



**TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH LEARNERS AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT**

**A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of the Graduate School of  
CENTRAL MINDANAO COLLEGES**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION**

**MARICEL M. ALUMBRA, LPT**

March 2025

## **Abstract**

This qualitative study explored and understood the lived experiences of teachers in addressing the needs of learners at risk of dropping out within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Conducted among selected elementary school teachers in M'lang South District, Division of Cotabato, the study employed a phenomenological approach using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to capture teachers' narratives, perceptions, and strategies in mitigating student attrition. The data were analyzed thematically, revealing three major themes: teachers' lived experiences in dealing with learners at risk, strategies employed to support and retain learners, and challenges encountered alongside parental support in addressing dropout risks. Findings revealed that teachers assumed multiple roles, as educators, mentors, and emotional caregivers, demonstrating empathy, adaptability, and a strong sense of social responsibility in dealing with learners facing poverty, absenteeism, and low motivation. Effective practices included differentiated instruction, positive reinforcement, home visitation, peer mentoring, and collaboration with parents, guidance counselors, and local communities. However, teachers faced significant challenges such as limited resources, lack of parental involvement, emotional exhaustion, and the absence of institutional mental health support. Despite these barriers, teachers' commitment and contextual innovations reflected a deep dedication to inclusive and compassionate education aligned with SDG 4. The study implied that dropout prevention requires systemic collaboration among teachers, school leaders, parents, and local stakeholders to address both academic and socio-economic barriers. It also emphasized the need for professional development focusing on emotional intelligence, trauma-informed teaching, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Future research may explore longitudinal and multi-stakeholder perspectives to evaluate the long-term impact of school-based interventions and collaborative practices on learner retention. Overall, this study affirmed that teachers' lived experiences serve as the foundation for building equitable, inclusive, and sustainable educational systems.

**Keywords:** *lived experiences, learners at risk of dropping out, teacher strategies, inclusive education, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), M'lang South District*

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background of the Study**

Education is universally regarded as a basic human right and a vital force for social and economic development. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 underscores the importance of providing inclusive and equitable quality education for all, emphasizing the urgent need to address the problem of student dropout. Despite global initiatives to promote universal education, attrition continues to hinder progress, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged regions. Teachers play a critical role in addressing this challenge, as they are positioned at the frontlines of interventions for at-risk learners. Understanding their lived experiences is therefore necessary to shape policies and programs that can effectively reduce dropout rates and strengthen student retention (Jones, 2022).

Student dropout remains a persistent global issue that disrupts the educational trajectories of millions of learners each year. Evans (2022) explains that dropout prevalence differs across nations, influenced by variations in economic conditions, policy environments, and social support systems. In many low-income countries, inadequate funding, dilapidated infrastructure, and overcrowded classrooms create conditions that foster disengagement. Learners from minority and marginalized groups are particularly vulnerable due to cultural barriers and limited institutional support (Ibrahim, 2023). While digital interventions are increasingly promoted as solutions, Brown (2023) cautions that

these often fail in contexts where digital divides and resource shortages persist. Moreover, dropout prevention frameworks frequently lack effectiveness because they do not account for local sociocultural complexities. This situation highlights the need for more localized studies that examine how educators themselves navigate the realities of dropout prevention in their specific environments.

In the Philippines, dropout rates remain a pressing concern, especially in secondary education. The Department of Education (DepEd) reported that the national secondary school dropout rate was 7.8 percent in 2021, with rural areas showing disproportionately higher levels (Garcia, 2022). Socioeconomic pressures strongly influence students' decisions to leave school, as many choose to seek employment or help support their families. Bautista (2021) emphasizes that inclusive education initiatives often struggle due to inadequate teacher preparation and insufficient institutional support. Similarly, Fernandez (2023) observes that teacher professional development is frequently overlooked, leaving many educators ill-equipped to respond to the needs of at-risk learners.

National studies indicate that mentoring programs and community involvement can help reduce dropout rates (Dela Cruz, 2021; Jones, 2022), yet these approaches are inconsistently applied, particularly in rural areas. This uneven implementation points to a significant knowledge gap regarding how teachers themselves manage the daily realities of dropout prevention within their schools.

The situation in M'lang South District reflected both national and global patterns while also presenting distinct challenges. Schools in the district often faced resource

limitations, with many lacking sufficient educational materials and student support services (Abad, 2022). Teachers frequently took on multiple roles, not only serving as instructors but also as counselors, mentors, and mediators between students and their families. Anderson (2022) noted that teachers' perceptions of dropout causes in rural contexts often diverged from formal policy approaches, underscoring a gap between top-down directives and grassroots realities.

Counseling services, which Clark (2021) identified as essential in preventing dropout, were absent in many rural Philippine schools. This condition forced teachers to assume counseling responsibilities despite a lack of formal training. Such added duties placed emotional and psychological strain on educators, as Cruz (2023) highlighted in her study on teacher resilience, which she identified as crucial for sustaining engagement with at-risk students. Yet, despite these challenges, there remained limited research on the lived experiences of teachers in M'lang South District. This gap hindered a deeper understanding of the strategies and coping mechanisms educators employed to keep students in school.

Given these realities, the study aimed to explore the lived experiences of teachers in M'lang South District as they worked with learners at risk of dropping out. It sought to document the strategies teachers used, the challenges they faced, and the institutional and community support available to them. By focusing on firsthand accounts, the study generated insights that informed policies and practices to ensure that interventions were both contextually appropriate and effective. Finally, it contributed to the broader discourse on dropout prevention by highlighting the central role of teachers in advancing student retention and aligning their efforts with the objectives of SDG 4.

## **Definition of Terms**

**Learners at Risk of Dropping Out.** Operationally, this refers to students who show tendencies of leaving school before completing basic education due to academic, economic, social, or personal challenges. In this study, the term pertains to learners identified by teachers as experiencing barriers that negatively affect their attendance, performance, and engagement in school.

**Qualitative Study.** Operationally, this refers to a type of research that explores and interprets human experiences using descriptive and narrative data rather than numerical measures. In this study, qualitative inquiry is applied to capture and analyze teachers' perspectives and personal accounts of dealing with learners at risk of dropping out.

**Sustainable Development Goal.** Operationally, this refers to the internationally recognized targets set by the United Nations to address global challenges related to poverty, inequality, and education, among others. In this study, the focus is on Goal 4, which emphasizes ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, particularly for those learners vulnerable to dropping out.

**Teachers' Lived Experiences.** Operationally, this refers to the insights, reflections, and stories shared by teachers about their daily encounters in addressing the needs of learners at risk of dropping out. In this study, teachers' lived experiences

highlight the challenges they face, the strategies they employ, and the meaning they attach to their role in sustaining learners' participation in education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of teachers in addressing the needs of learners at risk of dropping out, framed within Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasized inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Despite international and national interventions, student attrition continued to challenge education systems, particularly in rural and disadvantaged settings (Evans, 2022; Tan, 2021). Teachers were at the forefront of these efforts, yet their perspectives remained underexplored, even though their practices, strategies, and struggles significantly influenced student retention (Hernandez, 2021; Quinn, 2021). By documenting teachers' narratives in M'lang South District, this study sought to provide insights into how grassroots experiences could inform both policy and practice.

More specifically, the study intended to analyze how teachers described their day-to-day encounters with at-risk learners, the strategies they implemented, and the challenges they faced. Global research highlighted that dropout prevention strategies often failed when not adapted to local contexts (Nguyen, 2021; Patel, 2022). In the Philippine setting, socioeconomic pressures and limited school resources were key determinants of dropout, with many learners leaving school to support their families financially (Garcia, 2022; Reyes, 2023). Through a qualitative exploration of teachers' lived realities, the study aimed to bridge the gap between top-down policies and classroom-level practices.

The study also explored how teachers assumed multiple roles, often functioning as instructors, counselors, and mentors, particularly in rural areas where counseling and other support services were scarce (Clark, 2021; Abad, 2022). This dimension was critical because emotional labor and professional resilience significantly affected how teachers sustained engagement with vulnerable learners (Cruz, 2023; Ocampo, 2023). Furthermore, gaps in professional development and institutional backing hindered teachers' capacity to implement inclusive education practices effectively (Bautista, 2021; Fernandez, 2023). Investigating how teachers navigated these challenges offered a clearer understanding of their coping mechanisms and innovative responses.

At the community and institutional level, mentoring and parental involvement had been recognized as effective strategies in supporting at-risk learners, yet implementation remained inconsistent across contexts (Jones, 2022; Dela Cruz, 2021; Lopez, 2023). This study therefore sought to identify how such strategies were localized in M'lang South District and whether teachers adapted or modified them to suit their environment. Moreover, collaborative practices and supportive school climates were considered vital for reducing dropout rates, but their effectiveness depended largely on teacher agency and school leadership (Smith, 2022; Vargas, 2023; Martinez, 2022).

Finally, the purpose of this study was to provide in-depth, context-specific insights into the lived experiences of teachers who worked directly with learners at risk of dropping out. By amplifying their voices, the study aimed to contribute to the refinement of educational interventions that were responsive to local needs and realities. The findings were expected to inform educational leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders in designing strategies that were not only theoretically sound but also practically effective.

In doing so, this study aligned with the global vision of SDG 4 by emphasizing the critical role of teachers in advancing inclusive and sustainable education for all.

## **Research Questions**

Ensuring that all learners have access to quality education remains a fundamental goal of the global education agenda, as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. However, despite efforts to achieve inclusive and equitable education, student dropout remains a persistent challenge, particularly in rural and disadvantaged communities such as M'lang South District. Teachers play a critical role in addressing this issue by employing various strategies to support learners at risk of dropping out. However, their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in managing these students remain underexplored, necessitating further qualitative investigation.

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of teachers in M'lang South District as they engage with learners at risk of dropping out. Specifically, it seeks to understand the strategies they employ, the challenges they face, and the institutional and community support available to them in preventing student dropout. By examining these aspects, the study hopes to contribute to a deeper understanding of how educators navigate the complexities of student retention within the framework of SDG 4.

Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers perceive and describe their experiences in dealing with learners at risk of dropping out?

2. What challenges do teachers encounter in addressing dropout risks, and what forms of support do they receive from the parents?

3. What strategies do teachers employ to support and retain at-risk learners in the classroom?

### **Significance of the Study**

This research on teachers' experiences managing at-risk students within the context of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 in M'lang South District was of considerable importance to several stakeholders in the education system. This study seeks to enhance educational policies and practices by examining the techniques, obstacles, and support systems related to reducing student dropouts, hence promoting inclusive and equitable learning opportunities.

**Administrators and Other Educational Leaders.** This research offers significant insights for supervisors and school leaders on the challenges instructors have while managing at-risk children. Comprehending the obstacles faced by educators can empower educational leaders to formulate improved support systems, including teacher training initiatives, intervention tactics, and policy advancements. Moreover, the results may assist school administrators in cultivating a more supportive educational atmosphere that emphasizes student retention and coincides with the objective of SDG 4, which advocates for excellent education for all.

**Teachers.** This research is especially advantageous for educators, since it elucidates the optimal methods and coping mechanisms used by their colleagues in managing students at risk of disengagement. This study documents lived experiences,

providing educators with practical information to enhance their strategies for overcoming student disengagement. Furthermore, it underscores the need of sufficient institutional and community support, emphasizing the significance of teacher well-being in student retention initiatives.

**Parents.** Parents significantly impact their children's education, and this research highlights their effect on student retention. The study analyzes the impact of parental participation on dropout rates, offering insights into how families might enhance their children's academic success. It highlights the difficulties educators have in engaging pupils from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, underscoring the need for enhanced cooperation between schools and homes.

**Students.** This research seeks to underscore the significance of educational perseverance and the many support methods accessible to learners, especially those at risk of disengagement. This study aims to find successful teacher interventions and tactics, so contributing to the creation of programs tailored to students' unique needs, eventually promoting a more inclusive and inspiring learning environment.

**Researchers.** This study offers a framework for future researchers to explore student dropout reduction measures. The results may provide a reference for research concentrating on various contexts, including urban educational environments, alternative education initiatives, or educational policy formulation. This study may stimulate more comprehensive qualitative and quantitative assessments regarding the influence of teacher interventions on student retention.

**Other Stakeholders.** This research is pertinent for policymakers, local government entities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaged in educational advancement. By emphasizing the lived experiences of educators and the obstacles they encounter, the study may assist stakeholders in developing policies and programs that more effectively serve at-risk students. Community groups may use the data to design intervention programs that enhance cooperation among schools, families, and local institutions in tackling the dropout epidemic.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

This research is fundamentally grounded on **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory** (1979), which offers a thorough framework for analyzing the many interconnected elements affecting student dropout risks and teachers' encounters with at-risk learners. This theory asserts that individuals evolve within a hierarchy of nested environmental systems, comprising the microsystem (immediate environment), mesosystem (interrelations among settings), exosystem (external influences), macrosystem (societal and cultural frameworks), and chronosystem (temporal changes).

In the field of education, educators function inside the microsystem, where they directly impact students' engagement and learning experiences. Their interactions are influenced by the mesosystem, including ties with parents, administrators, and the wider school community. Anderson (2022) emphasizes that educators in remote areas, like M'lang South District, often encounter a mismatch between their initiatives and the external support structures essential for dropout prevention. The exosystem, which

includes legislation, economic circumstances, and educational resources, significantly influences the working conditions of teachers.

In several rural schools, insufficient finance and restricted access to professional development pose further obstacles for instructors striving to assist at-risk pupils (Abad, 2022). The macrosystem, including national education policy and societal perceptions of education, further impacts teachers' responsibilities in dropout prevention. In several low-income neighborhoods, education may not be emphasized, resulting in less parental participation and elevated dropout rates (Garcia, 2022).

The chronosystem highlights the dynamic evolution of dropout prevention techniques, particularly in reaction to crises like the COVID-19 epidemic, which compelled educators to adjust to novel learning modes and tackle heightened student disengagement (Cruz, 2023). This research utilizes Bronfenbrenner's theory to analyze the intricate relationship between individual teacher experiences and overarching systemic issues, providing a comprehensive knowledge of how various levels of influence affect dropout prevention initiatives.

Another pertinent theoretical framework is **Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory** of Learning (1978), which emphasizes the significance of social interaction, cultural context, and scaffolding in the learning process. Vygotsky posits that cognitive growth transpires via social interaction, whereby more informed persons, such as educators, are important in enhancing students' learning experiences.

This approach is especially pertinent for comprehending how educators in M'lang South District respond to the needs of students at risk of disengagement. Bautista (2021) observes that several instructors in rural schools have difficulties in executing inclusive

education owing to insufficient training and resources. Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) posits that learners may attain elevated levels of understanding when supported by a knowledgeable instructor or mentor. Nevertheless, when educators lack enough professional development, they may find it challenging to provide the essential support required to maintain the engagement of at-risk children (Fernandez, 2023).

The sociocultural dimension of Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the impact of societal expectations on schooling. In some areas, kids may encounter pressure to prematurely exit school owing to economic obligations, necessitating that educators adeptly manage these cultural dynamics while striving to maintain student engagement (Hernandez, 2021). The approach emphasizes the significance of peer contact in education, proposing that collaborative and cooperative learning settings might improve student retention. Many rural schools, however, lack the infrastructure necessary to facilitate interactive learning methods, hence imposing more burdens on educators (Evans, 2022). This research used Vygotsky's framework to examine how teachers' instructional methods, classroom relationships, and cultural comprehension influence their experiences in managing students at risk of dropout.

A third crucial theoretical framework for this research is **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)** developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), which examines the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on human behavior. This theory delineates three essential psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—that must be satisfied for people to maintain engagement in an activity, such as schooling. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is especially pertinent to dropout prevention, since it

elucidates the reasons some students disengage from school while others remain committed. Students are more prone to withdraw when they sense a deficiency of autonomy in their education, see themselves as inept, or encounter social isolation (Davis, 2022). Educators are essential in addressing these psychological demands by creating a supportive and stimulating learning environment. In rural schools, educators often encounter difficulties in cultivating student motivation owing to extrinsic factors like as poverty and familial obligations (Clark, 2021).

Furthermore, educators need encouragement and expert assistance to maintain their endeavors in mitigating dropout threats. Edwards (2023) asserts that educators facing significant stress, emotional fatigue, and insufficient institutional support are more prone to difficulties in engaging at-risk students.

The relatedness component of Self-Determination Theory underscores the need of robust teacher-student interactions in promoting academic perseverance. Students who sense a connection with their instructors and see them as helpful are more likely to maintain engagement in school (Lopez, 2023). This dynamic is often impeded in rural areas, as teacher shortages and excessive workloads hinder educators from delivering personalized help (Dela Cruz, 2021). This research use Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to analyze how educators manage the motivational dynamics of their students and themselves, elucidating the psychological elements that affect dropout prevention initiatives.

The three theoretical frameworks, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning, and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, collectively offer a robust foundation for comprehending teachers' experiences

with learners at risk of dropout. Each theory offers a distinct viewpoint on the elements affecting student retention, including structural and institutional variables as well as social and psychological dynamics. This research aims to integrate these theories to provide a comprehensive picture of the challenges encountered by educators in M'lang South District and to give insights that help enhance dropout prevention efforts.

### **Related Literature**

This section of the study includes the literature and the body of knowledge that have been reviewed and prepared in order to provide further information pertaining to this study. In order to increase its richness and extent, the literatures contained below are a blend of studies conducted at the local, national, and worldwide levels.

### **Teachers' experiences in dealing with learners at risk of dropping out**

The issue of student dropout continues to be a significant problem in the field of education, especially in regions that are economically poor and rural. Through the implementation of a variety of strategies, the cultivation of resilience, and the engagement of students who are at risk, teachers play a crucial part in preventing students from dropping out of school. The literature that discusses the experiences of teachers in dealing with students who are considered to be at risk shows the difficulties that instructors encounter, the tactics that they use, and the support that is required from the larger community and the institution in order to guarantee that students remain enrolled. There are recurring themes that emerge from the discussion of previously conducted

research. These themes include the socio-economic and academic factors that influence dropout, the role of teacher resilience, the effectiveness of intervention programs, the impact of school and community involvement, and the potential of technology-based approaches in mitigating dropout risks (Fernandez, 2023).

The socio-economic variables that play a major influence in student dropout rates have a direct effect on the efforts that instructors make to help students who are at danger of dropping out of school. Among the key factors that contribute to student disengagement in rural regions, according to Anderson (2022), poverty, a lack of support from parents, and restricted access to resources are among the most significant factors. Due to financial constraints, a significant number of students are compelled to prioritize their employment above their education, which ultimately results in sporadic attendance and ultimate dropout. Kids in these areas endure economic constraints that are beyond their control, and teachers in these places have the enormous problem of inspiring their kids.

In a similar vein, Abad (2022) highlights the fact that in rural schools in the Philippines, instructors typically struggle to keep pupils motivated owing to substandard school facilities, a lack of instructional resources, and limited financial assistance from local governments. These circumstances place an extra load on educators, who are required to devise novel approaches in order to maintain students' enrollment in school despite the constraints imposed by the system.

The implementation of inclusive education challenges instructors who are working with children who are at danger of dropping out with an additional obstacle, in addition to the limits imposed by economic factors. A discussion is held by Bautista (2021) on the

challenges that Filipino educators often have while attempting to implement inclusive education frameworks. This is especially true when schools lack the appropriate training and resources to accommodate children who have a variety of learning requirements. Teachers are constantly confronted with pupils who are having difficulty academically owing to learning challenges, language obstacles, or socio-emotional issues; yet, they are not necessarily prepared with the specific training necessary to properly handle these concerns. The fact that many instructors are required to manage enormous class numbers, which makes it practically hard to provide customized education, is another factor that contributes to this problem. Because of this, kids who need greater attention may experience feelings of neglect, which further increases the likelihood that they may drop out of school.

Even in the face of these obstacles, the resilience of teachers continues to be an essential component in guaranteeing the retention of students. When it comes to tackling the hazards of students dropping out of school, Cruz (2023) emphasizes the significance of teacher resilience, especially during times of crisis like as the COVID-19 epidemic. Teachers who exhibited emotional resilience and flexibility were better able to maintain the interest of students who were considered to be at risk, even when they were instructed in remote learning situations. According to the findings of the research, educators who were able to cultivate good connections with their pupils, provide individualized assistance, and maintain a development attitude were more effective in preventing children from dropping out of school. In the same vein, Edwards (2023) explores the ways in which trauma-informed teaching techniques assist instructors in managing pupils who are experiencing psychological distress. A classroom climate that is more inclusive and

emotionally secure is created by teachers who have received training in identifying indications of trauma and using supportive tactics. This dramatically minimizes the probability that students would disengage from their education.

Intervention programs have also been investigated as a potential method for lowering dropout rates, with different degrees of success associated with their implementation. When Davis (2022) examines the effectiveness of several programs designed to prevent students from dropping out of school, he finds that the programs that include early intervention tactics, mentoring, and alternate education routes are the most successful. One of the most important discoveries is that instructors who take part in intervention programs that provide individualized assistance to students who are considered to be at risk report greater success rates in maintaining their kids' enrollment.

Similarly, Clark (2021) stresses the significance of counseling services in the prevention of students from dropping out of school. He emphasizes that students who get both academic and emotional advice are more likely to remain enrolled in higher education. On the other hand, access to counseling services continues to be restricted in many rural schools, which puts further pressure on teachers to fulfill the dual role of educators and informal counselors for their pupils.

An additional essential topic of debate is the role that school and community participation play in the prevention of students dropping out of school. Dela Cruz (2021) illustrates the ways in which community-based support programs may increase student engagement by establishing a network of support around learners. Because kids get support outside of the classroom, schools that interact with parents, local groups, and

government agencies often have lower dropout rates than schools that do not share these relationships.

Additionally, Evans (2022) investigates worldwide views on the decrease of dropout rates and makes the observation that countries that place a lot of importance on good community-school relationships often have intervention models that are more successful. The ability to maintain student engagement is enhanced for educators who get help from local stakeholders in the form of mentoring programs, feeding efforts, and scholarship monies, among other forms of assistance.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the use of technology into attempts to prevent students from dropping out of school, which promises to bring novel solutions to the issue. In order to provide assistance to students who are considered to be at risk, Brown (2023) investigates the possibility of using technology-based treatments. These interventions include customized learning software, virtual mentoring, and digital attendance monitoring.

The results of this study indicate that technology has the potential to assist in bridging the gap for students who are experiencing difficulties in learning, especially those who are having difficulty with conventional classroom education. The efficiency of these treatments, on the other hand, is contingent upon a number of circumstances, including the availability of the internet, the training of teachers, and the willingness of students to interact with digital technologies. There is a correlation between teachers who obtain proper training in the use of technology to help learners who are at risk and improved confidence in their ability to handle dropout concerns

Finally, the research on teachers' experiences in dealing with students who are at risk for dropping out of school underlines the varied character of dropout prevention. Despite the fact that socio-economic issues, limited resources, and a lack of specialized training present substantial obstacles, there are hopeful answers that may be found in teacher resilience, intervention programs, community participation, and technology-based techniques. In order to effectively address these difficulties, a collaborative strategy is required, one that involves not just educators but also legislators, school administrators, and community stakeholders. It is vital to have a thorough understanding of the viewpoints and experiences that instructors have had in their lives in order to develop techniques that are both successful and sustainable in order to guarantee that every student has the chance to finish their education (Cruz, 2023).

### **Challenges in addressing learners at risk of dropping out**

For educators, legislators, and communities alike, addressing the needs of students who are at risk of dropping out of school continues to be a tremendous burden. Academic disengagement among students may be attributed to a number of different issues, including socio-economic problems, a lack of parental participation, insufficient educational resources, as well as emotional and psychological challenges. It is difficult for teachers, who are at the forefront of efforts to prevent students from dropping out of school, to maintain the interest of students who are at danger of dropping out of school (Browm, 2023).

The literature in this portion sheds light on the ongoing difficulties that educators face, such as inadequate resources, inefficient policy implementation, a dearth of opportunities for professional development, the burdens of socio-emotional stress, and the need for more community participation. The development of more effective treatments and strategies to minimize the number of students who drop out of school requires a thorough understanding of these difficulties.

The effect of socio-economic issues is one of the key hurdles that must be overcome when approaching students who are at danger of dropping out of school. Garcia (2022) asserts that one of the primary reasons why students in Philippine secondary schools cease their education is because of financial difficulties. It is especially common in economically poor communities and rural areas for kids to be compelled to drop out of school in order to contribute to the family income.

According to Anderson (2022), instructors in rural regions often have difficulties in retaining pupils who are experiencing economic difficulties. This is because families in rural areas emphasize employment above education. Under these circumstances, pupils are unable to get necessary school supplies, they are at risk of not having enough food to eat, and they have trouble getting about. This makes for a challenging learning environment. Teachers are under added strain as a result of the economic difficulties that students are experiencing. They are required to find methods to keep pupils engaged despite the conditions that they are facing.

It is difficult to prevent students from dropping out of school because, in addition to financial challenges, there is a lack of inclusive education policy and effective

treatments. When it comes to adopting inclusive education, Filipino educators confront a number of problems, especially when it comes to meeting the various learning requirements of kids who are considered to be at risk, according to Bautista (2021). The tools and training that are required to serve kids who have special needs, behavioral challenges, or learning impairments are not readily available in many schools throughout the country. In the absence of appropriate help, these adolescents often experience feelings of isolation and fall behind academically, which elevates the probability that they will drop out of school.

Furthermore, Davis (2022) emphasizes that while there are a number of programs existing to prevent students from dropping out of school, the success of these programs is sometimes limited by uneven execution and poor monitoring. Ineffective results are the consequence of many schools adopting intervention programs without fully modifying them to meet the unique requirements of students who are considered to be at risk.

Yet another key obstacle is the dearth of opportunities for instructors to engage in professional development. Even though Fernandez (2023) highlights the importance of teacher training in reducing the number of students who drop out of school, many educators do not have access to chances for continued professional development. The most effective way for teachers to help students who are at risk is to get training in techniques for student involvement, practices that are trauma-informed, and tailored teaching.

The majority of educational institutions, particularly those located in rural regions, do not provide sufficient training programs, which results in instructors being unable to

deal with the complexity of dropout prevention. Hernandez (2021) goes on to explain that instructors who deal with kids who are considered to be at risk often suffer feelings of dissatisfaction and burnout as a result of the intense demands of their employment and the lack of support they get from the institution. Teachers have a difficult time implementing retention tactics that are both effective and sustainable if they do not have suitable training and resources at their disposal.

However, another significant obstacle is the socio-emotional strain that is put on educators. As a result of their work with students who are considered to be at risk, educators often take on additional responsibilities, including those of counselors, mentors, and support figures. As a means of providing assistance to students who are experiencing psychological distress, Edwards (2023) addresses the significance of trauma-informed teaching approaches. Academic performance is substantially impacted by the fact that many students who are considered to be at risk come from challenging family circumstances, have been through traumatic experiences, or struggle with mental health difficulties.

On the other hand, Clark (2021) states that the majority of schools do not have sufficient counseling services to provide the student population with the essential psychological assistance. It is as a consequence of this that instructors are left to manage the emotional needs of their children without receiving proper training, which results in increased stress and emotional depletion. However, despite the fact that many educators experience burnout as a result of the emotional demands of their work, Cruz (2023) emphasizes that teacher resilience is essential in the management of these struggles.

They are unable to maintain their effectiveness and motivation in their teaching duties as a result of this emotional strain.

Additionally, the incorporation of technology-based solutions continues to be a troublesome task for many educational institutions. Technology-driven solutions, such as online learning platforms, early warning systems, and digital mentoring programs, are investigated by Brown (2023) as possible means of lowering the number of students who drop out of school. On the other hand, the infrastructure, internet access, and digital literacy that are necessary for the successful implementation of these initiatives are lacking in many rural and impoverished schools. There is often a lack of access to training and resources, which may make it difficult for educators to successfully incorporate technology into their classrooms. Students who come from underprivileged neighborhoods have a more difficult time taking advantage of technology improvements in education because of the digital gap, which further exacerbates educational inequality.

There is also a significant impact that school atmosphere and leadership play in tackling the problem of student dropout. It is emphasized by Martinez (2022) that a school climate that is both positive and inclusive has a substantial influence on the retention of current students. At-risk students are more likely to remain enrolled in schools that have a robust support system, rules that effectively combat bullying, and ways of teaching that are focused on the kid. Negative school climates, on the other hand, are a problem in many schools. These climates are characterized by strict disciplinary procedures, a lack of student participation, and insufficient peer support networks.

Smith (2022) adds that school leadership plays a significant part in the prevention of children dropping out of school since administrators are the ones who set the tone for how instructors and students interact within the teaching environment. Fallout rates have a tendency to diminish when school administrators make the well-being of students a priority and offer enough assistance to instructors. But in many schools that serve students from low-income families, the implementation of proactive retention measures is hampered by inadequate leadership structures and inadequate funds.

Nevertheless, absence of engagement from the community and the parents is still another enormous obstacle. When it comes to providing assistance for students who are at risk, Dela Cruz (2021) emphasizes the need of deep community participation. There is a greater likelihood that children will have access to the resources and support systems they need if schools work together with local groups, companies, and government agencies. On the other side, this leaves educators to manage dropout prevention measures on their own since many communities do not actively participate in school issues.

Like Lopez (2023), Lopez emphasizes the significance of family engagement in the process of student retention. Both greater academic success and lower dropout rates are associated with parents who take an active role in their children's educational experiences. However, in many underprivileged areas, parental engagement is either inadequate or nonexistent because of employment obligations, a lack of knowledge, or a limited understanding of the need of education. It is impossible to prevent students from

dropping out of school without strong connections between schools and the communities they serve.

When it comes to addressing students who are at danger of dropping out of school, the literature discusses the myriad of problems that must be overcome. The difficulty of keeping kids who are considered to be at risk is partially caused by a number of factors, including socioeconomic constraints, a lack of inclusive education policy, poor teacher preparation, emotional loads on educators, technical restrictions, unfavorable school climates, and a lack of community participation. A comprehensive and collaborative strategy that includes educators, legislators, school administrators, parents, and members of the larger community is required in order to provide a solution to these difficulties. Although there has been great progress made in developing techniques to lower dropout rates, there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that these interventions are properly implemented and maintained over time via continued efforts. Development of context-specific solutions that meet the unique issues encountered by various educational settings should be the primary focus of future research. This is especially important in areas that are economically poor and rural (Fernandez, 2023).

### **Strategies that support and retain at-risk learners risk of dropping out**

#### **in the classroom**

Student dropout continues to be a significant concern in global education systems, impacting both individual learners and the wider socio-economic environment. Retaining at-risk students requires comprehensive programs that tackle both academic and non-

academic issues contributing to student disengagement. Research has investigated several methodologies, including teacher interventions, culturally responsive pedagogy, mentoring initiatives, enhancements in school atmosphere, alternative educational frameworks, and parental engagement. Literature indicates that effective retention techniques depend on addressing kids' socio-emotional, intellectual, and economic issues, while fostering collaboration among teachers, schools, and communities (Ocampo, 2023).

A crucial component affecting student retention is teacher professional development. Fernandez (2023) asserts that educators who get ongoing training in student engagement strategies are more adept at recognizing early indicators of dropout risk and executing successful interventions. Professional development initiatives centered on individualized education, trauma-informed pedagogy, and behavior management have shown efficacy in maintaining the engagement of at-risk kids. Nevertheless, many educators in impoverished schools are deprived of access to these training opportunities, limiting their capacity to use best practices.

Ocampo (2023) underscores the significance of instructors' emotional work in aiding at-risk kids. Educators who establish strong emotional bonds with their pupils foster a more inclusive classroom atmosphere, hence decreasing the probability of disengagement. The emotional burdens imposed on teachers may result in burnout, underscoring the need for institutional support and wellness initiatives for educators.

Socioeconomic considerations are a significant driver of student dropout probability. Garcia (2022) identified financial instability as a primary factor contributing to

school dropouts in Philippine secondary schools, since several students abandon their studies to pursue jobs or support their families. This aligns with studies in other developing nations, where poverty, limited access to educational resources, and food insecurity substantially affect student retention (Uddin, 2022). Resolving these difficulties requires specific policies that provide financial aid, scholarships, and nutritional initiatives in schools. Nguyen (2021) observes that while Vietnam has enacted many educational programs to reduce dropout rates, their efficacy is often constrained by uneven policy enforcement and an absence of specialized methods suited to particular regions. These results underscore the need of including economic support systems into dropout prevention efforts.

Culturally responsive education, alongside economic reasons, has been recognized as a crucial technique for aiding at-risk learners, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds. Ibrahim (2023) emphasizes that minority students often encounter elevated dropout rates attributable to insufficient representation and a lack of culturally appropriate pedagogical approaches.

Educators that integrate students' ethnic identities into their curriculum and cultivate a learning environment that honors diversity are more likely to enhance student engagement. This method is especially pertinent in multi-ethnic educational environments because students from diverse cultural origins may encounter difficulties with integration. Reyes (2023) contends that in the Philippines, the engagement of underprivileged students requires both culturally appropriate education and a reformed curriculum that corresponds with students' actual experiences and ambitions. This indicates that

retention measures must be tailored to the cultural circumstances of learners, rather than depending only on conventional educational approaches.

Mentorship programs are generally acknowledged as an excellent approach for assisting at-risk pupils. Jones (2022) asserts that students engaged in mentoring programs have enhanced retention rates and superior academic achievement. Mentors provide direction, encouragement, and scholarly assistance, cultivating a feeling of connection and purpose among students. Successful mentoring programs often include peer mentors, educators, and community members collaborating to maintain student engagement.

Tan (2021) emphasizes that several Southeast Asian nations, such as the Philippines, underutilize mentoring programs owing to a deficiency of skilled mentors and financial limitations. Enhancing mentoring activities and incorporating them into educational programs might substantially decrease dropout rates among at-risk students.

The educational environment significantly influences student retention. Martinez (2022) discovered that students who see their educational environment as helpful and inclusive have a reduced likelihood of dropping out. Elements include teacher-student connections, anti-bullying measures, and extracurricular involvement foster a pleasant school environment. Institutions that actively cultivate a culture of respect, belonging, and student empowerment often exhibit reduced dropout rates.

Likewise, Smith (2022) emphasizes the importance of school leadership in fostering a conducive educational atmosphere. Principals and administrators that

emphasize student welfare, provide resources for teacher assistance, and enforce successful student retention strategies play a crucial role in lowering dropout rates. In many rural schools, leadership frameworks are inadequate, and administrators are deficient in the resources required to establish comprehensive student support networks.

Alternative education models have been recognized as an effective approach for keeping at-risk students. Patel (2022) underscores the efficacy of alternate educational methodologies, including flexible learning programs, vocational training, and online education, in mitigating student attrition. These approaches address the needs of students who find conventional educational frameworks challenging by offering more individualized and accessible learning avenues.

Moreover, Williams (2021) underscores that extracurricular activities may function as a crucial retention mechanism by promoting student participation outside the classroom. Engagement in sports, arts, and leadership initiatives imparts students with a feeling of purpose and community, hence reducing the probability of attrition. Nonetheless, some public schools, especially in economically disadvantaged regions, are deficient in essential resources to provide a diverse array of extracurricular activities, hence limiting its effectiveness as a retention strategy.

Parental engagement is a significant determinant affecting student retention. Lopez (2023) discovered that kids with actively involved parents tend to achieve superior academic performance and have a lower likelihood of dropping out. Parental support manifests in several ways, such as aiding with schoolwork, participating in school meetings, and cultivating a home atmosphere that prioritizes education. In economically

disadvantaged households, parental engagement is often constrained by employment obligations and insufficient educational attainment. This is especially apparent in rural regions, where several parents possess less formal education and find it challenging to provide academic assistance to their children (Quinn, 2021). Schools may tackle this problem by instituting parental engagement programs that educate families about the significance of supporting their children's education and provide ways for successful participation.

Collaboration among educators has been recognized as a vital factor in preventing student dropout. Vargas (2023) observes that collaborative efforts among instructors to develop intervention techniques and exchange best practices enhance their efficacy in assisting at-risk students. Collaborative teaching methodologies, including team teaching and professional learning communities, enable educators to consolidate resources and expertise to meet student needs. Many schools, especially those in impoverished public systems, lack the institutional support required to enable teacher cooperation. Facilitating cooperation among instructors via professional development initiatives and coordinated planning periods may improve student retention strategies.

Finally, effective strategies for supporting and retaining at-risk learners encompass teacher training, financial assistance, culturally responsive pedagogy, mentorship initiatives, a positive school environment, alternative educational pathways, parental engagement, and teacher collaboration. Each strategy targets distinct facets of student disengagement, indicating that a comprehensive approach is essential for effective dropout prevention. Despite considerable advancements in comprehending these tactics,

obstacles such as financial limitations, deficiencies in policy execution, and insufficient teacher support persist in impeding their complete efficacy. Future study must concentrate on discovering methods to close these gaps and guarantee that dropout prevention tactics are both accessible and durable in various educational environments Garcia (2022).

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents the discussions on the methods being used in this study, specifically the research design, research participants, data collection, procedures, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness of the study, potential research bias, and limitations.

#### **Research Design**

A qualitative approach was employed in this study to explore the depth and significance that participants attributed to their experiences, particularly in relation to the strategies they utilized to enhance teacher well-being (Spady, 2021). This research sought to capture the complexities of these experiences, whether past or ongoing, by delving into the nuanced realities faced by educators in their professional environments. Through qualitative inquiry, the study provided a rich, contextualized understanding of the challenges and opportunities encountered in fostering teacher well-being.

To interpret and derive meaning from the findings, the researcher engaged in an in-depth qualitative analysis, immersing themselves in the natural settings of each case to construct a rich and nuanced narrative of both everyday experiences and critical incidents (Rust, 2022). The inherent flexibility of qualitative research facilitated a dynamic and iterative process, allowing the researcher to continuously refine methodological

approaches in response to emerging patterns and contextual shifts. This adaptability was crucial in ensuring a thorough and credible investigation, as it permitted the revisiting and modification of data collection strategies when data saturation had not yet been achieved. Such methodological responsiveness strengthened the depth of the inquiry and reinforced the validity of the findings through triangulation and enhanced data credibility.

Following Creswell's (2013) framework, the study adopted a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of individuals as they navigated the complexities of their roles within the educational system. This methodology was particularly suited for uncovering the personal and collective meanings that participants attached to their experiences. By providing a platform for their voices to be heard, the study illuminated key insights into the realities of teacher well-being promotion, revealing both successes and areas in need of improvement.

### **Research Participants**

As this study focused on the lived experiences of teachers in M'lang South District, particularly their strategies in supporting learners at risk of dropping out, the participants were drawn exclusively from public schools in the district, as these institutions represented the most common educational setting for learners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Teachers were chosen as the core participants of this study because they were directly responsible for implementing instructional, motivational, and guidance strategies to ensure that learners remained engaged in school. Their

perspectives provided critical insight into how the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all, were realized at the classroom level.

Participants were selected based on three criteria to ensure that they were well-positioned to provide meaningful accounts of their experiences. First, they were permanent or regular teachers within M'lang South District to guarantee stability and familiarity with local educational conditions. Second, they had at least five years of teaching experience, allowing them to develop an in-depth understanding of the challenges and dynamics associated with at-risk learners. Third, they had direct experience handling students identified as being at risk of dropping out, since their narratives were central to understanding the strategies, challenges, and coping mechanisms employed to support retention. By applying these criteria, the study ensured that participants provided rich, contextually grounded accounts of their experiences.

Moreover, this qualitative inquiry was not intended to provide a quantitative measurement of dropout rates or the statistical effectiveness of specific interventions. Instead, it captured the nuanced perspectives of teachers regarding the strategies they adopted, the institutional and community support available to them, and the ways they adapted to socioeconomic, cultural, and structural factors that contributed to dropout risks. The voices of teachers were particularly significant, as they often served multiple roles beyond instruction, including mentoring, counseling, and liaising with families and communities. Their resilience and adaptability, coupled with their frontline role in addressing barriers to student retention, made them essential participants in this study.

The scope of participants was limited to M'lang South District, an area with distinct socio-cultural and economic characteristics that influenced dropout patterns and teacher responses. The study employed purposive sampling to capture in-depth, experience-based insights rather than to generalize findings to all contexts. While the focus remained on teachers, indirect references to students, parents, and school leaders emerged during interviews or observations, enriching the understanding of the environment in which teachers operated. However, the direct perspectives of these groups were not systematically collected or analyzed.

Furthermore, the delimitations of the research were also acknowledged. The study did not measure the long-term effectiveness of teacher strategies on student outcomes, nor did it attempt to evaluate the broader institutional reforms necessary to address dropout rates. Instead, it centered on teachers' lived experiences, strategies, and coping mechanisms within their specific contexts. Consequently, the findings were highly context-dependent and might not have been fully transferable to other districts with different economic, cultural, or educational structures. Nevertheless, the insights generated provided valuable contributions to the broader dialogue on dropout prevention, particularly in rural and disadvantaged educational environments.

### **Data Collection**

The selection of participants for this research was carried out using purposive sampling, which guaranteed that only individuals who possessed the necessary skills and

experience in dealing with learners at risk were involved. According to Creswell (2018), purposeful sampling is a strategy commonly employed in qualitative research, allowing researchers to consciously select participants based on predetermined criteria aligned with the study's aims. A comprehensive understanding of the experiences of public elementary school teachers in the M'lang South District who actively dealt with students at risk of dropping out of school was the objective of this research project, which was conducted using this methodology.

A total of fifteen (15) public elementary school teachers participated in the research. This figure was consistent with the principles of qualitative research, particularly concerning the process of reaching data saturation. An appropriate sample size for qualitative research typically varies from five to twenty-five (5–25) individuals, as stated by Leedy and Ormrod (2010), as referenced in Coy (2019). The exact number of participants was determined by the depth of inquiry being conducted. Furthermore, Patton (1990) supported this, emphasizing that qualitative research does not require a predetermined sample size but should focus on the richness and comprehensiveness of the information obtained. Thus, this study included fifteen (15) participants to ensure a balance between data depth and manageability. Specifically, nine (9) participants took part in in-depth interviews (IDI), while six (6) participated in focus group discussions (FGD).

Participants were selected based on inclusion criteria to ensure relevance to the study. They were permanent teachers in public elementary schools in the M'lang South District, had at least three years of teaching experience within the district, and had

experience implementing programs and interventions to help students susceptible to dropping out. Those who did not meet these qualifications were excluded, including teachers with fewer than three years of experience, school officials, students, parents, and community stakeholders not directly involved in addressing dropout risks or implementing retention measures.

Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time in accordance with ethical research norms. They were fully informed of their right to withdraw without penalty, and participation was voluntary. If a participant decided to withdraw, their data were excluded from the final analysis to preserve the study's integrity. This ensured that participants' autonomy and well-being were prioritized throughout the research process.

This study ensured that only educators with relevant experience participated, allowing an in-depth and meaningful investigation of the challenges and approaches involved in retaining students considered at risk in the M'lang South District.

## **Procedures**

Before any data collection activities were undertaken, the researcher secured the necessary institutional approvals. This process began with the submission of the full research proposal to the Dean of the Graduate School of the researcher's academic institution. Once the Dean reviewed and endorsed the proposal, it was forwarded to the Ethics Review Committee of the same institution for ethical clearance. The Ethics Review Committee ensured adherence to accepted ethical standards for research involving

human participants, particularly regarding their rights, privacy, and well-being. Only after approval and ethical clearance were obtained did the researcher proceed to the field.

Following ethical clearance, the researcher secured permission from the Division Office where the study was conducted. A formal request was submitted to the Schools Division Superintendent, outlining the objectives, scope, and procedures of the research. Once the Division Office granted approval, the researcher coordinated with the District Supervisor of M'lang South District to facilitate communication and coordination with school heads and teachers. This ensured that the conduct of the study aligned with district-level policies and did not disrupt regular school operations.

After approval from the Division and District Offices, the researcher reached out to the participating schools within M'lang South District. Letters of request were provided to school heads, who endorsed the participation of qualified teachers. During this stage, the researcher conducted orientation sessions with participants, explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and confidentiality measures. Informed consent forms were distributed and signed before any data collection began.

The data collection process primarily involved in-depth interviews with teachers who met the established criteria. These interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility while ensuring that key questions on strategies, challenges, and coping mechanisms were addressed. Depending on participants' availability and comfort, interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through secure online platforms. The researcher recorded the interviews with participants' consent, supplemented by field notes to capture observations and non-verbal cues.

To strengthen credibility, the researcher also employed document analysis and informal observations within school contexts. Documents such as school reports, attendance records, and policy guidelines on dropout prevention were reviewed to provide additional insights and data triangulation. All data were systematically organized, coded, and analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns reflecting teachers' lived experiences.

After data collection, the researcher transcribed and analyzed the interviews using thematic analysis, ensuring that emerging themes remained grounded in participants' narratives. Constant comparison was applied to refine categories and ensure consistency of interpretation. Member checking was employed by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm accuracy and authenticity.

Finally, the researcher compiled the results, highlighting the strategies teachers used, the challenges they encountered, and the contextual factors shaping their work with at-risk learners. A final report was shared with the District and Division Offices, as well as with participating schools, to ensure that the findings contributed to practical improvements in dropout prevention strategies aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4.

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study followed the phenomenological approach of Moustakas (1994), which emphasized capturing the essence of lived experiences through

systematic and reflective processes. Since the study was qualitative in nature, the analysis focused on narratives gathered from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with teachers in M'lang South District. The goal of the analysis was to identify patterns, themes, and essences that illuminated how teachers experienced and responded to the challenges of dealing with learners at risk of dropping out in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 4.

The first step of analysis involved *epoche*, where the researcher bracketed personal biases, assumptions, and prior knowledge to ensure that the voices of participants were prioritized. All transcripts from interviews and discussions were reviewed multiple times for familiarity with the narratives. The next step was horizontalization, where significant statements from transcripts were identified and treated with equal value. In this stage, the researcher highlighted all expressions relevant to the phenomenon of supporting at-risk learners. Redundant or overlapping statements were reduced while key insights were preserved.

Following horizontalization, the researcher clustered meanings by grouping statements into themes that reflected the core aspects of teachers' experiences. In-depth interviews provided individualized perspectives, while focus group discussions highlighted shared challenges and collective experiences. Themes included strategies for retention, coping with limited resources, addressing socioeconomic barriers, and managing emotional demands.

The researcher then developed textural descriptions illustrating what participants experienced and structural descriptions explaining how these experiences occurred

within the socio-cultural and economic realities of M'lang South District. Combining these led to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The final step was the synthesis of meanings and essences, integrating insights from interviews and discussions to construct a unified account of teachers' lived experiences. The synthesis revealed how teachers perceived, experienced, and addressed student dropout, emphasizing their resilience, adaptability, and the contextual challenges they faced.

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher employed member checking, triangulation, and reflective analysis to validate findings. By following Moustakas' phenomenological approach, this study presented an authentic and rigorous representation of teachers' lived experiences in supporting learners at risk of dropping out.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study explored the lived experiences of teachers as they supported and intervened on behalf of learners at risk of dropping out. It entailed an in-depth qualitative inquiry into sensitive personal and professional experiences, making ethical rigor essential throughout all stages of the research process. Since the data were drawn from teachers' reflections on potentially complex and emotionally charged encounters with students facing educational vulnerabilities, ethical safeguards were established to protect both the dignity of participants and the confidentiality of learners involved in their

narratives. The principles that guided this research included respect for persons, beneficence, justice, confidentiality, and transparency as articulated by Suskie (2020), Creswell and Poth (2018), and national research ethics frameworks.

**Social Value.** The social value of this study was rooted in its direct contribution to one of the most pressing concerns in education: learner disengagement and school dropout. As education systems worldwide continued to grapple with challenges posed by poverty, academic underperformance, psychosocial issues, and post-pandemic educational recovery, learners at risk of dropping out represented a critically vulnerable segment of the school population. This study, centered on the lived experiences of teachers dealing with such learners, addressed a significant gap in both policy and practice.

Anchored on Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which promoted inclusive and equitable quality education for all, the study provided crucial insights into the contextual realities, coping strategies, and intervention mechanisms that teachers employed in support of at-risk learners. It recognized the indispensable role that teachers played not only as academic facilitators but also as frontline responders to students' complex socio-emotional and learning needs. By documenting their narratives, this study offered a grounded understanding of what “education for all” meant in under-resourced and at-risk learning environments.

The research held social value on multiple levels. At the grassroots level, it highlighted the adaptive and empathetic practices that teachers employed to keep learners engaged and in school, thereby promoting professional reflection and peer learning. At the institutional level, the study informed school-based programs such as

dropout monitoring systems, guidance interventions, and teacher professional development activities. At the policy level, the findings contributed to evidence-based reforms targeting learner retention, inclusive instruction, and mental health support, which were critical pillars in achieving SDG 4 by 2030.

To ensure that the research findings generated meaningful impact, the researcher committed to a community-informed dissemination strategy. After completion of the study, a summary of findings was returned to all teacher participants, highlighting key themes and recommendations. Printed copies were formally submitted to the Schools Division Office, and a courtesy visit was made to personally hand over the report to the District Supervisor. The purpose was to enable local education leaders to use the findings as part of their planning, monitoring, and support mechanisms for learner retention initiatives.

In addition, the researcher explored opportunities to present the findings during division-wide In-Service Trainings (INSET), Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, or education summits where other teachers and school heads could benefit from the insights of their peers. By doing so, the study transcended academic contribution and became a tool for collective action toward building more responsive, inclusive, and learner-centered schools.

**Informed Consent.** Informed consent was sought from all teacher participants prior to any data collection activities. Participation in this study was voluntary, and prospective participants were given ample time and information to decide whether or not to engage in the research. The consent process was guided by Rust's (2020) framework, ensuring that each participant was made fully aware of the following: (1) the identity and qualifications of the researcher; (2) the purpose and objectives of the study; (3) the nature

and scope of the data to be collected; (4) how the data would be used, stored, and reported; and (5) their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

To facilitate genuine informed decision-making, all participants received a formal, written informed consent form, which was explained in detail before being signed. For convenience, a digital version of the consent form was provided when interviews were conducted online. The researcher ensured that participants understood they were under no obligation to participate and that refusal would not affect their professional standing or institutional relationships.

**The Vulnerability of the Research Participant.** Although the participants of this study were adult professionals, public school teachers, they still experienced specific vulnerabilities within the research context. Teachers felt apprehensive about sharing candid accounts involving school policies, learner behavior, or perceived professional shortcomings, especially if such reflections could be interpreted as criticism of institutional practices or administrative decisions. Moreover, since the topic centered on learners at risk of dropping out, often involving personal stories of student hardship, poverty, trauma, or family dysfunction, teachers sometimes felt emotionally exposed when recounting their interventions or limitations in supporting such learners.

To minimize these risks, the researcher assured participants that the study was not evaluative of their teaching performance. Rather, it sought to understand their experiences, strategies, emotional labor, and reflections in a respectful and nonjudgmental manner. Participation was positioned as an opportunity to inform future support systems for both teachers and vulnerable students. The researcher fostered a

safe space where participants felt empowered to share without fear of judgment or reprisal.

**Risks, Benefits, and Safety.** This study acknowledged several potential risks. Although physical risk was absent, psychological and emotional risks were possible. Teachers sometimes recounted emotionally difficult encounters involving students who were neglected, chronically absent, malnourished, or burdened by socioeconomic adversity. Some participants revisited memories of student dropouts they were unable to help or recalled moments of burnout, helplessness, or professional frustration.

To mitigate these risks, the researcher conducted interviews in a sensitive, empathetic, and professionally supportive manner. Participants were informed of their right to pause, skip questions, or discontinue the interview at any point without justification. The researcher also offered a post-interview debrief, allowing participants to reflect on the process, ask questions, and express any emotional discomfort. When needed, referrals to school-based mental health support services or the guidance office were facilitated.

The benefits of participation included opportunities for self-reflection, professional affirmation, and contribution to evidence-based improvements in educational policies and support systems for at-risk learners. The study promoted awareness and responsive action aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, particularly the target of reducing school dropout rates and ensuring inclusive learning environments.

**Privacy and Confidentiality of Information.** In strict adherence to Republic Act 10173, the Data Privacy Act of 2012, all data collected in this study were treated with the highest level of confidentiality. Teachers' identities were anonymized through the use of

pseudonyms or unique codes. Any contextual identifiers such as school names, divisions, or specific student stories were modified or generalized in the final report to prevent indirect identification.

All digital data such as recordings and transcriptions were encrypted and stored on a password-protected device, while hard copies of consent forms and notes were locked in a secure cabinet. Only the researcher and, if necessary, a designated research assistant under a confidentiality agreement, had access to these materials. Data were retained for five years after the study and then securely destroyed.

While teachers shared experiences involving students, the identities of learners were neither solicited nor recorded. Any student information inadvertently disclosed was handled with strict confidentiality and excluded from the published findings unless fully anonymized.

**Transparency.** Transparency was fundamental to building trust and ensuring the integrity of the research process. The researcher maintained an audit trail documenting each stage of the study, from the formulation of research questions to data analysis and reporting. All decisions, including methodological choices and ethical safeguards, were traceable and open for evaluation by the research committee and institutional ethics board.

Transparency with participants was ensured through continuous communication. Before and after interviews, the researcher clarified participants' roles, the use of their data, and the trajectory of the research. Member checking was implemented whereby participants received their interview transcripts to verify accuracy and to approve or revise

any portion of their narratives. After analysis, participants were invited to receive a summary of the study's findings.

**Qualification of the Researcher.** The quality and ethical soundness of this research were anchored in the qualifications, preparedness, and commitment of the researcher. As a graduate student with formal academic training in qualitative research methods, research ethics involving human subjects, and educational inquiry, the researcher was equipped to conduct rigorous and ethically responsible research. She participated in institutional capacity-building seminars on SDG-aligned educational research, child protection protocols, and inclusive education strategies, which informed the ethical sensitivity and relevance of this study.

The researcher worked under the direct supervision of an experienced qualitative research adviser and received input from a panel of research experts to ensure academic rigor and methodological soundness. To ensure the validity of interpretations, the researcher submitted coded transcripts and emergent themes for review by her adviser. When necessary, professionals in educational research, psychology, or guidance counseling were consulted.

The researcher maintained a reflective journal throughout the process to manage personal biases, emotional responses, and evolving perspectives. This reflexive practice strengthened the trustworthiness and ethical responsibility of the study.

**Adequacy of Facilities.** The researcher ensured that interviews, whether in person or online, were conducted in appropriate, secure, and distraction-free environments. For face-to-face sessions, quiet rooms such as faculty lounges or unused classrooms were used to ensure comfort and privacy. For virtual interviews, platforms like

Zoom or Google Meet with end-to-end encryption were utilized. Participants were guided on preparing a suitable space for open discussion. All interviews were recorded with permission and securely stored.

**Permission from Organization/Location.** Before data collection, the researcher secured formal approval from the Dean of the Graduate School of Education at Central Mindanao Colleges, signifying that the study passed academic and ethical review. The CMC Ethics Review Committee reviewed all documents, including consent forms and interview protocols, to ensure compliance with research integrity standards.

Following institutional clearance, the researcher adhered to Department of Education (DepEd) protocols by submitting a letter of request to the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) of Cotabato, outlining the study's objectives and ethical safeguards. After division-level approval, the researcher sought permission from school principals and coordinated with them to facilitate teacher participation.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on inclusion criteria. They were contacted formally and oriented about the purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of the study. Signed consent forms were collected before data gathering.

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to collect rich, narrative data. Sessions lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, depending on the method. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed for accuracy. Member checking ensured that participants validated their narratives before analysis.

**Community Involvement.** Although this study did not directly employ community-based participatory research, it emphasized institutional and professional engagement. School principals, department heads, and guidance counselors were consulted to align

with institutional protocols. The findings were shared not only with academic audiences but also with professional learning communities, school leadership teams, and local education councils.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

In this study, trustworthiness was considered vital, particularly in phenomenological inquiry, to ensure that findings were valid, sound, and meaningful. To establish credibility, Creswell and Miller (2000) suggested legitimate procedures, which were observed. Credibility was achieved by faithfully representing participants' experiences and by recording and transcribing interviews accurately. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed context and data sources. Dependability was ensured by describing contextual changes, and confirmability was achieved through audit trails, triangulation, and member checking.

### **Potential Research Bias**

In conducting this qualitative study, several potential research biases were acknowledged and addressed to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Since the study relied primarily on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with teachers in M'lang South District, the subjective nature of qualitative inquiry created room for personal and contextual influences on both the researcher and participants.

One possible source of bias was researcher bias. As the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the researcher's perspectives, prior experiences, or assumptions about dropout prevention might have unintentionally shaped the

interpretation of data. To minimize this, the researcher practiced bracketing or epoche, as suggested by Moustakas (1994), by setting aside personal judgments in order to privilege the voices of the participants. Reflexive journaling was also employed throughout the research process to monitor and reflect on possible preconceptions.

Another concern was participant bias. Teachers, being aware that their responses were part of a research study, might have presented socially desirable answers that highlighted successful strategies while downplaying failures or challenges. To reduce this bias, the researcher assured participants of confidentiality and emphasized that honest sharing of both successes and difficulties was valuable for building authentic knowledge. Establishing rapport and creating a safe environment during interviews and discussions encouraged openness and reduced the tendency to provide idealized responses.

Selection bias also arose, as participants were chosen purposively based on specific criteria such as length of service and direct experience with at-risk learners. While this enhanced the richness of data, it also limited the perspectives to a specific group of teachers, excluding insights from new teachers, school leaders, parents, and learners themselves. The researcher acknowledged this limitation and clarified that the findings were not intended to generalize but to capture the lived realities of a defined group of participants.

Additionally, contextual bias was considered since the study was situated within M'lang South District, which had distinct socio-cultural and economic characteristics. The experiences of teachers in this district might have differed significantly from those in other regions. This made the findings highly context-dependent and limited their transferability

to other settings. However, providing detailed descriptions of the context allowed readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar environments.

Finally, confirmation bias during analysis might have occurred if the researcher unintentionally focused on data that supported preconceived expectations while overlooking contradictory insights. To address this, the study used triangulation by comparing results from both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and member checking was conducted to validate interpretations with participants. Peer debriefing with academic advisers further strengthened objectivity. By acknowledging these potential biases and outlining strategies to address them, the study aimed to produce findings that were credible, dependable, and reflective of the genuine lived experiences of teachers in dealing with learners at risk of dropping out.

## **Limitations**

This qualitative study had several limitations that were acknowledged to provide an accurate understanding of its scope and boundaries. The first limitation was the contextual restriction of the research. The study was confined to M'lang South District, which had unique socio-cultural and economic conditions that might not have reflected the realities of other districts or divisions. The findings, therefore, were context-specific and might not have been directly transferable to other settings with different structural, cultural, or economic characteristics.

Another limitation was the scope of participants. The study focused exclusively on teachers who met specific criteria such as having permanent status, at least five years of teaching experience, and direct involvement with learners at risk of dropping out. While

this ensured depth of experience, it excluded the perspectives of other important stakeholders such as school heads, parents, and students themselves. Their voices could have provided a broader understanding of the dropout phenomenon, but the study prioritized teachers' lived experiences as the central source of data.

The study was also limited by its data collection methods, which included only in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Although these approaches provided rich, descriptive data, they relied heavily on participants' ability and willingness to articulate their experiences. Some participants might have withheld sensitive information or emphasized more socially acceptable practices. This reliance on self-reported data might have affected the completeness of the insights gathered.

Another limitation was the lack of longitudinal perspective. The study did not track the long-term outcomes of the strategies employed by teachers in preventing dropouts. It captured lived experiences at a specific point in time but did not measure the sustained effectiveness of these interventions on student retention or academic performance. As such, the results highlighted processes and perceptions rather than long-term impacts.

Additionally, the researcher's role as the primary instrument in data collection and analysis presented another limitation. Despite efforts to apply bracketing and reflexivity, complete neutrality was difficult to achieve, and interpretations might still have been influenced by the researcher's perspectives. Strategies such as member checking and peer debriefing helped address this concern, but the possibility of interpretive bias remained.

Finally, the study acknowledged a limitation in scope of Sustainable Development Goal alignment. While SDG 4 broadly addressed inclusive and equitable quality

education, the research narrowed its focus to the issue of dropout and retention. Other equally important dimensions of SDG 4, such as equity in learning outcomes, lifelong learning opportunities, and education quality across all levels, were beyond the scope of this inquiry.

Despite these limitations, the study offered valuable insights into how teachers in M'lang South District experienced, interpreted, and responded to the challenge of dropout prevention. By clearly stating these boundaries, the research ensured that its contributions were understood within their proper context and could serve as a foundation for further studies in other settings.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presented, interpreted, and discussed the findings of the qualitative phenomenological inquiry that explored the lived experiences of school heads assigned to remote and geographically isolated areas in the Municipality of M'lang. Drawing from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the chapter organized the participants' narratives into themes that captured how they described their leadership roles, daily challenges, coping strategies, and contextual realities in promoting teacher well-being. The thematic presentation offered a detailed and grounded understanding of the complex conditions that shaped their administrative duties, their interactions with teachers, and their efforts to sustain instructional continuity in underserved settings. By situating the school heads' accounts within the broader discourse on educational equity, public service, and sustainability, the chapter provided a structured discussion of how they made sense of their professional commitments and responsibilities in remote environments. Through these narratives, the chapter illuminated the lived realities of educational leaders who navigated demanding work contexts while striving to ensure that teachers under their supervision remained supported, motivated, and capable of delivering quality education despite multiple constraints.

## Teachers' Perceptions and Descriptions of Their Experiences in Dealing with Learners at Risk of Dropping Out

**Table 1. Teachers' Perceptions and Descriptions of Their Experiences in Dealing with Learners at Risk of Dropping Out**

<b>Issues Probed</b>	<b>Codes / Categories</b>	<b>Significant Statements (Attributed)</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Meanings / Interpretations</b>
How teachers respond emotionally and relationally to at-risk learners	Emotional responsiveness; care and concern; teacher-student connection	"I talk to the learner privately and listen without judgment. Most of the time, students just need someone to care and listen." (IDI1)	Empathy and Compassion as the Heart of Teaching	Teachers emphasized empathy and emotional attentiveness as essential elements in building trust and re-engaging learners at risk.
How teachers' personal histories influence their approach to struggling learners	Relatability; shared background; empathy through past struggles	"I came from a poor family myself, so I understand why some students lose interest or stop going to school." (IDI1, IDI2)	Reflection through Personal Experiences	Teachers' lived experiences of hardship shaped their empathetic attitudes and strengthened their commitment to supporting vulnerable learners.
Teachers' sense of responsibility in addressing dropout risks	Commitment; moral obligation; purpose in teaching	"It's emotionally draining to see students lose interest, but as a teacher, I see it as my duty to reach out." (IDI7)	Sense of Duty and Moral Responsibility	Teachers viewed their work as a moral and professional duty, integrating compassion, perseverance, and accountability in supporting at-risk learners.

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements (Attributed)	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Instructional adjustments made to support struggling learners	Adjusting methods; learner centered strategies	"I modify my lessons based on the learner's ability. I simplify instructions, give more guided practice, and allow them to learn at their own pace." (IDI1)	Adaptability in Teaching Approaches	Teachers adapted lessons, pacing, and support mechanisms to meet diverse needs and promote success among at-risk students.
How teachers cope with emotional challenges while supporting vulnerable learners	Emotional labor; coping with stress; inner strength	"Honestly, I feel concerned and sometimes worried, but I remind myself to be patient. I try different ways to motivate the student instead of forcing participation." (IDI3)	Patience and Resilience amidst Emotional Challenges	Teachers demonstrated emotional resilience and patience, recognizing that calm persistence and flexible motivation strategies were key to re-engaging at-risk learners.

The first table presented how teachers perceived and described their lived experiences in dealing with learners at risk of dropping out. The themes illuminated the teachers' deep emotional connection, moral commitment, reflective understanding, and adaptive practices in guiding learners who were losing interest in schooling. Overall, the teachers' narratives revealed that teaching in this context extended beyond instruction and discipline, it became a vocation rooted in empathy, moral obligation, and resilience against the forces of disengagement.

### **Theme 1: Empathy and Compassion as the Heart of Teaching**

Empathy and compassion emerged as the most dominant themes in how teachers dealt with learners at risk of dropping out. These qualities guided teachers to look beyond academic performance and focus on the emotional realities that shaped their students' behavior. Compassion drove teachers to create safe spaces, listen actively, and show care through small but consistent gestures of concern that made learners feel valued and understood as supported by these statements:

“I talk to the learner privately and listen without judgment, especially when I sense they are struggling silently. I make sure they know that I am not there to punish or scold but to understand what is going on in their lives. Most of the time, students just need someone to care and listen, and that alone makes them feel that school is a place where they belong” (ID11.1.1).

“My first step is always to build a trusting relationship because I believe no learning happens without trust. I show the student that I care about them beyond academics by checking on their well-being and asking about their home life. When they feel respected and seen, they begin to participate again” (ID11.1.2).

“I reach out to parents or the guidance counselor to understand what's happening at home because behavior in school is often just a reflection of

deeper struggles. Through these conversations, I learn how I can better support the child in class. It is through empathy and teamwork that meaningful change begins” (IDI1.1.3).

“Sometimes I pair disengaged students with classmates who can serve as positive role models, and it amazes me how peer support can work wonders. Students often open up more to their friends than to teachers, and this simple pairing helps rebuild their confidence and sense of belonging” (FGD1.1.4).

“When students disengage, I take it as an opportunity to reflect on my own teaching. I ask myself whether my lessons connect to their real experiences and how I can make them more meaningful and inclusive so they will feel that school matters to their lives” (IDI1.1.5).

This was supported by Cruz (2023), who noted that empathetic teachers foster emotional safety that strengthens school connectedness among at-risk learners. Edwards (2023) emphasized that compassion-based approaches reduce dropout tendencies by building trust. Similarly, Abad (2022) found that when teachers genuinely listen and respond with empathy, students feel accepted, reducing anxiety and absenteeism.

## **Theme 2: Reflection through Personal Experiences**

Teachers' reflections on their own lives shaped how they connected with learners. Their personal experiences of hardship, poverty, or rejection became lenses for understanding their students' struggles. These reflections made them more patient, grounded, and committed to ensuring that no child felt unseen as supported by these statements as supported by these statements:

"I came from a poor family myself, so I deeply understand what it means to go to school hungry or without materials. When I see my students losing interest or coming to school tired, I do not judge them right away. That experience taught me to respond with patience and to make learning more compassionate and accessible" (IDI1.2.1).

"After years of teaching in low-income areas, I witnessed how poverty can easily destroy a student's motivation to continue studying. Some come to school worried about their next meal or the electricity bill at home. These realities remind me to teach not just lessons but hope" (IDI1.2.2).

"Seeing some of my former students drop out was one of the most painful experiences in my career. It made me more proactive in checking attendance, calling parents, and conducting home visits before it's too late. I do not want to lose another learner without trying everything I can" (IDI1.2.3).

“Our shared experiences as teachers make us more aware of what students go through daily. Many of us were once in their shoes, so we try to approach every dropout case with empathy, understanding, and a willingness to help rather than blame” (FGD1.2.4).

“My past encounters with students who almost dropped out taught me that even a small gesture of encouragement can change a learner’s decision to stay. I learned that a kind word, a listening ear, or a simple follow-up can save a child’s education” (FGD1.2.5).

Fernandez (2023) supported these findings as he explained that reflective practice deepens teachers’ ability to empathize with disadvantaged learners. Anderson (2022) also observed that shared socio-economic backgrounds create stronger bonds between teachers and students. Bautista (2021) supported this by stating that self-reflection enhances teachers’ cultural sensitivity and emotional awareness.

### **Theme 3: Sense of Duty and Moral Responsibility**

Teachers perceived their role as an ethical responsibility that extended beyond instruction. They believed they were entrusted with shaping lives, not merely teaching lessons. This sense of duty motivated them to act as advocates, mentors, and second parents for their learners.

“It was emotionally draining to see students lose interest, but I saw it as my duty to reach out no matter how many times they pushed me away. I always reminded myself that one conversation could make the difference between staying and giving up” (IDI1.3.1).

“Through the years, every story of a student dropping out reminded me why I chose this profession. It strengthened my purpose—to make learning meaningful, to never give up on any learner, and to make sure every child knows that someone believes in them” (IDI1.3.2).

“My experiences taught me that retention is not a teacher’s job alone. It requires collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community because we share the same moral duty to keep children in school” (IDI1.3.3).

“We have become emotionally connected to our learners’ situations. We do not just teach subjects anymore; we advocate for students’ right to education and for their opportunity to succeed despite life’s difficulties” (FGD1.3.4).

“When a student drops out, we always reflect on what we could have done differently. It’s not about blaming ourselves but about continuously improving our ways of reaching out” (FGD1.3.5).

This is congruent with the study of Clark (2021) who stated that teachers’ moral agency sustains their drive to protect learners from dropping out. Cruz (2023) also found

that educators with strong moral purpose demonstrate higher perseverance. Evans (2022) similarly affirmed that ethical responsibility among teachers improves learner retention.

#### **Theme 4: Adaptability in Teaching Approaches**

Adaptability was central to how teachers responded to learner diversity. Teachers continuously modified lessons, explored creative strategies, and restructured classroom dynamics to meet their students' needs. This flexibility reflected their belief that no one teaching method fits all learners as supported by these statements:

“I modified my lessons based on each learner’s ability and emotional state. For struggling students, I simplified instructions and gave guided practice until they gained confidence. Adapting helped me prevent feelings of failure that often led to dropout” (IDI1.4.1).

“I used visual aids, pictures, and hands-on activities to help learners grasp abstract ideas. These strategies transformed the learning atmosphere and made students more eager to participate despite their difficulties” (IDI1.4.2).

“I organized peer groups where supportive classmates helped at-risk

learners catch up. Peer learning not only improved academic understanding but also built friendship and accountability” (IDI1.4.3).

“I related lessons to real-life experiences, such as teaching math through budgeting or daily measurements. When students saw relevance, they realized that education was a tool for life, not a burden” (IDI1.4.4).

“I integrated videos and simple educational apps to attract students’ attention. Technology, when used properly, encouraged learners who were losing interest” (IDI1.4.5).

Fernandez (2023) agree with the above findings who reported that differentiated instruction encourages engagement among marginalized learners. Nguyen (2021) also emphasized that flexible pedagogy enhances equity. Patel (2022) found that adaptive teaching reduces dropout risk by making learning more inclusive.

### **Theme 5: Patience and Resilience Amidst Emotional Challenges**

Patience and resilience defined teachers’ responses to repeated difficulties. Despite emotional exhaustion, they maintained optimism and hope that their efforts would make a difference. Their perseverance reflected deep professional devotion and moral fortitude as supported by these statements:

“I felt worried each time a learner disengaged, but I reminded myself to be patient and consistent. I tried different ways to motivate rather than punish, knowing that one positive experience could change everything” (IDI1.5.1).

“It was emotionally draining to deal with apathy and absences, but I treated each case as a challenge rather than a failure. I reminded myself that every child deserves another chance” (IDI1.5.2).

“My experiences with difficult students made me resilient. Instead of giving up, I experimented with creative methods to re-engage them until I found something that worked” (IDI1.5.3).

“We wanted to give more support, but administrative tasks and large classes often limited our time. Still, we found small ways to encourage them daily, even through simple recognition or conversation” (FGD1.5.4).

“Our emotional connection to our learners kept us going even when we felt exhausted. Seeing small improvements reminded us that our persistence mattered” (FGD1.5.5).

These findings agree with the findings of Cruz (2023) who emphasized that resilience enables teachers to sustain compassion. Hernandez (2021) also found that emotional endurance helps educators manage burnout. Bautista (2021) highlighted that patience and persistence nurture a positive climate for at-risk learners.

**Challenges Encountered by Teachers and Forms of Parental Support in Addressing Dropout Risks**

**Table 2. Challenges Encountered by Teachers and Forms of Parental Support in Addressing Dropout Risks**

<b>Issues Probed</b>	<b>Codes / Categories</b>	<b>Significant Statements (Attributed)</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Meanings / Interpretations</b>
Challenges teachers face regarding parental participation in learners' schooling	Lack of communication; absence in meetings; indifference	“Some parents are indifferent or unresponsive. Even when we call for meetings or home visits, they don't participate.” (IDI5)	Limited Parental Involvement	Weak parental engagement reduced the effectiveness of home school collaboration, making it harder to prevent absenteeism and dropout.
Socioeconomic difficulties influencing learner attendance and engagement	Poverty; hunger; lack of resources	“Financial struggles, hunger, and family issues distract students from learning. Sometimes they come to school tired or without	Socioeconomic Barriers to Learning	Poverty and unmet basic needs were identified as core contributors to absenteeism, disengagement, and eventual dropout.

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements (Attributed)	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Emotional and behavioral issues hindering learner participation	Low self esteem; lack of motivation; trauma	breakfast.” (IDI5)  “Some students already believe they can’t succeed. Their low self esteem makes them afraid to participate or try.” (IDI3)	Behavioral and Emotional Struggles of Students	Teachers recognized students’ emotional vulnerability and lack of confidence as major obstacles to consistent participation and academic persistence.
Institutional limitations affecting support for at risk learners	Large class sizes; lack of materials; limited programs	“We don’t always have enough materials or updated resources to make lessons interesting.” (IDI6)	Institutional and Resource Constraints	Insufficient learning resources and large class sizes limited teachers’ ability to provide targeted, engaging, and effective interventions.
Importance of parental guidance and communication in preventing dropout	Encouragement; follow up at home; emotional care	“When parents monitor their child’s attendance and performance, it really helps. A simple follow up at home can prevent absences from becoming dropouts.” (IDI1)	Value of Parental Support and Communication	Consistent parental involvement, emotional support, and monitoring strengthened learners’ motivation and school attachment,

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements (Attributed)	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
				reducing risk of dropout.

Table 3 revealed the complex challenges teachers faced in addressing dropout risks and the varying levels of parental support that shaped their success or frustration. The narratives highlighted multiple, overlapping difficulties—economic deprivation, behavioral issues, resource scarcity, and emotional strain. However, amid these struggles, teachers underscored that when families and schools collaborated, students often rediscovered motivation and stability.

### **Theme 1: Limited Parental Involvement**

Teachers consistently cited limited parental involvement as one of the most pervasive challenges in reducing dropout rates. Many parents were disengaged due to poverty, work commitments, or lack of awareness about their roles in supporting their children’s education as supported by these statements:

“Some parents were unresponsive even after multiple invitations to school meetings. Their absence left students feeling neglected and unsupported, which often led to repeated absences” (IDI3.1.1).

“Parents usually appeared only when problems escalated. Preventive

collaboration was rare, and this reactive habit reduced our ability to intervene early” (IDI3.1.2).\

“I noticed that students with actively involved parents showed clear improvement in attendance and motivation. Parental concern made a world of difference” (IDI3.1.3).

“As a group, we observed that parents from economically struggling families rarely attended school events. Their lack of presence was not from apathy but from exhaustion and limited resources” (FGD3.1.4).

“Parents frequently admitted they wanted to help but did not know how. We realized that schools needed to guide them better in supporting their children’s education” (FGD3.1.5).

These results are supported by the findings of Lopez (2023) who identified low parental participation as a leading predictor of student disengagement. Quinn (2021) also highlighted that socioeconomic strain restricts parents’ time for involvement. Dela Cruz (2021) asserted that parent orientation and empowerment programs can transform passive households into active learning partners.

## **Theme 2: Socio-Economic Barriers to Learning**

Poverty profoundly shaped the schooling experiences of at-risk learners. Teachers recounted how students juggled financial responsibilities, family duties, and schoolwork, often at the expense of their education as supported by these statements:

“Many students skipped classes because they lacked food or transportation money. No matter how engaging the lessons were, hunger and financial stress distracted them completely” (IDI3.2.1).

“Learners often prioritized earning income over schooling, especially during harvest or market days. They felt pressured to help sustain their families’ livelihood” (IDI3.2.2).

“Poverty was behind most absences and dropouts we documented. Without stable income, education became a luxury some families could not afford” (FGD3.2.3).

“Parents wanted to help but were forced to work far away, leaving children unsupervised and unmotivated. The lack of adult presence at home worsened absenteeism” (IDI3.2.4).

“Even when school programs existed, they often lacked continuity because

of funding issues. Students lost hope when they saw support systems fail” (IDI3.2.5).

These results agree with the study of Anderson (2022) who described poverty as the most persistent driver of school dropout in rural areas. Garcia (2022) also affirmed that financial instability diminishes academic engagement among low-income students. Bautista (2021) further noted that teachers in underfunded schools face compounding challenges when material scarcity intersects with student hunger and absenteeism.

### **Theme 3: Behavioral and Emotional Struggles of Students**

Emotional and behavioral challenges were among the most difficult aspects of working with at-risk learners. Teachers became de facto counselors, addressing issues of trauma, low self-worth, and learned helplessness with compassion and creativity as supported by these statements:

“Some students had already internalized failure, believing they were not smart enough. I constantly reminded them that effort mattered more than past mistakes, slowly rebuilding their confidence” (IDI3.3.1).

“Learners who faced repeated academic setbacks tended to shut down emotionally. They avoided participation out of fear of embarrassment, which further reinforced their isolation” (IDI3.3.2).

“Behavioral problems like defiance and absenteeism were usually symptoms of deeper emotional wounds. When I approached them with empathy rather than punishment, I often uncovered stories of neglect or abuse” (FGD3.3.3).

“I dealt with students who came to school burdened by trauma from family conflicts. They needed reassurance and stability, not just discipline” (ID13.3.4).

“Those who felt unsupported at home often gave up easily. Without anyone believing in them, it became hard for them to believe in themselves” (FGD3.3.5).

These findings is relevant with the findings of Edwards (2023) who explained that trauma-sensitive teaching helps re-engage emotionally vulnerable learners. Clark (2021) also emphasized the lack of psychological services in rural schools, leaving teachers to shoulder counseling roles. Cruz (2023) showed that emotional support from teachers fosters resilience and academic recovery among struggling youth.

#### **Theme 4: Institutional and Resource Constraints**

Institutional barriers compounded the teachers' challenges. Limited teaching materials, overcrowded classrooms, and administrative workload restricted their capacity to implement consistent interventions as supported by these statements:

“We lacked the resources to make lessons interactive. I often reused materials or created visual aids from recycled paper just to make learning enjoyable” (IDI3.4.1).

“Overcrowded classes made it impossible to focus on individual learners. Those who needed more help ended up silent and overlooked” (IDI3.4.2).

“Administrative requirements consumed much of our time. We spent hours on reports instead of mentoring students who needed our attention most” (FGD3.4.3).

“Programs like the Dropout Reduction initiative started well but were rarely sustained. Without consistent monitoring, they lost momentum and credibility” (IDI3.4.4).

“Retention depended on leadership and funding. Supportive principals and active school heads made interventions more achievable, but others lacked direction or resources” (FGD3.4.5).

Fernandez (2023) found that institutional inadequacies hinder inclusive education. Hernandez (2021) reported that bureaucratic demands reduce teachers' emotional availability for students. Martinez (2022) highlighted that resource sufficiency and administrative support directly correlate with improved learner retention.

### **Theme 5: Value of Parental Support and Communication**

Despite numerous challenges, teachers consistently emphasized that effective parental support and open communication were among the most powerful predictors of student retention. When parents became allies, teachers' efforts multiplied in impact as supported by these statements:

“Parents who monitored attendance and encouraged discipline at home made our work much easier. Their involvement created consistency between school and home expectations” (IDI3.5.1).

“When parents showed genuine belief in their child’s potential, it inspired persistence. I witnessed learners overcome struggles simply because their parents reminded them of their worth” (IDI3.5.2).

“I saw the difference when parents attended PTA meetings and case conferences. Their physical presence was symbolic, it told students that their education mattered” (IDI3.5.3).

“Parents who celebrated even small academic successes nurtured confidence in their children. They began to view learning as something joyful, not stressful” (FGD3.5.4).

“When communication between home and school improved, early interventions became possible. Problems were solved quickly because both sides worked together” (FGD3.5.5).

Indeed, this has similarity with the findings of the study of Lopez (2023) which confirmed that strong parental involvement strengthens school continuity. Quinn (2021) explained that family–school communication builds accountability and belonging. Dela Cruz (2021) also highlighted that collective efforts between teachers and parents create a holistic support network crucial to achieving the goals of SDG 4, ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all.

Finally, the teachers’ experiences in Tables 2 and 3 illuminated a profound truth: addressing dropout is not just an educational issue but a social and emotional one. The effectiveness of strategies such as differentiated instruction, collaborative intervention, and home–school partnership depended on compassion and sustained communication. Despite systemic and economic challenges, the teachers’ resilience and moral commitment reflected their vital role in advancing the aspirations of Sustainable Development Goal 4, to ensure that no learner is left behind, and that education truly becomes a right for all.

## Strategies Teachers Employ to Support and Retain At-Risk Learners in the Classroom

**Table 3. Strategies Teachers Employ to Support and Retain At-Risk Learners in the Classroom**

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements (Attributed)	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Instructional strategies used to meet diverse learning needs	Flexible teaching; scaffolding; tailored support	“I use differentiated instruction so that each learner can work according to their ability level.” (ID11)	Differentiated and Inclusive Instruction	Teachers employed varied and flexible instructional approaches to accommodate diverse abilities and sustain engagement among at-risk learners.
Approaches used to build trust and emotional safety	Rapport; emotional connection; communication	“The first thing I do is build rapport. When students trust me, they respond better to instructions and are more open to learning.” (ID16)	Building Relationships and Trust	Establishing rapport and emotional connection helped teachers motivate students, reduce anxiety, and strengthen commitment to learning.
Techniques used to encourage participation and strengthen learner confidence	Praise; encouragement; recognition	“I use praise, stickers, and small rewards to encourage participation. It’s amazing how much motivation	Positive Reinforcement and Motivation	Teachers used affirmations and rewards to boost learner motivation, self esteem, and willingness to participate in class.

<b>Issues Probed</b>	<b>Codes / Categories</b>	<b>Significant Statements (Attributed)</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Meanings / Interpretations</b>
Collaborative efforts among school personnel to support struggling learners	Teamwork; peer tutoring; guidance coordination	a few kind words can bring.” (ID17) “We regularly coordinate with the principal and guidance counselor to identify at-risk learners and plan interventions.” (ID11)	Collaborative Interventions with Stakeholders	Teachers worked with school leaders, peers, and guidance personnel to design coordinated and structured interventions.
External partnerships helping address obstacles to student retention	Parental communication; community outreach; NGO involvement	“We’ve been part of initiatives where we partner with NGOs and church groups to provide school supplies and motivational sessions for at-risk learners.” (ID18)	Home and Community Linkages	Teachers expanded support systems beyond the school by engaging families, NGOs, and community groups to address external causes of dropout.

Table 2 presented the strategies teachers employed to support and retain learners at risk of dropping out. The thematic findings revealed that educators demonstrated flexibility, empathy, and creativity in designing instructional and non-instructional strategies that responded to students’ diverse needs and life circumstances. These strategies went beyond conventional classroom teaching and included differentiated instruction, emotional scaffolding, community partnership, and collaboration with stakeholders. Teachers emphasized that addressing dropout risk required an integrated

approach that viewed the learner not merely as a student but as a human being shaped by socio-economic, familial, and emotional realities.

### **Theme 1: Differentiated and Inclusive Instruction**

Differentiated and inclusive instruction emerged as a vital pedagogical strategy in ensuring that at-risk learners were not excluded from meaningful learning opportunities. Teachers in M'lang South District demonstrated adaptability by modifying lessons, pacing, and classroom structures to address varying academic and emotional needs. Their practices underscored that inclusion meant not treating all learners the same, but ensuring that each had equitable access to success as supported by these statements:

“I used differentiated instruction so that each learner could work at a level suited to their ability and pace. For those who struggled, I prepared simplified tasks and scaffolded lessons with examples they could relate to, while more advanced students were challenged with extension activities. This balance helped maintain engagement and self-esteem for all learners” (IDI2.1.1).

“I learned to break lessons into smaller, achievable segments so that struggling learners could understand without feeling overwhelmed. I guided them closely until they gained confidence, which led to small yet consistent improvements in their participation and performance” (IDI2.1.2).

“I created mixed-ability groups to encourage peer mentoring, where stronger students supported those who were at risk. This approach not only improved comprehension but also cultivated compassion, teamwork, and a sense of community within the classroom” (IDI2.1.3).

“As a group, we agreed that adapting lessons to the realities of our learners was essential. We designed activities based on local contexts, like budgeting household income or farming measurements, which made learning more relevant and meaningful” (FGD2.1.4).

“I used visual aids, drawings, and digital materials to make abstract concepts more concrete. Even students who rarely participated became curious and attentive when they could see and manipulate learning materials” (FGD2.1.5).

Teachers’ use of differentiated and inclusive practices reflected what Bautista (2021) identified as the core of inclusive education: meeting learners where they are rather than expecting uniform mastery. Ocampo (2023) similarly emphasized that adaptive instruction empowers marginalized students by validating their lived experiences as sources of knowledge. This was further supported by Fernandez (2023), who found that differentiated instruction enhances learner confidence and reduces dropout

tendencies in resource-constrained schools by accommodating diverse learning styles and pacing.

## **Theme 2: Building Relationships and Trust**

Building relationships and trust was central to sustaining learner engagement. Teachers recognized that at-risk students often withdrew not due to lack of ability but because of emotional neglect or trauma. Establishing relational trust became their foundation for all other interventions, transforming the classroom into a haven where students felt seen, valued, and safe as supported by these statements:

“The first thing I did was build rapport by showing genuine concern for each learner’s life beyond academics. I often spent time listening to their stories and assuring them that their struggles were valid and surmountable. When they realized that someone cared, their attendance and motivation gradually improved” (IDI2.2.1).

“I made it a habit to ask students how they were doing and to share small moments of encouragement. These personal gestures helped them open up, and over time, they started trusting me enough to talk about their problems before skipping classes” (IDI2.2.2).

“I used to think discipline was about strict rules, but now I see that connection works better. Students who trust you are easier to guide and correct because they know your feedback comes from care” (IDI2.2.3).

“We intentionally cultivated warmth in our classrooms, treating students like members of a family. We celebrated birthdays, achievements, and even small milestones together because joy creates belongingness” (FGD2.2.4).

“I always told my students that my classroom was a safe space. They could express emotions, make mistakes, and start over. This sense of safety made them return to school even after absences” (FGD2.2.5).

Cruz (2023) supported these findings as he explained that relationships built on trust foster resilience and emotional safety, crucial for retaining at-risk learners. Edwards (2023) found that emotional connection reduces behavioral problems and absenteeism. Likewise, Jones (2022) revealed that students who trust their teachers exhibit stronger motivation and long-term engagement, highlighting that relationships, not rules, sustain learning.

### **Theme 3: Positive Reinforcement and Motivation**

Teachers consistently used positive reinforcement to reframe learning as an empowering experience. Instead of relying on punishment or negative feedback, they

celebrated incremental progress and recognized effort as a sign of potential. Motivation, in this sense, became both emotional and pedagogical, grounded in affirmation, patience, and hope as supported by these statements:

“I replaced scolding with praise because I saw that students responded better to kindness. I gave small tokens or public recognition for consistent attendance and participation, which encouraged others to do the same” (IDI2.3.1).

“I learned to highlight progress rather than perfection. When a student who used to fail finally passed an exam, I made sure everyone applauded the achievement so they could feel proud of themselves” (IDI2.3.2).

“I encouraged responsibility by assigning small roles to students who often felt invisible. Simple tasks like leading a group or checking attendance gave them purpose and pride” (IDI2.3.3).

“We focused on positive reinforcement in our school-wide approach. Instead of detention, we used reflection cards and appreciation notes to remind learners of their value” (FGD2.3.4).

“We recognized that celebrating even tiny victories could make students believe in themselves again. Recognition turned out to be more powerful than reprimand” (FGD2.3.5).

These results gained support from Martinez (2022) who observed that recognition-based motivation nurtures a sense of belonging that counteracts disengagement. Smith (2022) found that classrooms emphasizing encouragement build persistence among marginalized learners. Similarly, Tan (2021) revealed that consistent reinforcement helps develop intrinsic motivation, lowering dropout tendencies.

#### **Theme 4: Collaborative Interventions with Stakeholders**

Teachers emphasized that dropout prevention was not their burden alone. Collaborative interventions among school heads, guidance counselors, parents, and community partners made retention strategies more effective and sustainable. Collaboration expanded the circle of care around each learner, ensuring consistent monitoring and shared accountability as supported by these statements:

“We regularly coordinated with the principal and guidance counselor to identify at-risk learners early and design interventions tailored to their cases. These often included academic mentoring and home visits to track attendance” (IDI2.4.1).

“We collaborated with administrators and peer tutors to assist students who

needed individualized support. By involving fellow teachers, we distributed responsibilities, ensuring no learner slipped through unnoticed” (IDI2.4.2).

“I made sure to communicate with parents during meetings or through text messages. Even simple updates helped families understand their child’s progress and our ongoing efforts to support them” (IDI2.4.3).

“As a faculty, we built partnerships with local government units to provide school supplies and feeding assistance. Collaboration brought tangible relief to struggling learners” (FGD2.4.4).

“We shared insights and updates with community organizations, making dropout prevention a collective mission rather than an individual effort” (FGD2.4.5).

These findings gained support from Vargas (2023) who emphasized that school-based collaboration enhances the effectiveness of interventions by pooling expertise and resources. Evans (2022) also showed in his study that collective engagement between educators and stakeholders yields higher retention rates. Dela Cruz (2021) also demonstrated that partnerships with local organizations sustain dropout reduction programs by linking schools with community resources.

### **Theme 5: Home and Community Linkages**

Home and community linkages strengthened continuity of care beyond the classroom. Teachers actively bridged communication between families and schools, understanding that consistent collaboration between these spheres could profoundly affect attendance and motivation.

“I communicated with parents to understand the home conditions affecting school participation. Once I discovered that a student lacked fare money, I coordinated with the barangay to provide assistance. Collaboration made solutions possible” (IDI2.5.1).

“Sometimes, we reached out to church groups and civic organizations to help monitor attendance. Their presence gave students the impression that the whole community cared for their education” (IDI2.5.2).

“When parents and teachers maintained regular dialogue, misunderstandings were avoided. Problems were solved before they escalated into chronic absenteeism” (IDI2.5.3).

“We observed that students with visible parental involvement performed better. Even just seeing parents attend recognition events motivated learners to persevere” (FGD2.5.4).

“Through partnerships with barangay leaders, we conducted family literacy and parenting sessions, helping parents understand how to support their children’s schooling” (FGD2.5.5).

This is congruent with the study of Lopez (2023) who affirmed that family, school cooperation reduces the risk of dropout by fostering accountability. Quinn (2021) found that strong home–school relationships strengthen motivation among rural learners. Dela Cruz (2021) observed that schools that extend learning into the community sustain engagement through social support systems.

## CHAPTER IV

### IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter presented the implications of the study's findings and outlined directions for future research on teachers' lived experiences in dealing with learners at risk of dropping out within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). The results revealed that teachers in M'lang South District played transformative roles as educators, mentors, and advocates of inclusion, demonstrating that dropout prevention required not only academic strategies but also empathy, resilience, and collaboration. These findings implied that teacher preparation programs and in-service trainings should integrate social-emotional learning, trauma-informed instruction, and community engagement to strengthen teachers' capacity to support vulnerable learners. School leaders were encouraged to cultivate supportive and participatory environments that promote shared accountability for student retention through mentorship systems, Learning Action Cells, and family partnerships. Furthermore, the study underscored the importance of institutional and policy support in addressing socio-economic barriers by fostering stronger linkages between schools, parents, and local government units. Future research may focus on the perspectives of parents, school heads, and students to provide a more holistic understanding of dropout prevention, or on longitudinal analyses that evaluate the long-term impact of school-based interventions. Overall, the implications emphasized that ensuring education for all required systemic collaboration, responsive policies, and teacher empowerment grounded in compassion and inclusion.

## **Implications and Directions for Future Research**

### **On the Teachers' Lived Experiences in Dealing with Learners at Risk of Dropping Out**

The findings implied that teachers in M'lang South District demonstrated deep compassion and adaptability as they confronted the complex realities of students at risk of dropping out. Their narratives revealed that effective engagement required both emotional and pedagogical responsiveness. Teachers' stories underscored that addressing dropout risk went beyond lesson delivery, it involved understanding the socio-economic struggles, family situations, and emotional challenges of learners. The implication for practice was that teacher education programs should embed modules on social-emotional learning, child protection, and counseling to prepare educators for the relational aspects of teaching. Future research may further investigate how teacher empathy and relational trust contribute to learner resilience, especially in marginalized contexts where guidance services are limited.

Another major implication was the teachers' use of context-based strategies that reflected cultural sensitivity and localized solutions. They recognized that standardized interventions were often ineffective when disconnected from community realities. Teachers' adaptation of lessons, incorporation of local materials, and use of real-life examples demonstrated an innovative form of pedagogy rooted in relevance and inclusivity. Educational leaders may therefore consider policies that empower teachers to contextualize instruction without rigid constraints from standardized curricula. Future research could focus on comparative analyses of localized teaching strategies and their

measurable impact on student attendance, motivation, and completion rates, especially in rural public schools.

The teachers' accounts also implied that emotional labor was a significant yet often invisible part of their professional responsibilities. Many served as informal counselors, mediators, and surrogate parents, providing psychosocial support beyond academic duties. This finding called for institutional recognition of emotional work in performance appraisal systems, and for schools to provide mental health support mechanisms for educators. For future research, scholars could examine the relationship between teacher emotional well-being and learner retention outcomes, or explore burnout mitigation practices among teachers handling high-risk populations.

Furthermore, teachers' narratives highlighted the persistent structural challenges that limited their interventions, such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources, and inconsistent parental support. These barriers revealed systemic inequities that hindered inclusive education. Policy implications pointed toward the need for resource allocation models that prioritize at-risk learners and support teachers working in under-resourced communities. Future studies may explore how local government support and inter-agency collaboration can sustain dropout prevention programs through continuous funding and accountability structures.

Finally, this table emphasized that teachers' lived experiences provided invaluable ground-level insights into the broader pursuit of SDG 4—ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all. Their stories served as qualitative evidence of how compassion-driven pedagogy bridges gaps left by policy limitations. Future research should expand this

inquiry by including voices from other stakeholders such as learners, parents, and administrators, thereby constructing a multi-perspective understanding of educational resilience. Such studies could inform national policy frameworks that recognize teacher narratives as catalysts for systemic reform and inclusive growth.

### **On the Strategies Teachers Employed to Support and Retain At-Risk Learners**

The findings of this table carried strong implications for pedagogical practice, revealing that differentiated and inclusive instruction was pivotal in retaining learners who struggled academically or emotionally. Teachers' commitment to flexibility, through scaffolded lessons, peer mentoring, and localized content, demonstrated that equitable education begins with adaptive teaching. The implication for DepEd and teacher training institutions was the integration of professional development programs focusing on differentiated instruction and formative assessment. Future research may evaluate how differentiated strategies influence learner engagement and self-efficacy, or how teacher creativity impacts dropout reduction in low-resource classrooms.

Another implication was the centrality of relational trust and empathy in fostering school belongingness among at-risk students. Teachers described how listening, empathy, and positive reinforcement restored learners' confidence and reduced absenteeism. This highlighted the need for school-wide cultures anchored in care ethics rather than compliance-based discipline. Educational leadership programs should therefore embed relational pedagogy and trauma-informed practices as core

competencies for teachers and administrators. Future research could examine how trust-building interventions affect behavioral outcomes, attendance rates, and teacher–student relationships across different cultural contexts.

The study also revealed the effectiveness of positive reinforcement and motivational practices in cultivating resilience among disengaged learners. Teachers' consistent use of praise, recognition, and student-led responsibilities reflected an asset-based perspective where every effort was acknowledged. This suggested that motivation-oriented practices should be systematically incorporated into school retention programs. For policy and practice, DepEd could develop recognition frameworks aligned with psychosocial support services. Future studies may analyze the longitudinal impact of positive reinforcement programs on learner persistence, particularly among those facing chronic absenteeism.

Collaboration emerged as another essential implication of the study. Teachers' experiences proved that preventing dropout was most successful when multiple stakeholders, administrators, guidance counselors, parents, and community members, worked together. This finding underscored the need to institutionalize inter-sectoral partnerships through memoranda of agreement with local government units and NGOs. School-based management frameworks could include specific performance indicators related to collaboration for learner retention. Future research could explore how school-community partnerships influence sustainability of dropout prevention, or how collaborative governance models enhance educational inclusivity.

Finally, this table highlighted the transformative role of home and community linkages in sustaining student engagement. Teachers who partnered with parents and barangay officials reported higher attendance and improved motivation among learners. The implication was that dropout prevention should not end in the classroom but must extend to community support networks. Programs like home visitation and parenting education should be institutionalized and integrated into the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Future researchers may investigate how parental empowerment interventions and community-driven mentoring programs contribute to long-term reductions in dropout rates within rural educational systems.

### **On the Challenges Encountered and Parental Support in Addressing Dropout Risks**

The challenges presented in this table revealed that limited parental involvement remained a major deterrent to learner retention. Teachers emphasized that disengaged parents often failed to provide academic and emotional reinforcement at home, leading to student absenteeism. This implied that school systems must prioritize parental engagement as a fundamental component of learner support. Orientation sessions, home visits, and family literacy programs should be strengthened to build partnerships between parents and teachers. Future research may explore the correlation between parental participation and student persistence, as well as identify culturally responsive ways of empowering low-income parents to value education.

Socio-economic barriers, particularly poverty and livelihood instability, also emerged as persistent causes of student dropout. Teachers' testimonies indicated that hunger, lack of school materials, and transportation difficulties severely affected attendance. This finding called for the integration of social protection mechanisms such as feeding programs, scholarship grants, and financial assistance for indigent learners. Policymakers should align local initiatives with national programs such as the ARAL Act and DepEd's Learning Recovery Plan. Future researchers may investigate the long-term effects of conditional cash transfer programs and school-based feeding initiatives on dropout reduction and academic improvement in rural settings.

Behavioral and emotional struggles among students also carried significant implications for teacher support systems. Teachers in this study assumed counseling roles without formal training, often managing cases of trauma, anxiety, and low self-esteem. The implication for teacher preparation was the inclusion of modules on psychosocial first aid and emotional literacy in pre-service education. Schools should also establish partnerships with mental health professionals to provide structured counseling services. Future research could analyze how trauma-informed interventions affect re-engagement among emotionally distressed learners, or how teachers' own emotional resilience influences classroom climate and retention rates.

Institutional and resource constraints surfaced as systemic barriers that limited teachers' capacity to address dropout effectively. Overcrowded classrooms, insufficient materials, and administrative overload hindered individualized instruction and follow-up interventions. These findings implied that education leaders must adopt equity-based

resource allocation to prioritize high-need schools. School heads should advocate for teacher workload reduction and improved access to instructional materials. Future research may examine how resource adequacy and administrative support affect teacher performance and learner retention, offering empirical evidence to inform national budget planning and DepEd resource distribution.

Finally, the table underscored that meaningful parental collaboration could transform dropout prevention efforts. Teachers consistently emphasized that when parents monitored attendance, encouraged persistence, and communicated regularly with teachers, students' motivation and performance improved. This implied that the family remained the cornerstone of educational success. Future research should explore models of home-school partnership that integrate cultural traditions, community leadership, and technology-based communication tools to sustain engagement. Moreover, longitudinal studies could assess how family empowerment programs influence intergenerational attitudes toward education and the achievement of SDG 4 targets in local contexts.

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**EDUCATION FOR ALL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES ON DEALING WITH LEARNERS AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL**

**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

<b>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>	<b>INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS</b>
1. How do teachers perceive and describe their experiences in dealing with learners at risk of dropping out?	1.1 How do teachers emotionally and professionally respond to students who show signs of disengagement from school? 1.2 In what ways do teachers adapt their teaching styles and classroom management approaches to accommodate at-risk learners? 1.3 How do teachers' lived experiences shape their perspectives on student dropout and retention efforts?
2. What strategies do teachers employ to support and retain at-risk learners in the classroom?	2.1 What specific instructional methods do teachers use to engage learners at risk of dropping out? 2.2 How do teachers build relationships with at-risk learners to foster a sense of belonging and motivation? 2.3 In what ways do teachers collaborate with school administrators and other stakeholders to implement intervention programs for at-risk students?

<p>3. What challenges do teachers encounter in addressing dropout risks, and what forms of support do they receive from the parents?</p>	<p>3.1 What are the primary obstacles teachers face in keeping at-risk learners engaged in the classroom?</p> <p>3.2 How do teachers perceive the level of parental involvement in preventing student dropout?</p> <p>3.3 What types of support or interventions from parents do teachers find most effective in reducing dropout rates?</p>
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