PERSISTENCE AGAINST THE ODDS: NARRATIVES OF TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STRAND SARDOS AND THEIR PARENTS

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ABSTRACT. *Students-at-risk-of-dropping-out (SARDO) in the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) strand of Philippine Senior High Schools continue to face compounding socio-economic, emotional, and institutional challenges. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of SARDO students and their parents to understand the factors contributing to dropout risks and the mechanisms supporting their persistence in school. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, this qualitative case study employed in-depth narrative interviews with three SARDOs and their parents from a public high school in Northern Mindanao. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to ensure coherent interpretation grounded in actual lived experiences. Findings revealed that financial hardship, negative community influence, and emotional vulnerability significantly shaped students' educational engagement. However, themes of personal agency, strong family support, and school-level interventions—such as flexible deadlines and personalized attention—emerged as vital protective factors. These findings affirm the theoretical relevance of relational and motivational support mechanisms in preventing dropout. School practices aligned with the Self-Determination Theory—fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness—were found to enhance intrinsic motivation and student resilience. The study emphasizes the need for more empathetic and flexible school policies that consider the socio-emotional realities of SARDOs. It recommends stakeholder collaboration to design holistic interventions that reinforce both academic and non-academic support systems. These insights can inform future policies and programs aimed at reducing dropout rates and promoting inclusive, learner-centered education in the Philippines.*

Keywords: Dropout prevention, Educational resilience, Relational support, SARDO, TVL strand

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as an essential instrument for socio-economic transformation, particularly in rural regions where access to quality education can catalyze community development. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has institutionalized the "No One Left Behind" policy to ensure that every Filipino youth, regardless of socio-economic background, completes basic education [1], [2]. This aligned with United Nations's SDG 4 [3]. Despite this commitment, persistent challenges undermine this vision. At a large public senior high school in Northern Bukidnon, data reveal that an average of 6.7% of students enrolled in the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) strand have been classified as Students-at-Risk of Dropping Out (SARDOs) annually since School Year 2016–2017 [4]. This persistent dropout rate, despite various financial and institutional support mechanisms, raises pressing concerns regarding the efficacy of current interventions and the socio-cultural realities shaping student persistence.

This study is part of a broader research project conducted in the same institution. A previously published study by Lesaca and Namoco [4] focused on the narratives of the Senior High School TVL teachers and the designated Guidance Counselor, offering institutional and pedagogical insights. To broaden the understanding of the SARDO phenomenon, the current study turns its focus toward the personal narratives of those who experience educational risks most directly—the SARDO students themselves—and the individuals who support their education emotionally and financially—their parents.

While significant research has quantified dropout rates and evaluated policy-level interventions [5, 6] there remains a notable gap in literature exploring how SARDOs and their families navigate these challenges on a daily basis. This study seeks to fill that gap by employing a narrative inquiry approach, centering on the lived experiences of students and parents in rural Mindanao. Their stories provide a humanizing lens through which dropout can be understood not just as a statistical event but as a socio-cultural experience shaped by poverty, access, emotional resilience, and systemic interaction. The findings are intended to inform the development of inclusive, student-centered policies that are attuned to the complexities of rural schooling contexts.

Research across developing nations has consistently shown that dropout is a multifaceted issue shaped by interlocking personal, social, and institutional factors. In the Philippine context, poverty remains the most frequently cited factor contributing to dropout, particularly in rural areas [7], [8]. Studies by Fernandez and Abocejo [9] emphasized that income insecurity, coupled with geographical distance and limited transportation access, can severely disrupt school attendance, especially in marginalized communities like Northern Bukidnon.

Emotional well-being and familial support also significantly influence dropout tendencies. The lack of parental awareness, school-home communication gaps, and socio-emotional stressors—such as bullying, peer influence, and low self-esteem—are prominent among SARDO populations[10, 4]. These findings align with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory [11], which posits that individuals operate within nested systems of influence—family, school, peer, and community—each shaping educational outcomes in various ways.

This study focuses on the urgent and multifaceted nature of the dropout crisis among SARDO students by revealing the complex interplay of financial hardship, community influence, and emotional vulnerability. These findings not only validate the lived experiences of students and their families but also emphasize the critical role of personal agency, relational support, and institutional responsiveness in

student retention. Importantly, the study highlights how school-level interventions—such as flexible deadlines and personalized support—can significantly empower at-risk learners. These approaches align with Ryan and Deci's [12] Self-Determination Theory, which asserts that intrinsic motivation is strengthened when learners experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. By anchoring its findings in this framework, the study advances a deeper understanding of how targeted, empathetic educational practices can help address one of the most pressing challenges in Philippine education today.

While quantitative studies offer valuable generalizations, they often fail to capture the rich, textured realities of students' daily lives. Thus, this study contributes to the emerging body of research that employs qualitative methods to provide a deeper understanding of SARDOs in localized, rural educational contexts.

Theoretical Framework

This study is supported by two foundational theories. First, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory [11] serves as a macro framework, recognizing that student behaviors and decisions are influenced by multiple, interacting environmental systems. This theory is particularly relevant for this study as it contextualizes the SARDO experience within the realities of rural schooling, including family dynamics, community values, institutional structures, and economic conditions.

Second, Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory [12] provides a micro-level understanding of motivation. This framework highlights the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness—three essential elements that, when met, foster intrinsic motivation and educational persistence. These constructs are particularly evident in the stories of SARDO students who cited personal agency, moral support, and relational connectedness as key reasons for remaining in school. These theories provide a layered understanding of the SARDO phenomenon, emphasizing that educational outcomes are shaped both by individual motivation and systemic conditions. This dual framework supports the rationale for a qualitative, narrative-based methodology that gives voice to students and families as active agents within their socio-educational ecosystems.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a narrative inquiry approach, a qualitative research methodology that foregrounds the personal stories and meaning-making processes of individuals. As defined by Clandinin and Connelly [13], narrative inquiry explores the lived experiences of individuals through the stories they tell, emphasizing temporality, sociality, and place. This methodology is especially appropriate for the current study, as it enables a deep exploration of how SARDO students and their parents construct meaning around persistence, risk, and resilience in education.

Participants

This study employed six participants who were purposively selected based on pre-determined inclusion and exclusion

criteria [14]. These included three regular students who are categorized as SARDOs, and their parents. The students represented both current enrollees and those who had experienced academic interruptions, while the parents offered diverse perspectives on financial constraints, emotional involvement, and systemic engagement.

The selection criteria were designed to ensure that only those with direct, lived experience of the SARDO phenomenon were included. Participants had to be enrolled or previously enrolled in the TVL strand and identified by school records as having experienced at-risk conditions for dropout. Parents were selected if they had a dependent who was classified as a SARDO, with exclusion applied to those whose children were not in the TVL track or who had not experienced dropout risk in the past two years.

Data Collection Tool

The researcher-developed interview protocols that was used in collecting data for this study were validated by a panel of experts in language, research methodology, and TVL content to ensure clarity, sensitivity, and appropriateness [15]. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling the interviewer to probe deeper into significant life events, beliefs, and contextual experiences as they emerged organically during the conversations.

Researcher's Role in a Qualitative Study

In this study, the researcher assumed a deeply involved and reflexive role, functioning not merely as an observer but as a co-constructor of meaning, actively engaging with participants' lived experiences and stories [13]. The researcher established rapport by immersing themselves in the participants' natural settings which allowed for contextual understanding and encouraging open, in-depth sharing [16]. During the data collection, the researcher involved open-ended interviews and audio recordings, ensuring that participants' voices remained central to the process [17]. A reflexive stance was maintained throughout, with the researcher continually examining how personal background, assumptions, and emotions influenced interpretation [18]. Ethical responsibility was upheld by engaging in member-checking, where participants reviewed transcripts and initial interpretations to validate findings and reinforce co-ownership of their narratives [19].

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through one-on-one interviews lasting approximately 30 to 40 minutes each. Probing questions were used to elicit in-depth responses and clarify emerging themes [20]. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission to ensure accurate transcription and to facilitate natural conversational flow. The use of regional dialects was encouraged to enhance expression and comprehension, following the guidelines of local language appropriateness in qualitative interviewing [21]. Interviews were conducted in the month of April 2025.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, Braun and Clarke's [22] six-phase thematic analysis was employed. Transcribed data were read and re-read to ensure immersion, followed by initial coding, theme identification, and thematic refinement. Member checking was conducted after each interview to validate the accuracy

of interpretations, ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: THE STORY OF PERSISTENCE AND STRUGGLE

In a large secondary school in Northern Mindanao, the school day begins like any other—bells ringing, teachers calling roll, machines humming from the TVL shops. But beneath the surface of lesson plans and attendance sheets, there are lives quietly unfolding under pressure. These are the lives of Students-at-Risk of Dropping Out (SARDOs)—learners from the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood strand who navigate academic life while carrying the weight of poverty, emotional strain, and fragile support systems. Their stories are not theirs alone; intertwined with theirs are the hopes, frustrations, and quiet sacrifices of parents and guardians striving to keep them in school.

This study weaves together the voices of the SARDOs and their parents, highlighting how these intersecting narratives reveal shared experiences and perspectives, using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as lenses to explore the emotional, cultural, and systemic narratives that shape persistence.

Resilience in Isolation: Narratives of Persistence Among SARDOs in the TVL Strand

Theme 1: Academic Insecurity and Emotional Burden. This theme explores the internal struggle SARDOs face in the classroom, particularly in core subjects where mastery is expected but support is often lacking. Students voiced a lack of confidence in their abilities and experienced distress in situations that required academic performance, especially in Math, Research, and English.

> *"I really struggle with Math and Research... I feel like giving up." (REGSF1)*
> *"Math is the most difficult for me... it really gives me a headache." (REGSM2)*
> *"In English class... I almost cried because I was so nervous." (REGSF3)*

These statements reflect more than difficulty with content; they reveal a deep-seated fear of failure and a declining belief in their academic competence. The emotional toll of academic insecurity serves as a barrier to persistence, pushing these learners closer to disengagement.

Theme 2: Interpersonal Resilience and Motivation. Despite internal academic struggles, SARDOs found strength in the empathy of teachers and encouragement of peers. This theme illustrates how interpersonal relationships serve as protective factors that reinforce a sense of belonging and capability.

> "*My friends are actually the ones who inspired me to enroll.*" (REGSF1)
> *"My friends help me answer... they usually assist me."* (REGSF1)
> *"Ma'am Jacqueline would say, 'Do this and that.'"* (REGSM2)
> *"With you as my adviser... Even though it's embarrassing."* (REGSF3)

Support systems within the school environment—particularly peer collaboration and emotionally responsive teaching—help students reframe learning as manageable and meaningful. These experiences foster moments of resilience, even when broader support structures are lacking at home.

Theme 3: Adaptive Coping Through Identity and Purpose. This theme centers on how SARDOs make sense of their educational journey through personal identity, spirituality, and future-oriented thinking. These students exhibit a strong internal drive that sustains them when external support is minimal or inconsistent.

> *"I prefer being in church... it's where I try to find myself."* (REGSM2)
> *"I want to be able to inspire and give motivation to others."* (REGSM2)
> *"I kept telling myself to keep fighting."* (REGSF3)
> *"We accept it because we can't force our parents."* (REGSM2)

Despite facing both emotional and financial distress, students develop psychological strategies for endurance, including reframing their struggles with meaning, modeling resilience, and exercising acceptance over things they cannot control.

Theme 4: Educational Engagement in a Changing World. Post-pandemic experiences and the contextual relevance of TVL learning shape students' engagement with education. This theme shows how adaptive behaviors formed during remote learning continue to affect in-person classroom experiences, while practical skills training offers renewed motivation.

> *"I rely a lot on the internet... I got used to taking my time."* (REGSM2)
> *"My confidence was lessened because I couldn't go out."* (REGSF1)
> *"I really enjoyed the table-skirting activity."* (REGSF3)
> *"It's an enjoyable task... I have an idea of what I can do next."* (REGSM2)

These narratives suggest that students are more engaged when learning connects directly to real-world skills and future opportunities. However, residual effects from pandemic isolation—such as social anxiety and altered learning habits—pose new challenges to persistence.

The participants of this study are SARDOs enrolled in the TVL strand of a large public secondary school in Northern Mindanao, a region marked by economic vulnerability, high dropout risk, and limited access to mental health and guidance services. Many students are raised by grandparents or single parents, and school often becomes their most stable environment. The findings reflect how these students develop coping strategies that are both interpersonal and intrapersonal. However, these strategies emerge in isolation, often without sustained family involvement. This confirms prior findings by [23] who noted that students often develop emotional independence due to weak home-school partnerships. The data also echo findings by Abrazado, Namoco, and Dalonos [24] which stresses the importance of school-based psychosocial support for at-risk learners in rural Philippine contexts. The implications for schools are clear: resilience cannot be the student's burden alone. Schools must provide integrated systems that address not only academic deficiencies but also social-emotional gaps.

The findings are theoretically grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems

Theory. According to Ryan and Deci, SDT emphasizes the critical roles of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in sustaining motivation. In this study, students displayed low perceived competence in academic subjects but sustained relatedness through peers and teachers—fulfilling just enough motivational need to persist. However, autonomy was often undermined by socio-economic dependence and the pressure to minimize burden on caregivers. These motivational imbalances increase the risk of school disengagement unless explicitly addressed. Bronfenbrenner's theory contextualizes these struggles within a web of ecological systems: weak microsystem support from home, inconsistent mesosystem connections between family and school, and limited exosystem access to policy and psychological resources.

The findings of this study calls for systemic interventions. As suggested by recent scholarship, schools should design relational pedagogies and community-linked support systems that enhance student motivation while reinforcing ecological support structures [25, 26].

Parental Perspectives on the Risk of Dropping Out: Struggles, Support, and Systemic Gaps

Theme 1: Conditional Autonomy and Emotional Distance. This theme captures how parents often give their children the freedom to make educational decisions, not always as a deliberate parenting strategy, but sometimes as a result of emotional distance or limited knowledge about their children's school life. While this autonomy may appear supportive on the surface, it often coexists with a lack of meaningful dialogue, resulting in a misalignment between the child's needs and the parent's awareness.

"My daughter decides that on her own." (Grandparent2)
"The decision of Zy, ma'am, is hers alone." (Parent3)

"She does not *talk about what she does in school… so I also don't follow up.*" (Grandparent2)
"She acts really rude sometimes… she doesn't realize it anymore." (Parent3)

These quotes illustrate a subtle detachment. Parents may emotionally invest in their children's education in principle, but without open communication, they are left unaware of academic struggles, emotional distress, or signs of disengagement.

Theme 2: External Systemic Gaps and Support Limitations. Parents frequently referenced the lack of consistent external support from government programs, financial aid systems, and community-based interventions. While some had encountered programs like AKAP or ALS, most experienced uncertainty or exclusion. These structural gaps left families relying solely on their own limited means.

"Before, we only received one thousand every year." (Parent1)
"We are not recipient of AKAP. I give her allowance from my remittance." (Grandparent2)
"Maybe for transportation… it could be free for students…" (Parent3)

These narratives reveal how exosystem-level failures place additional burdens on already resource-constrained families. Without consistent policy-level support, parents must stretch personal finances beyond sustainable limits just to keep their children in school.

Theme 3: Sustained Encouragement Amid Limited Resources. Despite financial hardship, many parents go to great lengths to ensure their children's school attendance. Their support is often expressed in practical ways—like preparing food, providing fare, or adjusting household chores—not always through verbal encouragement, but through daily actions that reflect deep moral investment.

"Even though he keeps asking… we still provide for her." (Parent1)
"I don't make her cook lunch so she can go to school immediately…" (Parent3)
"We can afford food, we can pay for transportation even if it's far…" (Parent1)

This form of silent sacrifice reflects how parental love is enacted through labor and logistical support rather than conversation. It reveals a value system where action is prioritized over articulation, but also one that lacks emotional scaffolding for students' inner challenges.

Theme 4: Struggling to Support Amid Quiet Gaps and Limited Awareness. This theme points to the pervasive communication breakdown between parents and schools. While parents trust that everything is going well unless told otherwise, they often have no direct engagement with teachers or school activities. This leads to missed opportunities for early intervention or support.

"She doesn't say anything… I thought everything was okay." (GrandParent2)
"I have not communicated with my daughter's teachers." (Parent3)
"If he was given the letter, I'm sure it would have reached me." (GrandParent2)

These insights show a mesosystem disconnection, where the home and school are not working in tandem. Well-meaning parents become bystanders in their children's educational journey, assuming things are fine until a crisis—like dropout—makes the problem visible.

The parents in this study are predominantly low-income caregivers—one of them is a grandmother—living in rural areas such as in Northern Mindanao, a region marked by high poverty incidence and education attrition [7, 27]. Most did not complete formal education and engage with schools minimally, not out of apathy but due to economic survival priorities, logistical challenges, and limited confidence in interfacing with educators. In this context, the SARDO case is not only an individual crisis but a systemic symptom—an outcome of economic marginalization, fragmented school-home communication, and the absence of community-based interventions. Studies such as those by Parreño [28] and the world Bank [29] affirm that dropout risk among Filipino youth is strongly tied to parental education level, rural residency, and limited policy access. Thus, parental involvement must be redefined beyond attendance in school meetings—it must be supported through structured outreach programs, home-based learning initiatives, and community integration mechanisms that recognize the realities of rural families.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory helps situate these narratives within layered contexts. The microsystem, composed of family relationships, shows warmth and material commitment, yet emotional disengagement. The mesosystem, ideally connecting home and school, remains underdeveloped, with minimal parent-teacher interaction or knowledge of educational support services. The exosystem,

where government programs and school policies reside, fails to deliver consistent and inclusive support. These gaps collectively compromise the student's developmental environment. Meanwhile, Self-Determination Theory offers insight into how this affects student motivation: when parents cannot foster competence through encouragement, or relatedness through understanding, students' intrinsic motivation deteriorates.

The findings align with research by Niemiec and Ryan [30] who highlight that autonomy and competence in learners are not cultivated in isolation, but in environments that validate and scaffold them. In low-resource settings like Northern Mindanao, parental detachment—though unintended—can be psychologically costly for students. Therefore, intervention frameworks must adopt an ecologically grounded and motivation-sensitive approach, as supported by studies from Gordon and Cui [25]and Alampay *et al.* [26], where schools function as developmental bridges, not merely academic institutions. They must design culturally responsive strategies that empower parents to participate meaningfully, emotionally, and systemically in their children's education journey.

Shared Realities: Intersecting Narratives of SARDOs and Their Parents

Theme 1: Hope in Education Amid Scarcity. Despite the constraints of poverty, both SARDOs and their parents share a deep belief in education as the only viable path out of hardship. Students turn to extended family members for support—emotional, financial, or symbolic.

> *"Nanay is the one I can turn to sometimes,"- REGSM2*
>
> *"I always ask my older sister for help. She gives me money if she has some."- REGSF3*

For these learners, education is a debt owed to the people who believe in them. Similarly, parents see education as a legacy.

> *"We don't have anything to leave behind for you—just education,"- Parent1*
>
> *"If something happens to us, at least she'll manage." - GrandParent2*

This alignment of hope, though forged under constraint, creates a shared moral contract between generations—education as both burden and beacon.

Theme 2: Gaps in Emotional Communication and Understanding. Though both groups want success, a quiet emotional gap remains. SARDOs often internalize fear and insecurity without telling anyone. "

> *"I experienced bullying... since then I've developed anxiety," (REGSF1)*
>
> *"I already give up... I just sense there's no money." (REGSM2)*

Students avoid being a burden, reading the room for silence rather than speaking up.

> *"She does not talk about what she does in school," (GrandParent2)*
>
> *"She gets easily upset... she doesn't realize her words hurt." (Parent3)*

These narratives reveal how autonomy is granted by parents—*"The decision of Zy, ma'am, is hers alone"*—but without relational closeness. Misattunement leads to misread signals, where worry becomes withdrawal and concern is masked by distance, weakening relatedness in ways that undermine school persistence.

Theme 3: Navigating Economic Hardship and Sacrifice. In both student and parent stories, poverty is not just a backdrop but an active force that shapes educational behavior. Additionally, financial strain diminishes learning focus.

> *"You'd want to suggest what to buy, but you can't... you just end up crying," (REGSM2)*
>
> *"There are times when we don't have money, so I ask my sister for help." (REGSF3)*
>
> *"When there's no money, it's hard to focus," (REGSM2)*
>
> *"We can afford food and pay for transportation… but only*
>
> *those," (Parent1)*
>
> *"I don't make her cook lunch so she can go to school immediately." (Parent3)*

The shared reality is clear: parents give quietly, and students ask sparingly. Both are navigating a microsystem of sacrifice, where support is constant but stress is silent.

Theme 4: Community and Cultural Pressures. Culture and community expectations shape how both students and parents view education. For SARDOs, these forces manifest as both judgment and inspiration.

> *"My sister says, 'Why are you still studying when you're already old?'" (REGSF3)*
>
> *"They show me examples... even in hardship, they pursue opportunities." REGSM2*

For parents, cultural framing affects participation too.

> *"The ALS is a big help because they're not embarrassed," (Parent3)*
>
> *"Yes, there are a lot of professionals in our neighborhood." (Parents 1)*

External cues—both normative and programmatic—shape educational persistence, placing families within a macrosystem of social comparison and moral obligation. Whether as pressure or possibility, community becomes a third actor in the home-school dynamic.

The SARDOs come from low-income households where grandparents, single parents, or siblings often share caregiving duties. Education is universally valued but inconsistently supported—not due to neglect, but because of systemic and practical barriers. As highlighted in previous studies, school dropout in rural Filipino settings is less about disinterest and more about cumulative disadvantage: financial instability, weak home-school links, and a mismatch between programmatic interventions and real household capacities [31, 32]. The voices in this study echo these realities, revealing how SARDOs endure not in isolation, but in ecosystems marked by under-communication and silent sacrifice. It is clear that education is not only a personal aspiration but a family-wide endeavor carried forward through collective effort.

The findings of this study are deeply aligned with Self-Determination Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Students express unmet needs for competence, often feeling incapable in academic subjects but hesitant to seek help; their autonomy is compromised by financial dependence, and relatedness is weakened by emotional distance from parents [33, 34, 35]. As Niemiec and Ryan [30] assert, motivation erodes when students feel disconnected from those meant to support them. Simultaneously, the ecological lens shows how failures in the mesosystem—where school and family systems should

cooperate—create risks for dropout. Parents' lack of communication with teachers, though unintentional, leaves students unsupported in real time. The exosystem, which includes government programs like ALS or the 4Ps, is appreciated but uneven in implementation, echoing concerns raised by Asian Development Bank [36] on fragmented educational safety nets in the Philippines.

The findings call for more than individual resilience or parental goodwill—they require systemic alignment. Schools are encouraged proactively strengthen relational ecosystems through family-focused outreach, culturally responsive mentoring, and multi-stakeholder engagement. As Gordon and Cui [25] suggest, schools that recognize their role as developmental hubs—not just instructional centers—are best positioned to sustain at-risk learners. Effective interventions must include emotional coaching for parents, student support programs that address both academic and socio-emotional gaps, and consistent follow-through on government-led educational guarantees.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on educational persistence by foregrounding the lived experiences of Students-at-Risk of Dropping Out (SARDOs) and their parents in a large public secondary school in Northern Mindanao. Through narrative inquiry, the research reveals how school persistence is not merely a product of academic performance, but of complex social, emotional, and economic negotiations within families and communities. It fills a critical gap in Philippine education research by illustrating how SARDOs' voices—often unheard in formal evaluations—highlight daily struggles in subject-based competence, systemic exclusion, and emotional suppression, while also identifying interpersonal lifelines in teachers, peers, and faith.

Despite the hurdles, the narratives reflect a shared resilience between students and their parents—a quiet determination to endure and persist for a better future. This resilience emerges from the intergenerational belief in education as a legacy, the willingness to adapt to shifting roles, and the ability to reframe adversity as motivation. These findings suggest that resilience among SARDOs is not solely internal but relational and contextual, shaped by microsystem sacrifices and fragile yet sustaining community norms. As such, the study offers both a localized lens and transferable insights into how educational systems can be more responsive to the lived realities of those most at risk of disengagement.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is subject to several limitations. The small number of participants may have restricted the diversity of perspectives, limiting the breadth of insights that could have been drawn from the data. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of data collection captured only a snapshot of the participants' experiences and did not account for how their views and circumstances might evolve over time. The study's design as a single case study further narrows its scope, as findings are deeply rooted in a specific context and may not be transferable to other settings or populations. These limitations highlight the need for further research using longitudinal and comparative approaches to deepen understanding of the issues explored.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several practical and actionable recommendations are proposed to better support SARDOs in public secondary schools. Teachers are encouraged to establish emotionally safe and responsive classrooms by recognizing signs of anxiety, low academic confidence, and emotional withdrawal. Differentiated instruction may also be employed, particularly in subjects such as Math, Research, and English where many SARDOs expressed heightened academic insecurity. Teachers are also advised to offer consistent encouragement, provide constructive feedback, and foster meaningful one-on-one interactions that build students' sense of competence and autonomy. Furthermore, collaboration with guidance counselors may be strengthened to ensure that students showing signs of emotional distress receive timely psychosocial intervention.

For school administrators, it is essential to implement systematic communication channels that connect parents and teachers—such as regular SMS updates, parent liaisons, or scheduled feedback mechanisms. Parent orientation programs focused on emotional literacy, adolescent development, and school engagement may also be integrated into school activities to equip caregivers with tools for meaningful involvement. On an institutional level, schools are recommended to establish a dedicated SARDO Response and Referral Team, partner with local faith-based organizations and barangay units, and align the TVL curriculum more closely with students' interests and real-world opportunities. Advocating for consistent implementation of national programs like 4Ps and ALS can also help extend safety nets for at-risk learners.

In light of the study's limitations—particularly its focus on a single school context and the perspectives of students and parents—future research may consider longitudinal designs to track SARDOs' long-term outcomes and assess the sustainability of their coping strategies. Investigating the influence of gender, disability, or indigenous identity on the SARDO experience could also provide deeper insights into intersectional vulnerabilities. Additional studies may examine the perspectives of teachers, school heads, and policy implementers to triangulate the barriers to educational persistence and to inform more systemic, multi-level interventions. Moreover, the development and evaluation of resilience-building programs grounded in culturally relevant, ecologically sensitive approaches are strongly recommended to enhance future response frameworks for at-risk youth.

DISCLAIMER ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI

The use of generative AI in this study was limited to refining the clarity and coherence of the language. All other aspects—including the conceptualization, methodological design, data analysis, and interpretation of findings—were independently carried out by the researchers.

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