	16-18 years old	77 / 50.00%
Sex	Male	59.70%
Sex	Female	40.10%
Program	Junior high school	77 / 50.00%
Program	General Academic Strand	25 / 16.23%
Program	Technical-Vocational-Livelihood	19 / 12.35%
Program	Humanities and Social Sciences	18 / 11.68%
Program	Accountancy, Business and Management	15 / 9.74%
Parental status	Separated	41.56%
Parental occupation	Blue-collar work	68.18%

Extent of Factors Affecting SARDOs

All four domains were experienced by the respondents. Personal factors obtained the highest mean ($M = 2.57$, $SD = .60$), followed by family factors ($M = 2.55$, $SD = .43$) and social factors ($M = 2.51$, $SD = .43$). School-related factors received the lowest mean ($M = 2.42$, $SD = .27$) and were interpreted conservatively as less experienced because the reported mean fell within the 1.76-2.50 scale range. The pattern indicates that internal concerns, family conditions, and social experiences were more prominent than school-related concerns in the quantitative results.

Table 3. *Extent of Dropout-Related Factors Experienced by SARDOs*

Domain	Mean	SD	Interpretation	Rank
Personal factors	2.57	.60	Experienced	1
Family factors	2.55	.43	Experienced	2
Social factors	2.51	.43	Experienced	3
School-related factors	2.42	.27	Less experienced	4

Note. The detailed quantitative table reported $SD = .27$ for school-related factors, while a narrative summary elsewhere in the thesis reported $SD = .43$.

Leading Indicators Within Each Domain

The strongest personal indicator was uncertainty about the future ($M = 3.26$), while the strongest family indicator was limited financial support for school needs ($M = 3.26$). Within the social domain, difficulty controlling anger when others disagreed obtained the highest mean ($M = 3.00$). For school-related concerns, the perception that topics were not important in life obtained the highest mean ($M = 3.20$). These findings show that student retention requires both immediate practical support and counseling approaches that strengthen hope, self-understanding, communication, and engagement with learning.

Table 4. *Highest-Rated Indicators Within the Four Domains*

Domain	Highest-rated indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Personal	I am not sure about my future.	3.26	Highly experienced
Family	My parents cannot financially support my needs in school.	3.26	Highly experienced
Social	I cannot control my anger when someone disagrees with my opinion.	3.00	Experienced
School-related	Topics being discussed are not important in life.	3.20	Experienced

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

The two phases generally converged on the importance of personal, family, and social concerns. Qualitative accounts reinforced the quantitative evidence that negative self-perceptions, health difficulties, weak family support, financial strain, criticism, and fear of rejection affected learner engagement. School-related factors were less prominent in the quantitative phase, but the qualitative accounts still identified concerns regarding

relevance, teaching approaches, teacher behaviors, and the implementation of policies. This difference is useful because it shows that concerns reported intensely by some learners may remain important for intervention even when the overall mean is lower.

Table 5. *Integrated Findings and Priority Responses*

Domain	Integrated finding	Priority response
Personal	Negative self-perceptions, uncertainty, and health concerns affected attendance and motivation.	Counseling, self-esteem activities, health monitoring, and referral.
Family	Limited emotional and financial support weakened persistence.	Home visitation, family counseling, referral, and sponsor linkage.
Social	Fear of rejection and criticism reduced participation and belonging.	Peer mentoring, assisted tutoring, and supportive group activities.
School-related	Some learners perceived limited relevance, discouragement, or rigid implementation of policies.	Teacher capacity-building, guidance-administration collaboration, and student-centered review.

Proposed Guidance and Counseling Intervention Program

The proposed intervention program was developed from the integrated findings. Its components combine counseling, health support, family engagement, peer assistance, financial referral, teacher development, and administrative collaboration. The program is designed as a modular and school-responsive framework that guidance personnel, advisers, teachers, and partners may adapt to the needs of identified SARDOs.

Table 6. *Summary of the Proposed Guidance and Counseling Intervention Program*

Program component	Primary concern addressed	Expected contribution
KAPE-MUSTAHAN	Negative self-perceptions and low confidence	Individual or group counseling that strengthens self-esteem, reflection, and resilience.
SHINE: Support, Heal, Inspire, Nurture, and Elevate	Health concerns	Health monitoring, check-ups, vitamins, nutrition support, and referral.
TAHA-MUSTAHAN: Kumustahan sa Tahanan	Limited family support	Home visitation and family counseling to reconnect home and school support.
Financial assistance and referral	Financial difficulty	Sponsor linkage and referral for learners with urgent educational needs.
Learning Beshie / peer-assisted tutoring	Social fear and academic difficulty	Peer support, assisted learning, and strengthened belonging.
School-guidance collaboration	School-related concerns	Coordinated review of student concerns, school practices, and responsive policies.
Teacher capacity-building	Home-school partnership and student support	Training on home visitation, inclusive teaching, and early response.

CONCLUSION

School dropout risk among the SARDOs in the selected public secondary schools of Calapan City was shaped by interacting personal, family, social, and school-related factors. Personal factors obtained the highest quantitative mean, while qualitative narratives showed that negative self-perceptions, uncertainty, health difficulties, financial strain, limited family support, criticism, fear of rejection, and selected school experiences affected learners willingness and capacity to remain engaged. The findings support the view that dropout prevention cannot be reduced to attendance monitoring alone. It requires a coordinated guidance and counseling response that addresses emotional well-being, family circumstances, peer relationships, academic support, health conditions, and school practices. The proposed intervention program translates the integrated findings into practical and localized strategies for prevention and early response.

Recommendation

Schools should strengthen early-identification systems for SARDOs and establish timely referral pathways involving guidance personnel, advisers, subject teachers, school nurses, administrators, parents or guardians, and community partners. The proposed intervention program may be pilot-tested and refined through monitoring data, attendance records, learner feedback, and periodic evaluation. Counseling services should include individual, group, academic, career, and psychosocial support. Home visitation and family engagement should be strengthened for learners whose attendance is affected by financial difficulty, weak support, or family conflict. Peer-assisted tutoring and belonging-oriented activities should be expanded for students who experience social fear or difficulty participating. Teacher capacity-building should focus on inclusive practices, meaningful learning connections, positive discipline, and early response to disengagement. Future studies may evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed modules across a longer period and include additional public-school contexts.

References

- Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Kabbani, N. S. (2001). The dropout process in life course perspective: Early risk factors at home and school. *Teachers College Record*, 103(5), 760-882.
- American Psychological Association. (2007). Facing the school dropout dilemma. <https://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/school-dropout>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Carreon, J. R., & Banaag, I. A. (2019). Management of intervention and support program for students-at-risk of dropping out in secondary schools [Research paper]. ResearchGate.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Department of Education. (2010). Guidelines on the mainstreaming of the Dropout Reduction Program (DORP) in public secondary schools (DepEd Order No. 74, s. 2010).
- Department of Education. (2015). Policy guidelines on classroom assessment for the K to 12 Basic Education Program (DepEd Order No. 8, s. 2015).
- Goldschmidt, P., & Wang, J. (1999). When can schools affect dropout behavior? A longitudinal multilevel analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 36(4), 715-738.
- Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J., & Drew, S. (2007). Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs: A technical report. National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.
- Hoff, N., Olson, A., & Peterson, R. L. (2020). Dropout screening and early warning. Student Engagement Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Nebraska Department of Education.
- Knesting, K. (2008). Students at risk for school dropout: Supporting their persistence. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 52(4), 3-10. <https://doi.org/10.3200/PSFL.52.4.3-10>
- Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. H. (1994). *Psychometric theory* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Philippine Statistics Authority. (2020). Dropout rate. <https://psa.gov.ph/content/dropout-rate>
- Republic Act No. 10533. (2013). Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013.
- Rumberger, R. W. (2011). *Dropping out: Why students drop out of high school and what can be done about it*. Harvard University Press.
- Taherdoost, H. (2022). What are different research approaches? Comprehensive review of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method research, their applications, types, and limitations. *Journal of Management Science & Engineering Research*, 5(1), 53-63.
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (n.d.). Dropout rate by grade level. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/dropout-rate-grade>