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VOICES OF THE VULNERABLE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS AT-RISK OF DROPPING OUT (SARDO)

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In the Philippines, schools are grappling with the challenge of students at risk of dropping out (SARDO), a concern heightened by evolving educational landscapes and technology. To address this, a study delved into the experiences of at-risk students, examining their attitudes towards school, subjective norms, and perceived control. Through interviews with a purposeful sample of 10 Grade 7 SARDO students, the research uncovered themes such as mixed feelings about school, with boredom and grade pressure being significant. Students also discussed the influence of peers, teachers, and family, expressing a preference for a more liberating school environment. The findings suggest that interventions should be tailored to individual circumstances, considering family dynamics and socioeconomic factors. Personalized, inclusive education, better teacher training, a positive school climate, and community support are highlighted as key strategies to prevent dropouts and promote a fairer educational system.

***Keywords*:** Students at risk, dropout prevention, lived experiences, phenomenology, Philippines

***JEL Classification codes*:** I21, I24, I28

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Students at Risk of Dropping Out (SARDO) refers to students who exhibit characteristics or behaviors suggesting they may leave school prematurely (Pañares & Ybanez, 2021). Extensive research has identified various factors associated with SARDO, including poor academic performance, absenteeism, behavioral issues, socioeconomic status, family dynamics, individual characteristics, and school environments (Timbal, 2019; Ramos & Magallanes, 2021; Pañares & Ybanez, 2021). Early identification of SARDO students is crucial for implementing targeted interventions to address their specific needs and promote successful academic outcomes (Casinillo & Guarte, 2018).

Despite this progress, challenges and research gaps persist. While previous studies have explored engagement factors, there is a need for deeper investigation into the underlying mechanisms driving attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control (Vahed & Rodriguez, 2021; Aina et al., 2022). Additionally, examining the diverse influences on school and class behavior, including social, cultural, and environmental factors, is essential for a holistic understanding of SARDO experiences (Pinga et al., 2023). Longitudinal studies can reveal the long-term effects of interventions and the progression of engagement patterns, informing both local and global strategies.

In the context of a public high school in central Philippines, the increase in irregular attendance raises questions about the impact of lifestyle improvements and curriculum changes on SARDO (Chitereka et al., 2023). This study addressed these gaps by adopting a mixed-methods??? approach to investigate the multifaceted influences on SARDO students and document their experiences. By understanding the complex interplay of factors contributing to dropout risk, the research aimed to inform the development of precise, powerful, and effective interventions tailored to address the evolving needs and challenges of the students at-risk. This contribution to the academic community and scientific knowledge lies in providing a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of SARDO students, specifically within the context of the evolving needs and challenges of the students at-risk. The study's findings have the potential to inform the development of evidence-based strategies and interventions aimed at reducing dropout rates and promoting academic success for at-risk students.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological case study design to understand the lived experiences of students at risk of dropping out. Grounded in phenomenology, this qualitative approach aimed to uncover the essence of these experiences through detailed descriptions and thematic analysis. The design involves bracketing preconceived notions (epoché), identifying essential themes (phenomenological reduction), and analyzing descriptions to uncover underlying structures (horizontalization). By immersing themselves in the participants' experiences, researchers interpret recurring themes to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, utilizing techniques like member checking and peer debriefing to ensure credibility.

Research Participants, Sampling Technique, and Setting

The respondents of this research were ten (10) Grade seven (7) students from a public high school in central Philippines, purposely selected based on their classification as Students At Risk of Dropping Out (SARDO). This classification, determined by their adviser or subject teacher, aligns with early warning indicators of SARDO. These indicators, as identified by Allensworth (2005), Roderick (1994), Rumberger (2004), and Neild and Balfanz (2006), include attendance less than 70% of the time during the first quarter, failing a subject in previous grades, having a dropout record or being a returning student, belonging to a specific racial or ethnic group, and being older than the average student in their grade.

Research Instrument

The research instrument in this study was an interview guide adapted from Cabus and De Witte's (2007) study on high school dropout rates. The instrument consisted of two parts: the respondent's profile and semi-structured questions. These questions focused on three main categories: perceptions of school/class attendance, experiences influencing SARDOs' absences, and bargaining conditions to improve attendance. The questions served as guides for the interviewer, allowing for follow-up questions to gather deeper insights. Additionally, the interview guide included an observable data checklist in its first part, complementing the semi-structured questions in the second.

Data Collection Procedure

To conduct the study, a transmittal letter was secured from the school head, and coordination with 7th Grade subject teachers and advisors ensured a purposive sample of ten SARDO students based on the provided criteria. Prospective respondents' guardians/parents were met individually to explain the study's rationale and obtain consent. In cases of refusal, alternative participants were selected until the minimum sample size was reached. Data collection involved individual interviews with the selected students, maximizing the number of qualified respondents until data saturation. To maintain research integrity, only two (2) interviewers with proper orientation and familiarity with therapeutic communication conducted the interviews. These interviewers had the backgrounds in psychology, education, or social work, training in therapeutic communication, experience with vulnerable populations, cultural competence, and ethical awareness. Students certified as SARDO and whose parents/guardians provided informed consent, with a signed Contract of Confidentiality, were included. Interviews were scheduled at the respondent's convenience, conducted privately without guardians/parents, and in the respondent's preferred language. Audio/video recordings documented respondent details and interview content. Semi-structured questions, with allowances for relevant follow-up questions, guided the interviews.

Data Analysis

Data collected from this study were analyzed using a thematic analysis (Frechette et al., 2020; Mutya et al., 2022), which focuses on understanding and describing the essence of lived experiences within a specific phenomenon. This method involves a systematic and rigorous analysis of qualitative data, including narratives and perspectives, to uncover underlying meanings, themes, and patterns. By prioritizing participant insights and avoiding preconceived frameworks, this approach aligns with the study's goal of gaining authentic findings directly from those experiencing the phenomenon. The descriptive phenomenological method thus captures the richness of human experiences while maintaining methodological rigor and trustworthiness through systematic analysis procedures.

Data Trustworthiness

To ensure data trustworthiness, rigorous data collection methods, such as interviews, were employed. These methods were further strengthened by incorporating multiple sources of data, including perspectives from students, families, teachers, and other relevant stakeholders, to achieve data triangulation and enhance reliability. Additionally, member checking and peer debriefing were utilized to validate the findings and ensure accuracy. Finally, thorough documentation of research methodologies and transparent reporting of data analysis processes were prioritized to contribute to the overall trustworthiness of the research outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

In a completed study researching Students at Risk of Dropping Out (SARDO), ethical considerations were paramount. The researchers prioritized participant well-being by creating a supportive and respectful environment and addressing any potential harm that may have arisen during the study. Confidentiality was crucial, ensuring the protection of personal data and obtaining both parental assent and informed consent. It was essential to consider potential interventions that could benefit not only the at-risk students but also their communities. By adhering to these ethical principles, the researchers conducted responsible and sensitive research that upheld participants' rights and promoted their well-being.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Classroom Activities Stimulate Boredom

SARDO individuals often view classroom activities as boring and unchallenging, lacking the stimulation needed to engage them. They find routine tasks taken for granted and unmotivating, leading to a desire to leave the classroom for more stimulating activities outside. School tasks lack meaning for them, failing to motivate or encourage participation. (Goldberg, 2022).

> *"It's okay if I won't be in school, because we mostly just write in the classroom. That's usually what sir asks us to do."*
>
> *(Student 8, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

"Sometimes, sir, I feel really lazy, it's just too boring to stay at school."
(Student 4, personal communication, August 18, 2022)

"Actually, I really don't enjoy school. It's just so boring. I'm really sorry."
(Student 2, personal communication, August 22, 2022)

The literature on student engagement highlights the challenges faced by students at risk of dropping out (SARDO). Goldberg (2022) notes that routine classroom tasks are often undervalued by these students, who seek extracurricular activities for a sense of purpose. SARDO individuals frequently find traditional academic tasks meaningless, leading to a lack of interest and participation. This indicates a need for educational practices that are dynamic and relevant to SARDO students' experiences and aspirations. Adapting teaching methods and curriculum design to be more engaging and tailored to these students' needs is crucial. Educators are encouraged to create instructional activities that are not only challenging but also inclusive and stimulating. Emphasizing active learning, collaboration, and problem-solving can help sustain SARDO students' engagement, potentially reducing dropout rates and improving educational outcomes. Fostering intrinsic motivation through meaningful and relevant learning, along with offering flexibility and autonomy, is essential. These strategies can enhance SARDO students' satisfaction and engagement, making education more effective and inclusive (Petrasek, James, Noltemeyer, Green, & Palmer, 2022).

Classroom Activities Stimulate Boredom

Students at Risk of Dropping Out (SARDO) perceive schooling as a mission-oriented task, the goal of which is to achieve grades. However, they lack clarity on the standard of grades they need to attain by the end of this mission. They are under the impression that any grade, high or low, is acceptable as long as they pass. The mere goal of having enough ratings could let them go to the next level.

"I go to school just to be graded, that's all there is to it, sir."
(Student 2, personal communication, August 02, 2022)

> *"It's important to have grades. That's really my main goal. Just getting grades."*
>
> *(Student 8, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"Grades are important in school. That's why we go to school, for the grades."*
>
> *(Student 8, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

The literature on educational assessment and student motivation reveals pitfalls in focusing solely on grades. This approach can overshadow critical thinking, creativity, and personal growth, which are essential for a well-rounded education. Sardi, Idri, Carrillo de Gea, Toval, and Fernández-Alemán (2019) note that students at risk of dropping out (SARDO) often face unclear grading criteria, leading to uncertainty and disengagement. These findings highlight the importance of transparent and holistic assessment practices that cater to diverse student needs and abilities. By adopting such practices, educators can better support the learning process and provide equitable opportunities for success. This could improve educational outcomes and foster a more inclusive environment. Encouraging active engagement in learning and addressing systemic issues like standardized testing are crucial to ensure they do not hinder the development of critical skills. The goal is to create a student-centered environment that nurtures the growth and success of all learners, especially SARDO students.

Going to School Means a Stable Job in the Future

Among all the responses, the said theme is the most common. Schooling for most of the SARDO is a way for them to have a future that is far from a life of difficulty. Others would say that it is their way to escape from their present status. They understood that to get a good job they had to present the basic requirement which is schooling.

> *"When I go to school, sir, my intention is to study hard so that I can get a good job in the future, sir."*
>
> *(Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"And if you could not finish to school, it's really difficult to find a job."*
>
> *(Student 7, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"It's really different if you have finished school, sir, because then you can get a stable job."*
>
> *(Student 5, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

The literature on the socioeconomic impact of education highlights its vital role in securing job opportunities and improving socioeconomic status. Yildiz (2021) emphasizes that individuals in communities with high rates of students at risk of dropping out (SARDO) view education as a pathway to better-paying jobs and escaping poverty. They value education for its potential to lead to financial stability and career advancement. Ensuring access to quality education, providing support, and addressing systemic inequities are essential to help SARDO individuals achieve their educational and career goals. These efforts are crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty and promoting social mobility (Casale-Giannola, Delisio, Sardo, & Kline, 2023). Recognizing the pivotal role of education in creating opportunities and driving socioeconomic mobility is essential for a brighter future for SARDO students and their communities. Educational practices and policies must be designed to harness education's transformative potential. This involves not only providing access to quality education but also ensuring that educational experiences are meaningful, relevant, and supportive of SARDO students' diverse needs. By doing so, educators and policymakers can help break the cycle of poverty and foster greater socioeconomic equality.

Schooling is a Familial Responsibility, Liability, and Social Expectation

SARDO individuals attend school as a family responsibility, viewing it as a sign of being a responsible family member and acting in the family's best interest. They also see schooling as a legal obligation, with potential consequences for non-attendance. Socially, they go to school because it meets societal expectations for their age, avoiding questioning or stigma for their parents.

> *"I really strive in school to be able to help my family."*
>
> *(Student 2, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"It's important to go to school so that one won't have a hard time when they grow up."*
>
> *(Student 7, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"I go to school so I can be successful when I grow up, unlike others who don't prioritize grades, sir."*
> *(Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

The literature on students at risk of dropping out (SARDO) reveals their view of education as a means to fulfill familial roles and contribute to family well-being. Sardo (2023) notes that these individuals see education as both a duty to their family and a legal obligation. They worry about the repercussions of not complying with compulsory education laws and feel a duty to meet societal expectations to maintain their family's reputation. This perspective highlights how personal, familial, and societal factors influence SARDO students' attitudes toward education and their decision to stay in school (Yildiz, 2021). These insights underscore the need for educational practices and policies that actively engage families, ensure awareness of legal responsibilities, and address societal expectations. Yildiz (2021) emphasizes creating inclusive and supportive school environments that recognize the unique challenges SARDO students face. By doing so, stakeholders can provide necessary support to facilitate their educational journey and foster positive school experiences. This approach is crucial for enhancing the resilience and success of SARDO individuals within the educational system.

Being Absent is a Missed Opportunity and Generates a Feeling of Remorse

Some SARDO students understand their educational responsibilities and the future benefits of education. However, unyielding factors can lead to attendance issues, causing frustration and fear of falling behind. They view school as a path to a brighter future, and missing out feels like a step away from that path.

> *"I'm thinking of skipping class, sir, because it feels like a waste. Sometimes I even feel like crying because I feel embarrassed."*
> *(Student 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"I feel bad about my father's efforts going to waste."*
> *(Student 8, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"Sometimes I feel like I would be better off if I hadn't entered."*
> *(Student 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

The literature on students at risk of dropping out (SARDO) highlights their struggle to balance recognizing education's benefits with personal frustrations and hopelessness. Yildiz (2021) explores how these students, despite understanding that education can lead to a better future, often deal with irregular attendance and disengagement. Their academic difficulties create a sense of falling behind, which exacerbates their fears of further setbacks. This cycle underscores the need for targeted interventions and support systems to address SARDO students' unique challenges and re-engage them in their education. The challenges faced by SARDO students—including their awareness of education's importance, struggles with attendance, and fear of underachievement—highlight the necessity for responsive educational practices and policies. Developing strategies to address attendance issues, build resilience, and provide alternative success routes is crucial. Implementing counseling services, mentorship programs, and alternative education pathways can empower SARDO students to overcome obstacles and pursue their educational and career goals with resilience. These interventions are critical for supporting SARDO students' success and well-being within the educational system, helping them navigate their challenges and achieve their aspirations.

The School is a Hub of Learning

SARDO knows that the school is where they can be taught many things necessary for life. They come to school for the purpose that they would have the learning offered in this place. Being at school, they know that they will learn and that they know how it is to learn because they know what these learnings can do to them in the future.

> *"I like coming to school because I want to learn."*
> *(Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"It's important to understand what is being taught."*
> *(Student 9, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"That's really why school is the place to learn things. Because the teacher teaches. For example, just with computers alone, in school, there are many techniques to learn."*
> *(Student 6, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

In the literature review, SARDO individuals are depicted as perceiving school as a pivotal platform that presents invaluable learning opportunities crucial for personal and professional development. Their attendance at school is rooted in the expectation that their education will furnish them with the requisite skills and knowledge for their future pursuits, underscoring their acknowledgment of education's pivotal role in shaping their prospects (Gandhi, Gani, & Sardi, 2023). Furthermore, their motivation to engage in educational pursuits is fueled by a keen recognition of the opportunities afforded by schooling and a forward-thinking stance on the future implications of education (Anurogo, La Ramba, Putri, & Putri, 2023). The mindset described not only fosters a positive educational environment but also promotes lifelong learning outside the confines of traditional classrooms. It enables SARDO individuals to actively pursue personal and professional growth. Acknowledging SARDO individuals' understanding of the importance and future impact of education can guide the development of educational practices and policies. By creating supportive learning environments, tailored to their needs, SARDO individuals can be empowered to reach their maximum potential.

Degree of Pressure Felt in the Classroom

SARDO feels the need to do things as a student and there is a perception of pressure on how to have things done at the needed time. SARDO claims that they are not used to handling pressures and that whenever they are in such situations, the usual thing they do is avoid it. Avoidance is not always a good coping mechanism especially since it could compromise the chances of developing oneself to grow.

> *"When I'm at school, I can focus on assignments and projects because it seems like I can't handle them if I'm at home, so I sometimes skip."*
> *(Student 10, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"There's just so much to do."*
> *(Student 2, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"I feel a bit pressured here."*
> *(Student 9, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

"I just feel like I can't handle it, sir, because it's overwhelming."
(Student 4, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

In the literature review, SARDO individuals are depicted as recognizing the significance of meeting academic expectations and deadlines. Despite this awareness, they frequently encounter challenges in effectively managing stressful circumstances and feel ill-equipped to cope with pressure. Consequently, they resort to avoidance as a coping mechanism to alleviate the immediate discomfort stemming from academic pressures. Regrettably, this reliance on avoidance tactics can have enduring repercussions on their personal advancement and maturation, potentially impeding their capacity to acquire new skills and undergo growth (Tye & Sardi, 2023). To address SARDO individuals' tendency to resort to avoidance as a coping mechanism and its potential implications for personal growth, it is essential to promote the adoption of effective coping strategies. Creating supportive learning environments where SARDO individuals feel encouraged to seek help and voice their concerns can aid in cultivating resilience. This proactive approach can steer them towards adopting healthier alternatives to avoidance. By acknowledging SARDO individuals' perspectives on academic pressure and nurturing constructive coping mechanisms, stakeholders can offer the vital support needed for their academic achievements and holistic development.

Classmates are Stressors due to Overcrowded Classrooms

SARDO perceives classmates as a source of stress. They often are not used to an environment of noise and commotion. During their elementary years, the number of students per class is limited and controllable or manageable. In Sogod National High School students per class are maximized which could even reach up to 83 students per class.

"I really don't have much problems with them, sir, sometimes it's just too much for me. It really hurts my head because it's so complicated."
(Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"I feel stressed because I hate them and so I don't come to class."
(Student 8, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

> *"We feel cramped here in school, like sardines. It's suffocating with so many people. Sometimes we even have to step out of the classroom, which can be really stressful."*
>
> *(Student 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

In the literature review, SARDO individuals are noted to exhibit unease in noisy and disorderly settings, showing a preference for smaller, more intimate class sizes akin to those found in elementary school (Casale-Giannola, Delisio, Sardo, & Kline, 2023). The transition to larger class sizes poses challenges for SARDO individuals, characterized by heightened noise levels and reduced individualized teacher attention. Consequently, there is a pressing need to confront the obstacles associated with larger class sizes and establish nurturing learning environments that prioritize the academic achievements and well-being of SARDO individuals. In addition to acknowledging the experiences of SARDO individuals and addressing their apprehensions regarding class size, educational practices and policies can be enhanced by implementing strategies to effectively manage classroom dynamics. This includes offering supplementary support to students grappling with larger class sizes and cultivating a strong sense of community and belonging within the school environment. By proactively responding to the needs of SARDO individuals, educators and policymakers can create a supportive framework that bolsters their academic progress and nurtures their social-emotional well-being, as advocated by Casale-Giannola, Delisio, Sardo, & Kline (2023).

Unattended Bullying Cases

Though the Child Protection Policy exists, teachers fail to implement this, and cases are sometimes unattended and taken for granted. The degree of seriousness is not given to certain cases of bullying that it deserves. Such happenings involving SARDO aggravate the down feelings of these students, thus making them feel being served with justice and ultimately losing the appetite for attending classes.

> *"Yes, because my classmates are bullies."*
>
> *(Student 5, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"I have some enemies in school."*
>
> *(Student 8, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"Every time I enter school, there's always someone bullying. That's how it is with our classmates."*
>
> *(Student 9, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

Existing literature reveals that despite the presence of protective measures like policies, their enforcement often falls short (Berg, Woods, Shaver, & Kostas-Polston, 2022). This gap in implementation leads to instances where bullying incidents are overlooked or not adequately addressed. Such lack of intervention exacerbates the negative experiences of students at risk of dropping out (SARDO), intensifying their feelings of injustice and subsequently diminishing their motivation to attend classes (Berg et al., 2022). In light of the importance of prioritizing the well-being of SARDO individuals in educational settings, it is imperative to implement and enforce policies that ensure their protection. This necessitates providing thorough training and assistance for educators to identify and tackle instances of bullying effectively, along with establishing transparent protocols for promptly and compassionately handling such situations. Furthermore, cultivating a culture of inclusivity and mutual respect within schools can play a pivotal role in mitigating incidents of bullying and fostering a secure, nurturing learning environment for all students, as emphasized by Berg, Woods, Shaver, & Kostas-Polston (2022).

Classmates as Major Contributors in Disadvantageous Decisions and Judgments

According to SARDO, their malign peers are like magnets that whenever close by, seem to drag them out of class. SARDO easily are being carried and make decisions not favorable to them as students. SARDO has this weakness in terms of standing in their own decisions and that they often rely on the dictates of others.

> *"If my classmates provoke me, sir, I'll retaliate."*
>
> *(Student 5, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"They're good at teasing and pretending to be innocent, but I end up joining in too."*
>
> *(Student 4, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"Sometimes when someone is absent from school, it's obvious they're cutting classes, and then they start teasing. Sometimes they text me that we're going to play basketball."*
>
> *(Student 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

According to Buhagiar and Azzopardi Lane (2022), students at risk of dropping out (SARDO) often struggle with peer pressure, leading to poor decision-making that undermines their academic responsibilities. This vulnerability reflects a lack of assertiveness and autonomy, limiting their ability to resist external influences. The study highlights how peer pressure affects SARDO students' academic engagement and outcomes, underscoring the need for interventions to boost their resilience, assertiveness, and autonomy. Educational practices and policies must address these specific needs to optimize SARDO students' academic experiences and achievements. Educators and support personnel play a crucial role in providing mentorship and guidance, helping SARDO students navigate peer relationships and make sound decisions aligned with their academic goals and personal well-being. Empowering SARDO individuals to assert their choices and counter negative peer influences is essential for mitigating the impact of peer pressure on their educational success and overall development. Research by Casale-Giannola, Delisio, Sardo, and Kline (2023) supports the implementation of targeted strategies and support systems. By proactively addressing these challenges, educational stakeholders can create an environment conducive to SARDO students' academic advancement and personal growth, reinforcing the importance of tailored interventions within educational settings.

Demands of Financially Limiting Class Requirements

One cause SARDO revealed is that some teachers give assignments or lesson requirements they can't afford. Teachers as they said are inconsiderate or fail to consider that some students are not capable and will never be capable of complying such. Learning still has a price and not all can afford it.

> *"I tease, sir, because Ms. [name] is really good at being strict."*
>
> *(Student 2, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *I don't get involved in their exchanges, sir/ma'am."*
>
> *(Student 2, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

"I don't have a module, sir, because I didn't pay for the photocopying."
(Student 6, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

According to Rahmaniar, Surahmat, Sardi, and Nurnaifah (2024), students at risk of dropping out (SARDO) often experience frustration with assignments perceived as overly challenging. This highlights a lack of teacher consideration for the diverse needs and circumstances of their students, revealing potential disparities in educational access and support. These concerns reflect broader issues of inclusivity and equity in education. Rahmaniar et al. emphasize the crucial role of educators in recognizing and accommodating varying student capabilities and resources to foster a more inclusive learning environment. The need for equity and inclusivity in education necessitates that educators tailor assignments to accommodate diverse backgrounds and capabilities, including those of SARDO students. This requires comprehensive teacher training and professional development focused on empathy, cultural awareness, and differentiated instructional techniques. Policymakers also play a vital role in advancing initiatives that address educational disparities and ensure equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status or background. Casale-Giannola, Delisio, Sardo, and Kline (2023) support the implementation of strategies promoting inclusivity and diversity within educational practices and policies. By addressing these challenges collectively, educational institutions and policymakers can create a more equitable and empowering educational landscape where all students can thrive and excel.

Comments and Criticisms Develop Stigma among Sensitive Students

Students have different ways of taking comments. Teachers might give comments to correct misbehavior yet some students take the comments negatively. Teachers might as well give criticisms with good intentions but students fail to take them constructively or the other way around teachers fail to deliver them effectively.

"I will be absent, sir, because I don't feel well, sir."
(Student 7, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

> *"We'll go out during the other subject, sir, just like... because Ms./Mr. [name] is strict."*
>
> *(Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"Every class, sir, there's always constant scolding, especially if we haven't completed assignments or projects."*
>
> *(Student 9, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

Casale-Giannola, Delisio, Sardo, and Kline (2023) highlight the complexities of classroom communication, noting that teachers often aim to provide constructive feedback to address misbehavior or enhance academic performance. However, the impact of such feedback depends on students' perceptions, which can vary widely. Some students may interpret feedback negatively, seeing it as criticism rather than a development opportunity. Effective feedback is influenced by factors like delivery style, tone, and timing, which can hinder the intended positive outcomes. Understanding this variability is crucial for fostering a supportive classroom environment (Goldberg, 2022). Teachers need strategies to deliver feedback constructively and help students perceive it positively (Sevara & Akramovna, 2023). Targeted teacher training programs focused on communication and feedback techniques are essential. These programs should also promote a classroom ethos of open communication and mutual respect. Policymakers play a vital role in this by recognizing the importance of effective communication for student engagement and well-being (Pellegrini & Vivanet, 2021). Prioritizing policies that support comprehensive teacher development in communication skills and foster a positive interaction culture within educational settings can significantly enhance students' academic progression and socio-emotional growth (Sevara & Akramovna, 2023). By focusing on these aspects, stakeholders can create a learning environment that promotes meaningful dialogue, academic excellence, and holistic student development, thereby establishing positive student-teacher relationships and enriching academic experiences.

Tackling of Out of the Topic/Lesson Discussions

Talking about topics that are religious or baseless lectures far from the subject matter makes the lesson and the teachers not interesting for SARDO. This conditions them to take absences or cut classes as they view the teacher to be a

useless teacher with an uninteresting lesson and ultimately leaves a bad impression on the subject matter.

> *"Sometimes it gets annoying because they keep chatting and goofing off during lessons, sir, and it's really distracting, sir, when you're trying to focus."*
> *(Student 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"Sometimes we talk about our teacher's experiences. It makes us laugh."*
> *(Student 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"That's true. Those stories about the Lord can be troubling because they keep repeating the same stories."*
> *(Student 2, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

SARDO students often express disinterest when educators deviate from the topic or discuss irrelevant subjects (Timbal, 2019). This highlights the importance of instructional relevance to sustain interest and participation. Pedagogical practices straying from the curriculum can decrease motivation and satisfaction. Effective practices should focus on relevance, engagement, and expertise. Continuous teacher development initiatives are essential to enhance methodologies and align curricula with students' needs (Chen et al., 2024). A climate of mutual respect can foster inclusivity and enrich engagement. Prioritizing strategies resonating with SARDO students is crucial for enhancing learning experiences. Aligning curricula with needs, promoting student-centered instruction, and valuing diversity can stimulate their educational journey (Chen et al., 2024). From a policy perspective, supporting teacher capacity building in instructional design and cultural sensitivity, and advocating for inclusive policies can contribute to SARDO individuals' holistic development and success.

Arduous Task/Activities Given

SARDO could sometimes be ages far from the majority of their classmates. Others have a low knowledge background about the present lesson or topic such that as others continue, SARDO feels like being left behind or outcast from the rest of the group. The need for belonging is not satisfied. They could not relate to the lessons making it hard for them to understand and catch up with the rest of their classmates. These accumulated and mixed feelings give them a hard time in class.

"Sir, I don't really like the activities because I can't relate to them."
(Student 7, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"Sir, I'm not really good at the tasks, so I feel embarrassed to participate."
(Student 6, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"There are times when I don't understand the task, so I don't participate because it's difficult."
(Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

According to Casale-Giannola, Delisio, Sardo, and Kline (2023), students at risk of dropping out (SARDO) often struggle to keep pace with their peers, leading to feelings of isolation and detachment. This disconnection negatively impacts their academic achievement and socio-emotional health. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing the factors contributing to SARDO students' sense of isolation to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Creating such environments is crucial for addressing the disparities faced by SARDO individuals. Teachers play a key role by offering tailored instruction and remedial opportunities to help SARDO students bridge knowledge gaps. Fostering a nurturing environment through peer networks, collaborative learning, and inclusive classroom activities can diminish feelings of isolation and boost student engagement. Vera, Heineke, Schultes, and Daskalova (2022) highlight that cultivating a sense of belonging and inclusivity within the educational setting positively affects SARDO students' academic and socio-emotional well-being. This underscores the need for teacher professional development programs focusing on culturally responsive practices and strategies for diverse learning needs. By embedding values of inclusivity and belonging in educational practices, educators can empower SARDO individuals to overcome academic challenges and thrive, creating an environment conducive to holistic growth and academic excellence.

Class Requirements are Tickets for Class Attendance

Teachers have strategies to motivate students to be compliant with their assigned requirements but SARDO in some cases could not comply. Though this does not happen every day SARDO are easily conditioned that whenever teachers assign something they could not attend the class. Another is that these strategies of teachers give SARDO the impression to such teachers that being inconsiderate

and liking them is hard. Whether teachers like it or not, students prefer teachers in certain ways.

> *"Sir, I don't have a book, so I'm not allowed to enter the class."*
> *(Student 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"I keep skipping classes, sir, if I don't have a project or activity because I still get scolded when I attend, and if I don't, I'll be clueless when I enter."*
> *(Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"If we don't submit the requirements, we'll be asked to do them, and even if we manage to attend, if we can't finish what's assigned, we're not excused. Sometimes, we're even marked absent."*
> *(Student 7, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

SARDO students may struggle to meet expectations despite teachers' efforts, indicating a misalignment between incentivization strategies and students' motivations (Gandhi, Gani, & Sardi, 2023). Perceived insensitivity in teacher strategies can affect their willingness to engage academically. Cultivating positive teacher-student relationships based on respect, empathy, and understanding is essential. Educators should prioritize students' worth and motivation, creating nurturing and inclusive environments (Markey et al., 2021). Incorporating student autonomy and decision-making can boost engagement and ownership over academic responsibilities. Considering SARDO individuals' viewpoints in educational settings is important (Casale-Giannola, Delisio, Sardo, & Kline, 2023). Tailoring instructional strategies to diverse needs and fostering inclusivity can support holistic development. Advocating for practices that champion student voice, enhance relationships, and promote respect can create a harmonious educational ecosystem, nurturing growth and fostering collaboration and achievement.

Parental Inattention and Neglect of Needs Provision

Parents tend to forget to follow up on their children in their student's lives. Based on the learning agreement between parents and the school, most of it is not being done by the parents and guardians. As students, children have the tendency to be easily distracted from the things around them far from their school responsibilities. If parents are inattentive and fail to do their guidance

responsibilities SARDO looks for this and perceives neglect. SARDO don't feel the attention they need and they will be looking for it. They look for support and compare the participation of their guidance/parents from other students in school. Their awareness of their parent's responsibilities sometimes matters, especially if not attended to.

> *"They won't just let me be absent, sir."*
> *(Student 10, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"That thing won't just go away, sir."*
> *(Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"My parents are always busy looking for money, that's why they don't have time to monitor what I'm doing in school anymore."*
> *(Student 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

Yildiz (2021) underscores the widespread existence of learning agreements between parents and schools, yet identifies a significant shortcoming: the failure of parents to provide consistent follow-up and support. This lack of involvement often results in SARDO individuals feeling neglected, which can manifest as isolation, distraction from studies, and a sense of abandonment. The comparison with peers' parental engagement can intensify these feelings of neglect and dissatisfaction. It is imperative to acknowledge the pivotal role of active parental participation in enhancing academic success and socio-emotional health of SARDO individuals. Efforts to raise parental awareness and involvement, such as educational programs for parents and improved school-home communication, are vital. These initiatives can foster a supportive and inclusive educational atmosphere for SARDO individuals, bolstering their academic achievements and overall well-being. Policymakers should advocate for strategies that encourage parental participation, forge strong community partnerships, and enhance collaboration between schools and families. By promoting active parental involvement and fostering connections between home and school, policymakers can establish a cohesive and supportive educational framework that propels the academic progress and holistic development of SARDO individuals forward. (Hungo et al., 2023; Sardo et al., 2022).

Discouraging Remarks from Parents

Family members of SARDO are said to be not so good at motivating their children. It is not that they don't give comments at all, but some parents of SARDO demotivate their children. They give discouraging comments to their children in an attempt to change their behavior. SARDO, on the other hand, perceives these comments to mean that they are not important and that their parents or guardians don't care.

> *"It's really demotivating, sir, because instead of attending classes, I'm blamed for being late." (Student 10, personal communication, August 36, 2022)*

> *"When my mother tells me I should just focus on finding a job instead." (Student 39, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"Sometimes they say to me that nothing good comes from going to school, sir." (Student 10, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

Lin et al. (2022) reveal the varied strategies parents use to motivate their SARDO children, ranging from encouragement to inadvertently discouraging comments. Negative feedback can harm SARDO individuals' self-esteem and sense of belonging, leading them to perceive their parents as indifferent. This can result in feelings of low self-worth and alienation within the family, highlighting the importance of understanding family dynamics and their effect on SARDO individuals' development. Positive communication and feedback are crucial for SARDO individuals' motivation and self-image. There is a need for parent education focusing on constructive communication to strengthen parent-child relationships. By fostering an environment of support and encouragement, stakeholders can boost SARDO individuals' motivation and well-being. Policies should promote parent education programs that emphasize positive communication and nurturing family bonds to create a supportive environment for SARDO individuals to flourish academically and emotionally. (Carreon et al., 2021).

Child Labor

SARDO are not really full time students because they are partly working. Whether the job is to support studies or other reasons, SARDO are being disturbed because of these obligations. SARD work not just because of the monetary

compensation but because their families tell them to do so. Most of them work as assistants to their father or mother, doing home chores like taking care of their youngest sibling. Sometimes SARDO takes the function of one of the parents in the absence of the family member and they are obliged to do so.

> *"I'm the one tasked with washing the dishes and knives, sir, so I'm often ordered around, causing me to be late or absent."*
> *(Student 10, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"They make me help in making hollow blocks."*
> *(Student 9, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"Sometimes I also look for ways to earn money to help with my needs."*
> *(Student 6, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

SARDO individuals face a complex reality, balancing academic pursuits with work commitments driven by financial needs and familial expectations (Ramos & Magallanes, 2021). Their responsibilities extend beyond income generation to domestic duties, sometimes assuming parental roles (Pellegrini & Vivanet, 2021). These challenges impact their educational trajectories. It's crucial for educational institutions and policymakers to understand these unique challenges. Implementing targeted support mechanisms and resources can alleviate academic and personal strains (Atzori et al., 2022). Fostering empathy and adaptability in academic domains is essential to accommodate SARDO individuals' diverse obligations. Acknowledging their circumstances and implementing relevant interventions can create a more inclusive educational environment. From a policy perspective, initiatives catering to SARDO individuals' needs, such as tailored academic support programs and flexible scheduling, can facilitate their educational progression amidst complex responsibilities. By recognizing and responding to SARDO individuals' challenges, policymakers can create a more equitable and supportive educational landscape. This empowers SARDO individuals to excel academically and thrive personally.

Poverty

Poverty is a factor in the sense that needs and wants are not being met due to financial problems. From buying school materials, paying school contributions,

the fare for transportation, and even for snacks, poverty is the cause. Families of such conditions cause a child to develop a thinking of not prioritizing studies and discouragement. While others use their condition as motivation to go on, the effect of this is still inevitable.

> *"We don't have rice, sir, so I don't have breakfast. Sometimes, we even eat only cassava." (Student 2, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"I don't have money for transportation, sir, so I just walk, which is why I end up being absent." (Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"I don't have money for transportation to go to school. Plus, I live far away. It's not walkable." (Student 2, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

Perez-Bustos et al. (2022) illuminate the severe effects of financial hardship on students, showing how economic challenges hinder basic needs and academic progress. Poverty's burden ranges from difficulty obtaining school supplies to managing transportation costs and daily financial struggles, placing immense pressure on already financially unstable families. Students may feel despondent and disillusioned, facing the harsh truth that their socioeconomic status limits their access to resources critical for academic success. While some students use adversity as motivation, poverty's impact on their education is undeniable. The intricate link between socioeconomic factors and educational outcomes underscores the need for focused interventions to support students in poverty. Educational institutions and policymakers should prioritize strategies like financial aid, scholarships, and resource access to ease the burdens on disadvantaged students. Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that acknowledges and meets the diverse needs of low-income students is also vital. By tackling poverty's root causes and implementing targeted interventions, stakeholders can reduce the negative impact of socioeconomic inequality on students' education and promote equal access to quality education for all (Perez-Bustos et al., 2022).

Leisure, Pleasure, and Satisfaction of Basic Needs Over Studies

SARDO often confesses that their drive to get involved in pleasure and leisure is hard to control. They tend to give more importance to these needs over studies. And when opportunities come, they grab it without thinking of the

consequences later of the action. They tend to have no endurance to delay the gratification of their needs.

> *"We just hang out at the canteen."*
> *(Student 10, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"My friends, sir, often bring me to play computer games."*
> *(Student 8, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"Back then, sir, I used to skip classes a lot because I would just play basketball with my friends."*
> *(Student 9, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"I like eating, sir, because I get hungry easily."*
> *(Student 6, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

SARDO individuals often struggle with self-control, prioritizing immediate gratification over academic pursuits. This can hinder their academic progress. They face difficulties in maintaining discipline amidst various demands, leading to procrastination and distraction. To foster their academic success, cultivating self-discipline and impulse control is crucial. Educators play a key role in implementing strategies to equip SARDO individuals with essential skills like time management and goal-setting (Sardo, 2023). Interventions to create a positive learning environment can enhance their engagement in academic pursuits. Policymakers should incorporate elements of leisure and basic needs satisfaction into educational curricula. This balanced approach supports SARDO individuals' well-being and encourages exploration and personal growth. By creating an environment that respects their need for rest and recreation, we can ensure they thrive academically and personally.

Pulling Influences from Peers and Friends

Most SARDO are surrounded by SARDO peers and friends. These friends/peers usually are the ones taking them out of their classes. They act like temptations pulling out SARDO from their classes thus making them cut classes. Because they find enjoyment in being with their friends/peers rather than being with their classes they tend to do the same thing all over again whenever opportunities come brought by their SARDO peers/friends.

"My friends outside, sir, would pressure me to drink and tease me if I refuse because they would say they won't invite me anymore since they think I'm too uptight." (Student 4, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"They always bring me to their room, sir, and they won't let me leave or refuse to join them." (Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"Sometimes when I'm in the room, they call me from outside because they want me to join them on their outings."
(Student 9, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

SARDO individuals often prioritize socializing over academics, leading to class avoidance (Ramos & Magallanes, 2021). The impact of peer interactions on their academic choices is substantial. It's essential for educators to devise interventions that counteract negative peer influence. Establishing positive peer relations and a supportive network can balance negative behaviors. Initiatives emphasizing positive norms and academic collaboration can foster a conducive learning environment (Vera et al., 2022). By addressing peer influence proactively, SARDO individuals can be equipped to navigate peer dynamics constructively. Encouraging positive peer dynamics and collaborative practices can empower them to prioritize education. These efforts can enhance academic outcomes and well-being, fostering a culture of support and success. Addressing peer influence and promoting positive dynamics are crucial for supporting SARDO individuals' growth (Ramos & Magallanes, 2021). Implementing strategies facilitating constructive interactions and collaborative learning can contribute to their holistic development and success.

Participation in Out of School Activities in the Community

There are SARDO who are members of organizations in their community. These organizations are not connected to the school. More often than not if there are activities requiring members to be with the organization this is the time that SARDO takes absences for days or so. These activities seem to be given importance by the students because these are their strengths and where they are good at and that they feel being appreciated.

"When I join them, sir, we usually go to another place to hang out."
(Student 9, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"I'm actually a DJ, sir, that's why I often come home late."
(Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"Sometimes I join my friends when they have gigs at other places."
(Student 8, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"Maybe because we're probably the same age."
(Student 9, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

Extracurricular activities offer SARDO individuals a sense of belonging, purpose, and recognition, enriching their growth beyond academia (Caldana et al., 2023). However, these activities often conflict with school attendance, leading to absences (Veloso et al., 2024). This presents challenges in managing time between academic obligations and extracurricular pursuits. Recognizing the value of extracurricular involvement in SARDO individuals' development is important. Participation in community organizations offers opportunities for personal growth, leadership development, and community engagement. A balanced approach that acknowledges both academic and extracurricular pursuits is crucial. Collaboration between schools and community organizations can facilitate integration of SARDO individuals' commitments. Coordinating schedules, aligning goals, and providing support can promote a supportive and inclusive environment that values diverse student engagement (Vera et al., 2022). Recognizing and accommodating SARDO individuals' involvement in community organizations can contribute to their well-being and academic success, enriching their educational experiences and fostering a sense of belonging.

There is a Perception of Freedom and Autonomy Inside the School

The school for them is a safe place. It is where they feel secure and away from harm. As the SARDO compared their situation inside and outside the school premises in terms of freedom and autonomy they preferred more being in school than being out. They are very busy at home doing chores and other responsibilities. They tend to find quality time for themselves and to relax for a while. Autonomy is somehow exercised in the school as a student rather than being a son or daughter at home. They don't really like being dictated on what to do and being restricted from their actions. This as they say is a place they can exercise their freedom. According to them, it is harder to disobey parents.

"I actually prefer being here at school, sir, because I find it relaxing, and at least here, I'm not constantly being told what to do."
(Student 8, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"I wonder if it's stricter there in our place, sir."
(Student 2, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"At our place, sir, my mom always scolds me when I don't do anything."
(Student 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

Schools provide SARDO individuals a sanctuary of safety and liberation, allowing them to embrace their student identity away from home duties (Potts & Smith, 2021). However, asserting autonomy within the family setting presents challenges, as parental authority often supersedes personal autonomy (Tye & Sardi, 2023). Recognizing schools as sanctuaries is crucial for fostering SARDO individuals' growth. It's essential to cultivate an understanding that nurtures the balance between parental guidance and individual autonomy. Prioritizing schools as safe spaces that promote autonomy and self-expression can nurture academic and personal development. Policy development should advocate for initiatives championing autonomy within the educational framework while fostering family collaboration to balance parental authority and individual agency (Yildiz, 2021). Embracing these principles can fortify the educational ecosystem to cater to SARDO individuals' diverse needs, contributing to their overall growth.

The Need to Earn or be Sponsored for

SARDO are tempted to choose to earn rather than attend school. They commit absences whenever one-time opportunities to earn come. They feel envious of their friends/classmates who could buy things at school. They tend to fail to weigh money over studies because they feel the need to earn to support their needs at school. SARDO wants to be working students or in other means of compromise. This in their view would help them improve class attendance since they would have a chance to arrange working time and class time. SARDO also sees this as a way to help ease the burden of their families.

"I want to work here, sir, because sometimes I can't attend due to lack of food."
(Student 10, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

> *"I want to save money even while I'm here."*
> *(Student 9, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

> *"It's good that I have the opportunity to work for our neighbor."*
> *(Student 7, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

SARDO individuals face a conundrum where the importance of education coexists with the need for income generation (Hungo et al., 2023). The quest for financial security often supersedes academic dedication. Envy towards affluent peers intensifies their inclination towards employment. They face challenges in balancing divergent priorities to secure economic stability and academic accomplishment. Assuming roles as working students emerges as a potential pathway to reconcile work and school demands. However, this poses challenges in balancing commitments, managing time, and upholding academic standards. Recognizing this predicament underscores the need for tailored support mechanisms that address the overlapping realms of work and academics. Policy development should advocate for initiatives accommodating the unique needs of working students, offering resources for time management, academic support, and holistic well-being. Promoting a supportive environment that acknowledges the complexities of balancing work and education can empower SARDO individuals to navigate these challenges effectively, fostering a conducive educational setting that promotes success and resilience.

A Class Free from Contributions and Expensive Assignments/Requirements

Some class sessions or activities like experiments and presentations require materials such as costumes, photocopies, modules, and others. SARDO feels a degree of hopelessness since if they could not provide such materials or even contribute to securing them, they conclude to have no chance of being graded accordingly. Assignments and projects sometimes are set as requirements to be able to attend classes and are graded completion for each grading period. In such cases, SARDO claims that if these are removed they won't hesitate to attend classes anymore.

> *"I wish for easier assignments, especially those that don't require buying expensive materials."*
> *(Student 9, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

"I hope they won't buy expensive materials anymore since we don't have money."
(Student 7, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"I hope they won't demand expensive things anymore, sir."
(Student 8, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"I wish the school supplies were free, sir, because we don't have money to buy them." (Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

SARDO individuals grapple with desolation due to their inability to procure essential materials, jeopardizing their academic progression (Casinillo, 2022). Assignments and projects are seen as barriers to class attendance (Hungo & Casinillo, 2024). Their participation hinges on the elimination of these prerequisites, indicating a need for a more inclusive educational environment. The absence of materials profoundly influences their educational journey, emphasizing the need for equitable resource access and support structures. Reassessing assessment methodologies and instructional approaches is necessary to cater to SARDO individuals' needs. Recognizing and addressing material barriers is crucial for promoting equity and academic success. Policy development should advocate for resource equality and adaptable assessment practices. Prioritizing inclusivity and aligning instructional strategies with SARDO individuals' needs can cultivate an empowering, supportive learning environment, fostering accessibility, inclusion, and educational advancement.

Being Kept Away from Badly Influencing Peers

SARDO has weaknesses in controlling their decisions and resistance to bad suggestions. They are easily dictated by the opinions of others. Most SARDO are surrounded by SARDO peers. Peers are temptations and distractions for them to be delinquent in their classes thus they want to be kept away or be temporarily disconnected from their malign peers.

"I want to avoid being disturbed by my friends during class."
(Student 10, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"That I won't be tempted by my friends so I won't skip anymore."
(Student 2, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"There's really no friend to be found in school because they're just the same, and they're still tempting."
(Student 8, personal communication, August 44, 2022)

"It's our own friends who invite us to cut classes, that's why it's better to stay far away from friends, if possible."
(Student 1, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

SARDO individuals are vulnerable to peer pressure, often swayed by distractions that divert their focus from academics (Casale-Giannola et al., 2023; De Aquino et al., 2023). They recognize the adverse effects of these influences on their performance. There's a need for interventions enhancing their resilience and empowering autonomous decisions aligned with academic goals. Cultivating supportive relationships, providing guidance, and implementing mentorship programs are essential. Prioritizing initiatives equipping SARDO individuals with skills to resist peer pressure can enrich their academic path. Policy advocacy should establish support systems encouraging mentorship, nurturing positive relationships, and facilitating guidance. Highlighting the value of mentorship and guidance in peer relationships can empower SARDO individuals to assert autonomy and uphold academic pursuits amid pressures, fostering a robust educational community.

Study Buddy

Due to the fact that most parents of SARDO are not capable of helping them do their assignments or lessons, they want someone to take this role. SARDO sometimes has difficulties in catching up on lessons and they easily get bored when alone. A study buddy is someone who could help them catch up and motivate them to have their lessons done.

"I prefer having a partner when doing assignments."
(Student 8, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

"Having someone to work with on school requirements to finish them quickly."
(Student 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022)

> *"It's good to have a partner to help each other so that the work can be done more easily because there's a lot to do."*
> *(Student 2, personal communication, August 08, 2022)*

Hammond et al. (2023) shed light on the common challenges faced by SARDO students in comprehending and staying abreast of their academic lessons, often resulting in sentiments of boredom and frustration during solitary study sessions. In response to these obstacles, SARDO individuals have articulated a necessity for a study buddy. A study buddy serves as a source of assistance in grasping lesson content and serves as a motivator in completing assignments.Peer support emerges as a pivotal catalyst in fostering academic achievement and motivation among SARDO individuals. The presence of a study buddy serves as a valuable asset in mitigating academic hurdles and enhancing learning achievements. These insights underscore the significance of cultivating collaborative learning atmospheres and peer support systems within educational institutions. By establishing such environments, SARDO individuals can access the vital assistance and encouragement needed to excel academically, thereby emphasizing the essential role of peer support in enhancing educational outcomes.

Eidetic Insight

For students at risk of dropping out (SARDO), education is a complex experience marked by both challenges and aspirations. They navigate a landscape of societal pressures, family responsibilities, and personal struggles, often encountering boredom, pressure, and bullying within the school environment. Financial constraints, lack of parental support, and negative societal influences further compound their difficulties. Despite these obstacles, SARDOs yearn for a better future through education, viewing it as more than just grades and classroom activities. They value community involvement, personal connections, and the fulfillment of basic needs as essential components of their educational journey.

4. CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the diverse challenges faced by students at risk of dropping out, emphasizing the importance of understanding their unique life experiences. These insights reveal that traditional, one-size-fits-all interventions may not be effective for this vulnerable population. Instead, the study underscores the need for personalized approaches that address the specific needs and

circumstances of each student. By recognizing the individuality of these students and tailoring support services accordingly, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, ultimately increasing school retention and improving academic outcomes. While this study is limited in scope, it provides valuable insights into the complexities of student disengagement and offers a foundation for future research and intervention development.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

This study's limited focus on grade seven students at risk of dropping out (SARDO) from a single high school in central Philippines raises concerns about the generalizability of its findings to other students, schools, and regions. The reliance on self-reported data from SARDO students may introduce bias, and the narrow focus may overlook key factors like family and socio-economic circumstances, potentially leading to researcher bias. Additionally, the study's specific geographic and cultural context limits the applicability of its findings to diverse populations and educational settings. Acknowledging these limitations is crucial for accurately interpreting the results and developing interventions that are relevant to a wider range of students and educational contexts.

6. PRACTICAL VALUE

This study offers practical guidance for developing targeted interventions to support grade seven students at risk of dropping out in central Philippines. By examining their experiences and analyzing factors influencing their academic engagement, the research provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers. These insights can inform the development of tailored strategies such as mentorship programs, academic support initiatives, and community engagement projects to improve student engagement and reduce dropout rates. The effectiveness of these interventions can be evaluated through assessments, attendance records, student feedback, and longitudinal studies.

7. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on grade seven students at risk of dropping out (SARDO) can explore the impact of family dynamics, community engagement, and mentorship programs on their academic perseverance. Using mixed-methods approaches, including interviews and longitudinal studies, researchers can gain a

deeper understanding of the factors influencing SARDO students' educational paths and develop tailored interventions. Comparative research across diverse settings can also shed light on contextual influences. Ultimately, this research can inform evidence-based practices to improve student engagement, retention, and academic success for SARDO individuals in various educational contexts.

8. DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The study contains no potential conflict of interest according to the authors.

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