

Initiation Across LARDO's/LARF's: Emergent Initiatory Learning Policy

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Abstract:

This study explores the psycho-social experiences of learners at risk of dropping out (LARDOs) and learners at risk of failing (LARFs), focusing on patterns of absenteeism and classroom withdrawal. These behaviors often escalate due to limited intervention from parents, teachers, and the wider community. The consequences of LARDOs and LARFs include increased illiteracy and unemployment. Using a qualitative experiential approach, the research captures classroom observations from teachers who work directly with these learners. The study is framed using Müller's three-part structure of initiation—Innocence, Experience, and Maturity—which offers insights into behavioral transitions. The findings inform the development of an emergent initiatory policy aimed at re-engaging at-risk students and guiding targeted interventions.

Keywords: Initiation, LARDO, LARF, three-part structure of initiation, Innocence Level, Experience Level, maturity level, initiatory policy

Introduction:

Learning-At-Risk Due to Drop-Out (LARDO) and Learning-At-Risk Due to Failure (LARF) are persistent and unavoidable challenges in the Philippine educational system. These issues not only hinder academic success but also pose long-term societal impacts. Particularly alarming is the increasing rate of dropouts and failures, which, in some districts, nearly match the survival rate of students. According to the Department of Education (DepEd), one of the major contributing factors to student dropouts is the teacher factor, suggesting that instructional quality and school engagement practices play a central role in student retention (DepEd, 2010; Rumberger, 2011).

DepEd envisions that no Filipino should be left behind in the pursuit of literacy and lifelong learning. However, LARDOs threaten this vision by producing individuals who are ill-equipped for employment due to the lack of essential skills and competencies. Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) referred to this dropout crisis as a "silent epidemic," emphasizing its long-term economic and social consequences. The average high school dropout, as reported by Amos (2009), contributes negatively to society in fiscal terms, creating a burden on public services and reducing national productivity.

The Cebu Province Division recently revealed concerning statistics on dropout rates across elementary, secondary, and senior high school levels. Certain districts exhibit particularly high LARDO rates, prompting the need for urgent intervention. In line with Jerald's (2006) recommendation, the use of early warning systems can help identify at-risk students and tailor interventions accordingly. Similarly, Appleton et al. (2006) highlight the value of measuring student engagement—both cognitively and psychologically—to enhance school completion rates.

Multiple studies underscore the complex and multifactorial nature of dropouts. Randolph, Fraser, and Orthner (2006) pointed out that time-varying family risks, such as poverty and parental separation, play a significant role in student withdrawal from school. Parental involvement, a strategy emphasized by Epstein (2002) and Herrel (2011), has been proven effective in mitigating these risks and fostering academic resilience. Ayodele and Bada (2007) likewise affirmed that home environment and teacher-student relationships significantly influence students' decision to stay in school.

To address LARDOs and LARFs effectively, it is imperative for educational leaders to implement innovative, inclusive, and community-based strategies. Epstein's (2002) School-Family-Community Partnership Model offers a framework for shared responsibility in education, where stakeholders collaborate to create supportive learning environments. Programs like the Dropout Reduction Program (DORP) initiated by DepEd (2010) serve as concrete examples of structured, scalable solutions to re-engage out-of-school youth.

Furthermore, integrating thinking styles in teaching strategies, as explored by Bernardo, Zhang, and Callueng (2002), may help cater to diverse learners and reduce failure rates. By embracing differentiated instruction, alternative pathways to graduation (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009), and culturally relevant pedagogy, educators can better respond to student needs.

Thus, reducing LARDOs and LARFs requires a multi-pronged approach involving systemic reform, innovative teaching, and holistic support systems. The Cebu Province Division must lead by example in pioneering interventions that not only bring learners back to school but also ensure their sustained success and future employability.

Literature Review:

School dropout continues to be a pressing concern across various educational systems worldwide, significantly impacting individuals, communities, and broader socioeconomic development. Numerous studies have explored the root causes, risk factors, and interventions related to student disengagement and dropping out of school.

This review synthesizes findings from existing literature on student engagement, parental involvement, socio-demographic risk factors, and policy-level responses to better understand the dynamics contributing to early school leaving.

A foundational study by Appleton et al. (2006) introduced the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI), which measures both cognitive and psychological aspects of student engagement. This multidimensional model emphasizes the importance of students' perceptions of school relevance, teacher-student relationships, and future aspirations as pivotal factors in fostering school connectedness. Student engagement is increasingly recognized not just as an educational outcome, but also as a critical predictor of retention. Similarly, Doll and Hess (2001) argued that school completion should be viewed through a psychological lens, incorporating emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement to comprehensively address dropout concerns.

The psychological and motivational aspects of student dropout are deeply interconnected with family and social environments. For instance, Randolph et al. (2006) found that time-varying family risk factors, such as financial instability and lack of parental support, significantly predict students' likelihood of dropping out. Furstenberg et al. (1987) also underscored the influence of paternal involvement on children's well-being and school outcomes, noting that father absence or low engagement correlates with lower academic achievement and a greater risk of school discontinuation.

Parental involvement plays a critical role in supporting students' educational journeys. Joyce Epstein's (2002) Model for Parental Involvement identified six types of family-school-community partnerships that foster student success. These include parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community.

Herrel (2011) further supported this framework, demonstrating a positive association between parental involvement and teachers' perceptions of student motivation and achievement. This indicates the need for schools to adopt inclusive and structured programs to actively engage parents, especially in marginalized or high-risk communities.

Socioeconomic status, geographic location, and gender also contribute significantly to dropout rates. In their study of Filipino students, Bernardo et al. (2002) found that thinking styles were linked to academic achievement, implying that culturally contextualized pedagogy might help address engagement gaps. Similarly, Ayodele and Bada (2007) explored dropout causes in Nigeria and highlighted poverty, lack of interest in school, and peer pressure as key contributors. Sax (2007) noted a particularly gendered issue, with boys more likely than girls to disengage due to perceptions that school is "uncool" or irrelevant to their aspirations.

From a macro perspective, Bridgeland et al. (2006) described school dropout in the United States as a "silent epidemic," drawing attention to how many dropouts are academically capable but feel unmotivated, unsupported, or disengaged from school environments.

In line with this, Rumberger (2001, 1995, 2011) has extensively explored the sociological and educational roots of dropping out, asserting that early warning systems, combined with targeted interventions, can significantly mitigate this issue. His research suggests that policies addressing racial disparities, academic tracking, and school climate are necessary for effective dropout prevention.

Government and institutional responses to the dropout crisis are evident in several policy initiatives. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (2010) institutionalized the Dropout Reduction Program (DORP) to address out-of-school youth concerns and provide flexible learning options. Furthermore, the 2016 DepEd order revising the Basic Education Research Fund (BERF) emphasizes data-driven, research-based policymaking to ensure interventions align with students' real needs.

Technological and cultural factors have also emerged as contemporary influences on student engagement. Suler (2004) discussed the psychological effects of computer and cyberspace addiction, which may contribute to distractions from academic responsibilities. In contrast, Sorensen (1994) praised South Korea's educational system

for fostering discipline and a strong national emphasis on academic excellence, offering a comparative lens for understanding successful retention strategies.

Despite policy efforts and growing awareness, dropout remains a complex, multifactorial issue. Jerald (2006) advocated for early warning systems that utilize student data (such as grades, attendance, and behavior) to predict dropout risk and intervene promptly. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) recommended multiple educational pathways and dropout recovery programs to re-engage students who have left the traditional system.

Amos (2009) highlighted the long-term economic implications of dropping out, asserting that the average high school dropout has a negative net fiscal contribution to society. This underscores the urgency of investing in proactive and preventive educational reforms to support at-risk students.

The literature presents a multifaceted picture of school dropout—rooted in psychological, familial, cultural, and institutional dimensions. Efforts to mitigate this issue must be holistic, integrating school-based strategies, parental involvement, targeted government programs, and culturally responsive pedagogy. By addressing both the individual and systemic factors involved, educators and policymakers can collaboratively develop more effective solutions to promote student retention and success.

Methodology:

This action research is a qualitative design adopting Muller's three-part structure of initiation in pupils' with LARDO's and LARF's. This research is highly teacher's classroom observations involving the different behaviors of the learners that are transmitted in terms of innocence level, experience level, and maturity level.

The thematic descriptions are used in the questionnaire/ table based from the learners' documented actions as reflected for instance in different classroom activities such as oral and written, laboratory and group activities.

Data Gathering Methods

A. The Three-Part Structure of Initiation

I. Innocence Level

This is the remarkable initial behavior manifested by pupils that can be transitory as he develops the idea of mingling the other colleagues with the same predestined of being irregular in classroom participation either in performance and attendance phase.

Remarkable Dates	Initiatory Observations	Remarks

II. The Experience Level

The pupils are in the state of being engulfed with peers of the same disciplinary problems.

Remarkable Dates	Initiatory Observations	Remarks

III. The Maturity Level

This is the remarkable stage of either changing from worse to better. The pupils either change depending upon the initiative solutions given by the teachers and other surrounding peers.

Remarkable Dates	Initiatory Observations	Remarks

B. The Initiatory Themes in the Students' Performance/Actions that Reveal LARDO's

The pupils' social and academic performances are translated into a thematic description

C. The THREE-DIMENSIONAL STRUCTURES THAT REINFORCE/AFFECT LARDO's
The three-dimensional structures are believed to be revitalizing factors that reinforce the chance of being risk of dropping out and failure

1. The Student

The pupils' anecdotal records that constitute the prevalent risk of dropping out and failure are being substantiated to explain the existing problem

Teacher's Prepared Anecdotal Report/ Observation	Remark

2. The Parents

The parents' observation about their children's behavior and attitude are being noted down by the teachers in order to bring about fair validation of the existing problem.

Teacher's Prepared Anecdotal Report/ Observation from interview with the pupils	Remark

3. The School

The school is merely focused on the teacher's assessment about the pupils disciplinary and participatory attitudes since they are with the pupils for rest of the teaching hours.

Teacher's Prepared Anecdotal Report/ Observation from Interview with the Different Teachers and Administrators	Remark

Results

The findings of the study revealed a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to a pupil's risk of dropping out of school or earning failing grades. The data underscored the existence of a developmental trajectory composed of three distinct yet interconnected levels—innocence, experience, and maturity—that pupils may undergo in their academic journey. These stages significantly influence students' academic outcomes and their vulnerability to educational disengagement.

The Three-Part Developmental Structure

The innocence level refers to the earliest phase of a learner's academic development, during which their perspectives are still largely shaped by their home environment, personal disposition, and the initial influences of school culture. At this stage, pupils tend to exhibit raw potential, unrefined attitudes, and a general openness to learning. The innocence phase is marked by a crucial sensitivity to classroom conditions and peer influence. Pupils at this level are surrounded by classmates who come from varied backgrounds and diverse household dynamics.

These differing family upbringings and values can either support or hinder a pupil's academic growth. In positive environments, students may demonstrate promising development. However, when placed in settings characterized by peer misconduct, neglect, or lack of positive reinforcement, the risk of becoming disinterested or developing negative attitudes toward school increases substantially. The classroom environment, especially one that is emotionally and socially supportive, plays a vital role in shaping the trajectory of learners at this critical point.

As students progress, they enter the experience level, where social learning becomes more pronounced. This stage is significantly influenced by peer interactions and the gradual internalization of learned behaviors. The data revealed that peers serve as a strong influence on academic habits and attitudes. Pupils who consistently associate with delinquent or disengaged classmates tend to adopt similar behaviors.

The longer a student remains in an environment where poor academic conduct and rule-breaking are normalized, the higher the likelihood of developing attitudes that are resistant to learning and compliance. This prolonged exposure can accelerate their risk of academic failure and eventual dropout. Students begin to either conform to negative peer norms or struggle with their identity in a classroom that may lack positive models. This peer dynamic

intensifies the likelihood of academic decline, as students begin to replicate behaviors observed among their social groups.

The third level is maturity, a stage that either consolidates negative attitudes or opens pathways for intervention and transformation. At this point, pupils may already have demonstrated patterns of absenteeism, disengagement, and disciplinary issues. Without appropriate intervention, they might continue to spiral into deeper academic and behavioral problems. However, this stage also presents an opportunity for recovery and redirection. With consistent, empathetic, and strategic teacher intervention, as highlighted in anecdotal records, students may gradually shift from negative behavior patterns toward improved performance.

The maturity level reflects the culmination of their academic journey thus far, but it is not without hope. Evidence showed that pupils who were provided with structured support systems—whether through guidance counseling, remedial instruction, or consistent mentorship—were capable of reversing previously established patterns of failure.

Academic Performance and Attendance Patterns

Another significant area of concern that emerged from the results pertained to student participation in teacher-designed activities and the role of school attendance in predicting academic outcomes. The performance of students in various academic tasks was found to be a reliable indicator of their likelihood of success or failure in school. Those who actively engaged in classroom exercises, assessments, and collaborative projects tended to perform better and show greater resilience against academic decline.

Conversely, students who demonstrated low levels of participation or consistently poor performance in teacher-made activities were flagged as being at risk. One of the most consistent predictors of academic failure and eventual dropout was irregular attendance. Students with erratic and frequently interrupted attendance records were more likely to perform poorly, miss key instructional content, and fall behind in their academic progress. In cases where students were absent for extended periods, they found it difficult to catch up, particularly in subjects that required cumulative learning, such as mathematics and reading comprehension.

The data suggested that attendance is not merely a logistical concern but a critical educational indicator. Chronic absenteeism often stemmed from deeper issues such as family instability, lack of motivation, health issues, or peer pressure.

Teachers noted that students who rarely attended class were also those who struggled to maintain discipline and engagement during the limited time they were present. These pupils often felt disconnected from their classmates and the school community, further deepening their detachment and lack of accountability. The absence of consistent routines and reinforcement of classroom expectations contributed to their educational vulnerability.

Multi-Dimensional Factors in Learning Attitudes, Risk of Dropping Out, and Failing

The results further highlighted that the root causes of dropping out and failing grades were not isolated to individual students alone. Rather, they are embedded in a three-dimensional web of contributing factors involving the students themselves, their parents, and the school environment, particularly the teachers.

The data revealed that the students play a significant role in determining their academic pathways. While external influences are important, students are still active participants in shaping their educational outcomes. Those who exhibited strong personal motivation, adaptability, and a sense of self-efficacy were more likely to succeed, regardless of their external circumstances. However, those with low self-confidence, poor behavioral regulation, and passive learning attitudes were more susceptible to failure. Peer pressure played a central role here. Many pupils were seen to follow group norms, often compromising their academic integrity to fit in socially. In environments where academic underachievement was celebrated or normalized, students internalized those attitudes.

Parents emerged as both protective and risk factors. The findings indicated that parental involvement—or the lack thereof—was crucial in determining the likelihood of dropout or academic failure. Students whose parents were involved in their schooling, monitored their academic progress, and communicated regularly with teachers were more likely to perform well. On the other hand, pupils from homes characterized by neglect, absence of supervision, or indifferent attitudes toward education were often those with inconsistent attendance and low academic performance. In some cases, students had to bear household responsibilities at a young age, further limiting their ability to focus

on schoolwork. Lack of parental discipline, emotional support, or guidance amplified the risk factors already present in the child's environment.

Lastly, the role of the school, particularly teachers, cannot be overlooked. Teachers serve not only as academic instructors but as emotional anchors and behavioral models for students. Unfortunately, not all students relate positively to their teachers. There were numerous instances where the mismatch between teaching styles and student learning preferences created barriers.

For example, rigid classroom management styles, lack of differentiated instruction, or failure to provide emotional support were cited as reasons why students felt alienated or disengaged. Some teachers may unintentionally widen the gap by exhibiting favoritism, neglecting quieter students, or lacking cultural sensitivity, thereby creating a disconnect between themselves and their pupils. When such disconnects persist, students may begin to lose interest in school altogether.

Moreover, the data suggested that teacher interventions, when consistent and student-centered, made a significant difference. Educators who built strong relationships with their students, fostered inclusive classroom climates, and offered timely feedback and encouragement were able to reach even those pupils who were previously disengaged.

Teachers who collaborated with parents, used flexible teaching strategies, and provided tailored support helped many students recover academically and emotionally. However, where the institutional culture lacked such support systems or when teacher-student relationships were strained, the risk of dropping out and failing increased.

Discussion:

The three-part structure of initiation observed among students at risk of dropping out (LARDOs) and those with a likelihood of acquiring failing results (LARFs) provides critical insight into the behavioral and academic progression that ultimately leads to educational disengagement. This structure—consisting of the stages of innocence, experience, and maturity—offers a framework through which stakeholders in the educational system can better understand, predict, and address the needs of vulnerable learners.

At the stage of innocence, students typically enter school with a neutral or positive disposition toward learning. They possess the potential to perform well and develop positive behavioral habits. However, this stage is fragile and largely influenced by their environment, particularly the composition of their peer group and the classroom atmosphere. When exposed to peers from diverse household backgrounds—some of whom may display delinquent or disengaged behaviors—these students may begin to mirror such attitudes, especially if school environments do not foster a strong sense of belonging, structure, and motivation. The experience stage is marked by increased interaction with peers and greater exposure to external influences. Here, students may begin to internalize the attitudes and behaviors of their social group, for better or worse.

In cases where students are embedded in peer groups that promote school disengagement, absenteeism, and academic apathy, the risk of dropping out and receiving failing grades rises sharply. Prolonged exposure to such environments without timely intervention can deepen behavioral issues and reinforce negative self-perceptions, such as learned helplessness or a belief that academic success is unattainable.

The final stage, maturity, reflects a critical turning point. At this juncture, students either spiral further into academic failure and behavioral problems or begin the slow process of recovery and reintegration into positive academic behaviors—often as a result of consistent, compassionate, and firm teacher intervention. Teachers who provide structure, individualized attention, and emotional support can redirect students' trajectories, offering them a renewed sense of purpose and self-efficacy. However, in the absence of such support, this stage may instead reflect the solidification of negative patterns that began earlier in the student's educational journey.

This three-part structure highlights the layered and complex nature of school disengagement. It suggests that teachers, as constant figures in students' daily lives, are in a prime position to observe these developmental changes and implement early intervention strategies. Their daily contact with students allows them to notice subtle shifts in behavior, mood, and performance, making them key actors in preventing the escalation of at-risk tendencies.

However, teachers cannot do this alone. Parents hold a crucial role in the students' academic and behavioral development. Their participation in monitoring attendance, supervising assignments, and encouraging proper time management and goal-setting is foundational.

When parents are detached or unavailable due to socioeconomic stressors, work demands, or lack of awareness about their child's school life, the risk of disengagement increases significantly. Students without this familial support

may lack accountability and may become overwhelmed by peer influences or internal struggles that remain unacknowledged and unaddressed.

Students themselves, of course, are at the heart of this process. Their capacity to resist negative influences, remain engaged in their studies, and respond positively to guidance varies greatly depending on individual personality, emotional resilience, and internal motivation. Some students have the natural temperament to thrive despite adversities, while others may require substantial scaffolding to remain on track. Understanding students' internal challenges and supporting them through counseling, mentorship, or personalized instruction can be the key to changing academic outcomes.

Beyond the immediate triangle of student, parent, and teacher, the school as an institution also bears responsibility. The institutional environment—ranging from its disciplinary policies to its teaching methodologies—can either accommodate or alienate students, especially those who do not fit neatly into conventional educational molds.

When schools fail to adapt to the diverse learning styles and socio-emotional needs of students, those already at risk may experience further alienation, contributing to absenteeism, behavioral issues, and academic failure. Traditional, rigid teaching styles may particularly disadvantage students with non-traditional thinking patterns or those who struggle with conformity to strict classroom routines.

Meanwhile, irregular attendance—a key marker of LARDOs and LARFs—was shown to correlate highly with academic failure. Students who are frequently absent miss out on crucial instructional time, classroom discussions, and learning continuity. They struggle to keep up with coursework, feel disconnected from their peers and teachers, and often develop feelings of academic inadequacy. This creates a feedback loop of disengagement that makes returning to regular school life increasingly difficult. Schools must therefore treat chronic absenteeism not merely as a disciplinary issue, but as a warning signal requiring immediate and compassionate intervention.

The root causes of dropout and academic failure are therefore not singular but multi-faceted, involving a complex interplay between personal, familial, and institutional factors. For instance, families affected by economic hardship, broken parental relationships, or low levels of educational attainment may inadvertently perpetuate cycles of disengagement. Students from such backgrounds often assume adult responsibilities prematurely or face emotional and psychological stress that distracts them from academic goals.

Furthermore, peer influence is a formidable factor that shapes students' behavior and attitudes. Peer groups can either motivate students toward excellence or encourage anti-school sentiments, depending on the values and behaviors endorsed within that group. As students transition into adolescence, their desire for social acceptance often outweighs the fear of academic repercussions.

This makes peer-led interventions and mentorship programs particularly promising. Schools can harness the positive potential of peers by creating student leadership programs, buddy systems, and inclusive clubs that foster a sense of identity and belonging.

In mitigating dropout risks and academic failure, school-community partnerships are indispensable. The community can support schools by offering after-school programs, youth engagement activities, counseling services, and alternative learning opportunities for students whose needs are not fully met within traditional classroom settings. Collaboration with local governments, non-profits, and faith-based organizations can significantly broaden the safety net for at-risk youth.

Reducing dropout rates and improving academic performance among LARDOs and LARFs requires a holistic, collaborative, and empathetic approach. No single stakeholder can bear the burden of educational recovery alone. Instead, a coordinated effort among teachers, parents, students, schools, and the community is required to identify problems early, respond appropriately, and support students consistently.

The three-part structure of student behavior development provides a lens for understanding how early warning signs can evolve into serious academic consequences—but it also offers a roadmap for recovery, renewal, and re-engagement when interventions are timely and sustained. Through a commitment to inclusivity, vigilance, and shared responsibility, the educational community can transform vulnerable students into thriving learners prepared for long-term success.

Conclusion:

This study underscores the critical importance of a multi-faceted, collaborative approach to preventing school dropout and mitigating disciplinary and academic issues among students with LARDOs and LARFs. The three-part structure of initiation reflects the need for early intervention, consistent monitoring, and sustained engagement across key transitional periods in a student's educational journey.

It emphasizes that no single entity—be it the school, the home, or the student—can effectively address these challenges alone. Instead, success is fostered through the dynamic interplay of teacher guidance, parental involvement, peer influence, and student agency.

Teachers, by virtue of their extended interaction with students, are uniquely positioned to detect early warning signs of disengagement and behavioral issues. Their role as academic mentors and behavioral models makes them crucial in implementing structured support systems, such as those advocated by the Department of Education through initiatives like the Dropout Reduction Program (DORP). Meanwhile, parents bear the foundational responsibility of instilling values, supervising activities, and reinforcing school expectations at home—functions that have a significant impact on students' academic resilience and social behavior.

Students, as central actors in their educational experience, must be equipped with the skills and motivation to manage their time, resist negative peer influence, and pursue academic success. However, expecting students to navigate these pressures independently is neither realistic nor fair. As numerous studies suggest (Appleton et al., 2006; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Rumberger, 2011), students are more likely to thrive when they are embedded within networks of support that include caring adults and constructive peer relationships.

Additionally, the broader community—comprised of school administrators, local government units, non-government organizations, and other stakeholders—must actively participate in shaping educational policies and practices that prioritize student well-being. Community engagement not only reinforces school initiatives but also fosters a culture of accountability and shared responsibility.

Ultimately, the success of students at risk of dropping out or experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties is a joint venture that calls for intentional, sustained, and evidence-based collaboration among all stakeholders.

The integration of psychological insights, social interventions, and systemic reforms can collectively transform the trajectory of at-risk youth, turning potential failure into resilience and achievement. This study affirms that through holistic partnerships and proactive strategies, we can bridge the gaps that lead to dropout and cultivate learning environments where all students are empowered to succeed.

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