

# “STUDENTS AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL: CHILDREN’S VOICES”

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the truth behind the experiences of students at risk of dropping out from public schools. Twenty secondary students from Matanao, Davao del Sur were selected through purposeful sampling. The results of the interview were transcribed, translated and coded to produce root and branch codes. Through in-depth interview and focus group discussion it was found out that hostility in the family, adversities at home, peer influence, learning difficulty, low self-esteem and poor disposition, and negative social interaction were barriers of students to enthusiastically focus on their studies resulting to higher risk of dropping out. As to their insights they can share to other students who are also at risk of dropping out and to the academe in general: have faith, reform and transform, hold on and be positive. This study has significance in education as to how to address the problem and find ways to prevent it.

## Keywords:

**Students at Risk of Dropping Out.** student in disadvantaged situation due to factors attributed to the family, school and community.

**Academic Engagement.** Refers to time on task, academically engaged time, or credit accrual.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is a passport to the future. Today, the world needs smart and globally-competitive people who provide the demands of commercialization, industrialization and development. Without education the world will be blind, the truths will be withheld and hidden behind the walls of ignorance and countless generations will be estranged from knowledge and wisdom that only education can suffice. Thus, it is life itself. With the helping hands of the teachers who enable the children to see the difference between innovation and stagnant the world begins to take shape and reshape into modification, improvement and speedy progress. Parents apparently send their children to school to acquire education which is a powerful legacy any child would inherit (Arum, Roksa and Budig, 2008).

It is a tool to explore limitless opportunities to improve the mind, enhance skills, and draw out the best from each student. Education connotes an implicit means of living – the rationale that drives most parents to provide the best education to their children at all cost. It is perceived that education is a ladder to employment, development and industry. Moreover, bringing children to school and making them stay therein until graduation is a matter that involves a scrupulous effort of the parents, teachers and children themselves. It is easier indeed to send them to school but to make them stay until the end of the school year is an arduous task (Arum et al., 2008; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Oghuvbu, 2008; Wotherspoon, 2004).

The major concern in basic education is ensuring that students stay in school until they complete their education. Dropping out is a serious problem because it hinders the individual student to assert education as fundamental human right. Internationally, the individual right to education has been purportedly affirmed in many treaties and conventions as in The 1948 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (UNESCO, 2008).

There is an across-the-board consensus that the school dropout problem has reached epidemic proportions globally and has become a problem facing the education industry round the world. The most important concept in preventing school dropout or promoting completion is student engagement. There is a great deal of proof that dropping out of school is a process of disengagement from school and the learning that accumulates over the years, often beginning early in elementary school (Arum et al., 2008; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Oghuvbu, 2008; Wotherspoon, 2004).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the students at risk of dropping out. This study involved different secondary schools with the aim of increasing a deeper perception of the reasons of dropping out particularly in high

school. This study visualized to document the distressing and discouraging experiences and sentiments of students who were at risk of dropping out from high school. This phenomenological study likewise revealed data about the informants' family background, activities, experiences and their capacity and self-motivation to continue schooling despite the blocking circumstances (Starks and Trinidad, 2007).

In this study, the objective was to observe, pay close attention and capture the different anecdotes of the students at risk of dropping out and take note of how they were able to manage the circumstances, specifically on how they end up victoriously amidst the hurdles that nearly made them give up. It was also noteworthy to understand how these children were rebooted and motivated to continue learning despite the risks of dropping out. How they championed over the obstacles and what inspired them to carry on are interesting cases needed to be studied and shared to students who are in the same predicament. The educators would also be alerted by the facts and reasons that students at risk of dropping out experience and go through (Racasa, 2008).

Effective teachers leave an imprint to their students' lives and mark priceless learning experience to the world. It is a challenge for an educator to motivate students in a near drop out situation to stay and continue learning. Education remains to be a freeway to escape from the deep, dark cave of ignorance and stagnancy and it drives the lives of the students. It controls their actions and outlooks toward the future and beyond thus making it necessary for teachers to understand their roles in preventing students from dropping out.

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

What are the experiences of students at risk of dropping out?

What insights can the students share to their peers and to the academe in general?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presented the nature of the study, the research design used with regard to presentation, analysis and interpretation, the philosophical assumptions, role of the researcher, research participants, the data collection process, data analysis, trustworthiness which includes the following: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformity of the study and all individuals involve and the ethical considerations in the process.

### **Research Design**

In this research study, I applied descriptive qualitative method particularly phenomenology. Phenomenology is a study that attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation. It is reliving the experiences of the participants involved in the study and going deeper into their

thoughts, identifying the essence of the experience as described by the participants, through lengthy discussions (Campbell, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Speziale and Carpenter, 2007; Willis, 2011).

I used the phenomenological approach because it is a powerful tool in getting a clear understanding of human experiences, penetrating into their thoughts, feelings and actions in order to gain insights from their experiences. It clearly illustrates the specific details of the experience and how they are seen by the subjects in the situation. It is an appropriate instrument in my study wherein I need to envision and explore the actual experiences of my participants who are at risk of dropping out of school.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Many of our children nowadays are not in school because they help their parents earn for a living. The Department of Education has initiated programs and projects to reduce or even eradicate problems on dropping out of school but dropout rates have remained to be a major problem for school heads, teachers and parents. There are children who are at risk of dropping out of school for some other reasons. It is for this reason that I like this study, to find out if these children who are at risk of dropping out of school have the same experiences and problems which made them at risk of dropping out. As a District Supervisor, I wanted to learn more on the reasons of students and why they became at risk of dropping out and provide wider spectrum in understanding on this problem at school.

### **Research Participants**

Prior to the conduct of my study, I have identified my informants. The informants were secondary students identified by the school head of Matanao National High School. After contacting these informants, I explained to them the purpose of my study. To obtain a good quality of qualitative research, I opted to get just a considerable number of participants for my research with twelve informants for the in-depth interviews and eight participants to engage in focus group discussions. Focus groups are considered to work well with approximately 8 people (Hancock et al, 2009). I believe that this is already a considerable number of participants, adequate to provide credible information and significant results and findings.

### **Data Collection**

In the collection of data of the study, I have undergone these processes namely: in-depth interview with the study-informants, conduct focus group discussion with the participants and take note on crucial information. Before conducting the actual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the study participants, I made sure that ethical considerations were properly observed. I applied the key principles of ethical issues (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Mack et al, 2005) that should be considered in any research study which are consent and confidentiality.

## **Analysis of data**

Analysis of data in a research study involves summarizing the mass of data collected and presenting the results in a way that communicates the most important features (Hancock et al, 2007). Data were analyzed using a method which includes data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2007), adding that qualitative content analysis is “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings”. Data reduction is the abstraction of data from the transcriptions, deleting data which are not important and transforming it into a comprehensible material, easily understood by many (Namey et al, 2007; Suter; 2012). This pairing and sieving of data is often termed as thematic analysis, a form of sorting and categorizing. With data reduction, I will employ the expertise of a professional data analyst for data analysis. .

The conceptual framework was interpreted with reference to the related literature on the subject in an attempt to explain, with a theory, the phenomenon being studied by the researcher with the assistance of two independent readers and analysts who were experts in the field of study to form a triangulation team wherein each examined the data and compared individual findings to obtain a deeper and broader understanding of how each investigator view the issue. Triangulation was used to ensure the validity of the data by using more than one person to collect the data, thereby increases its reliability (Lobo, 2010; Speziale and Carpenter, 2007).

## **Trustworthiness**

To establish the trustworthiness of this study, I observed the following components: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. To address credibility of my study, I employed the following techniques. First, I deliberately included three experiential learning initiatives rather than just one or two. My intention here was to generate three layers of data from each participant. Second, I made sure that all relevant data were included. Irrelevant data were excluded. Third, I asked the assistance of my guidance counselor to be one of the independent readers. We have read and analyzed the same data and compare our independent analyses. If we have the same findings and analyses, these strengthen the confidence of the study. To address transferability, I described in the detail research context and the assumptions that are central to the research and showed all data as transparent as possible. To establish the dependability of my study, I ensured consistency during the data collection and analysis by doing the code-recode system during the data reduction and will apply the peer examination and investigator triangulation of the data collected and analyzed. This made my study reliable. To address the conformability of my study, personal opinions, assumptions and judgments were set aside so that data were not distorted. The use of audio-taped interviews, note-taking and journals is one way of ensuring conformability. As much as possible during the interview, there was less interference in order to gain the true picture of the personal experiences of the participants. To ensure that the findings of the study are free from biases and prejudice, triangulation and peer consensus were applied.

## **Ethical Consideration**

Since my research study involved students who are at risk of dropping out of school, they were hesitant to disclose information out of fear and withheld some data. However, as part of research rigor, several safeguards were applied that eradicated their fears and promoted trust. I ensured that my study was guided by ethical principles as described by (Mack et al, 2005), namely: respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent and confidentiality.

## **RESULTS**

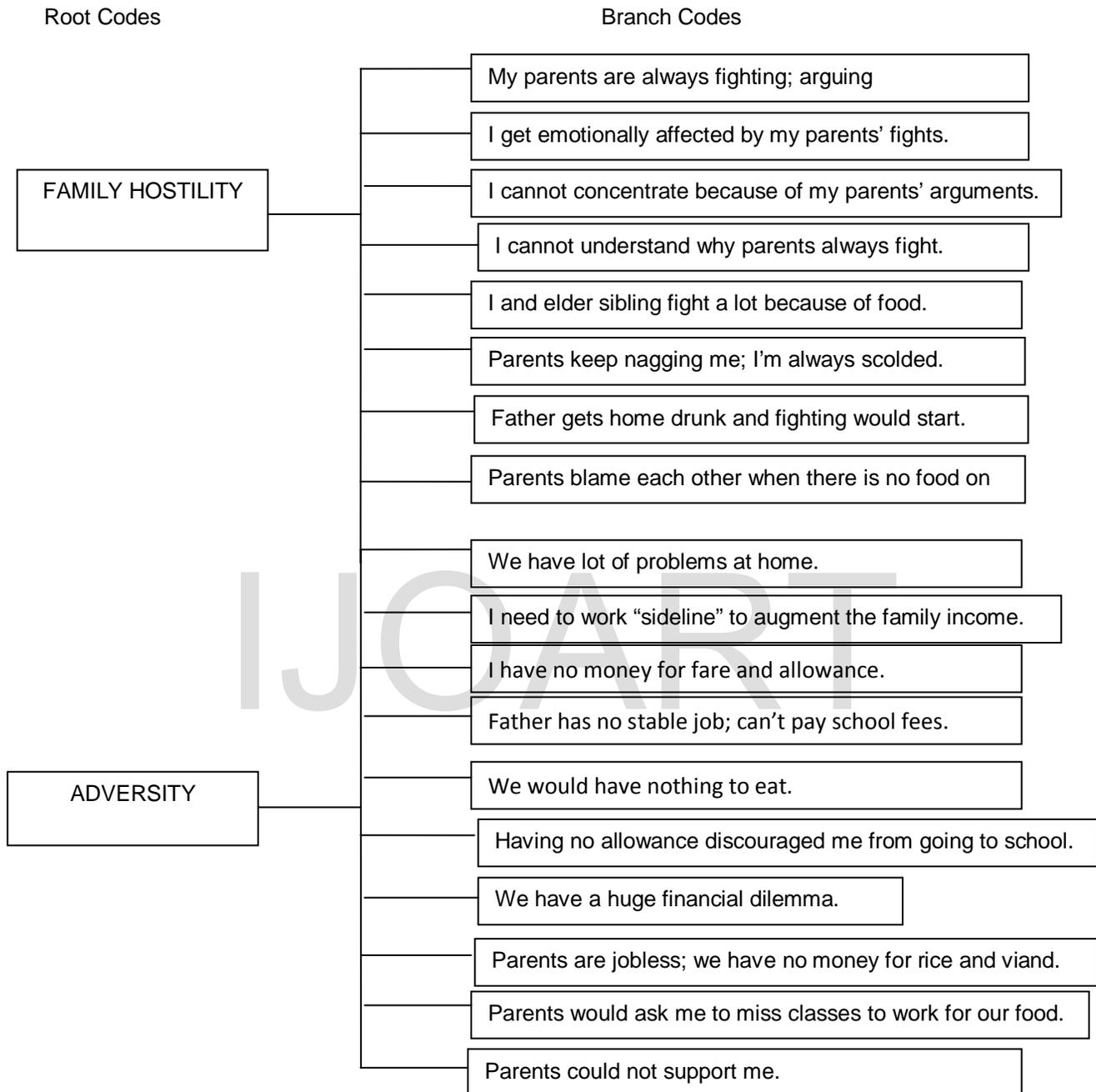
This chapter present the participants' experiences relating their insights and viewpoints which include conclusions based from the information collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. The following research questions supplied data results from the informants.

What are the experiences of students at risk of dropping out of school?

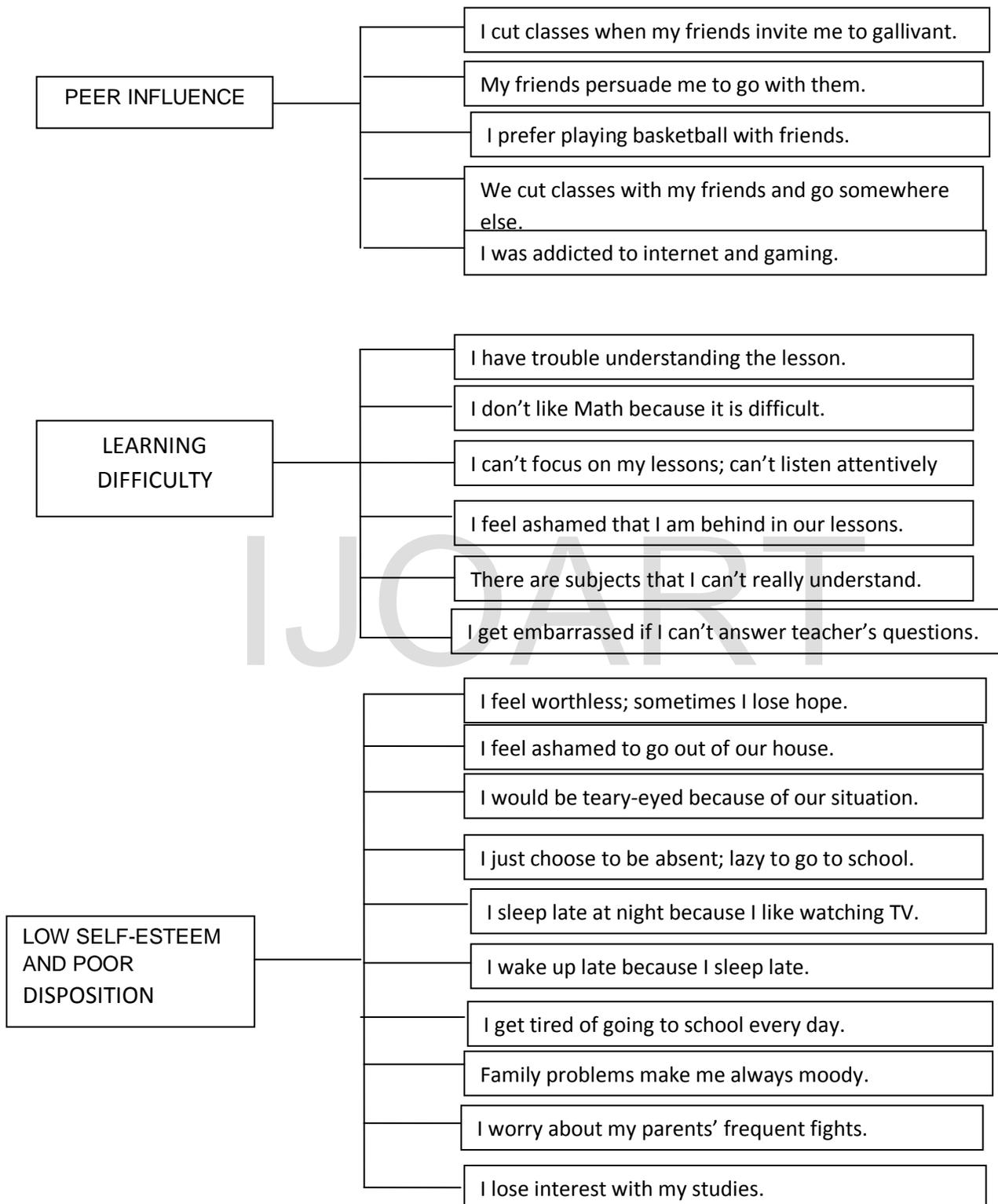
What insights can the students share to their peers and to the academe in general?

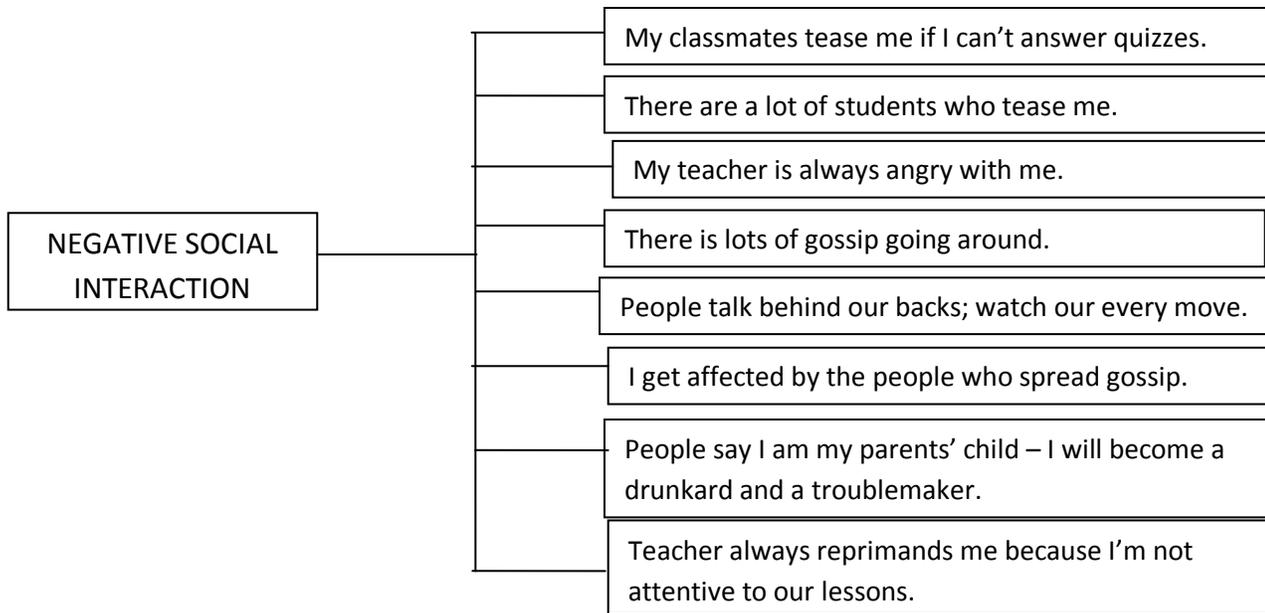
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**Figure 1. Root and Branch Codes on the experiences of students at risk of dropping out.**



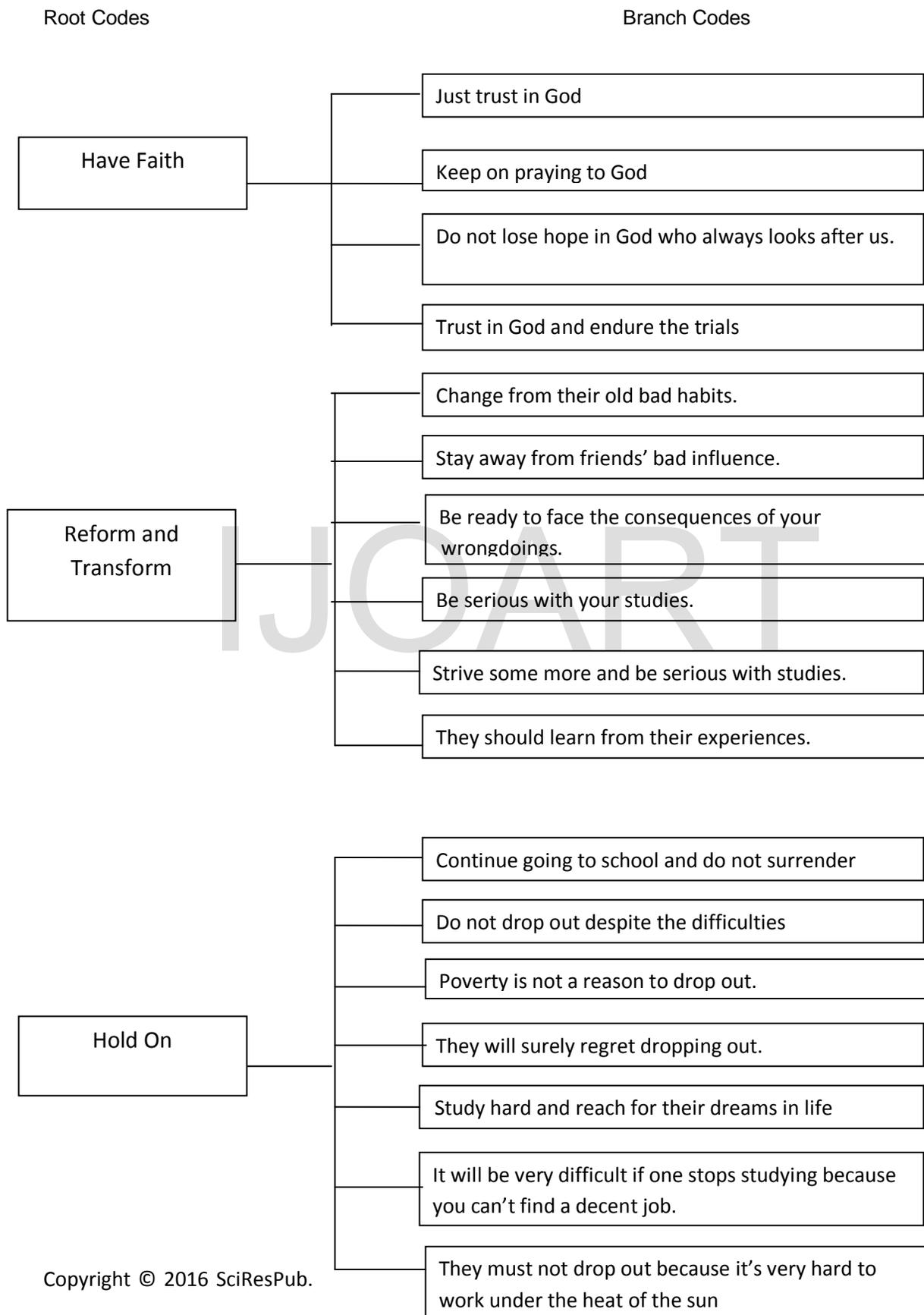
### Continuation of Figure 1

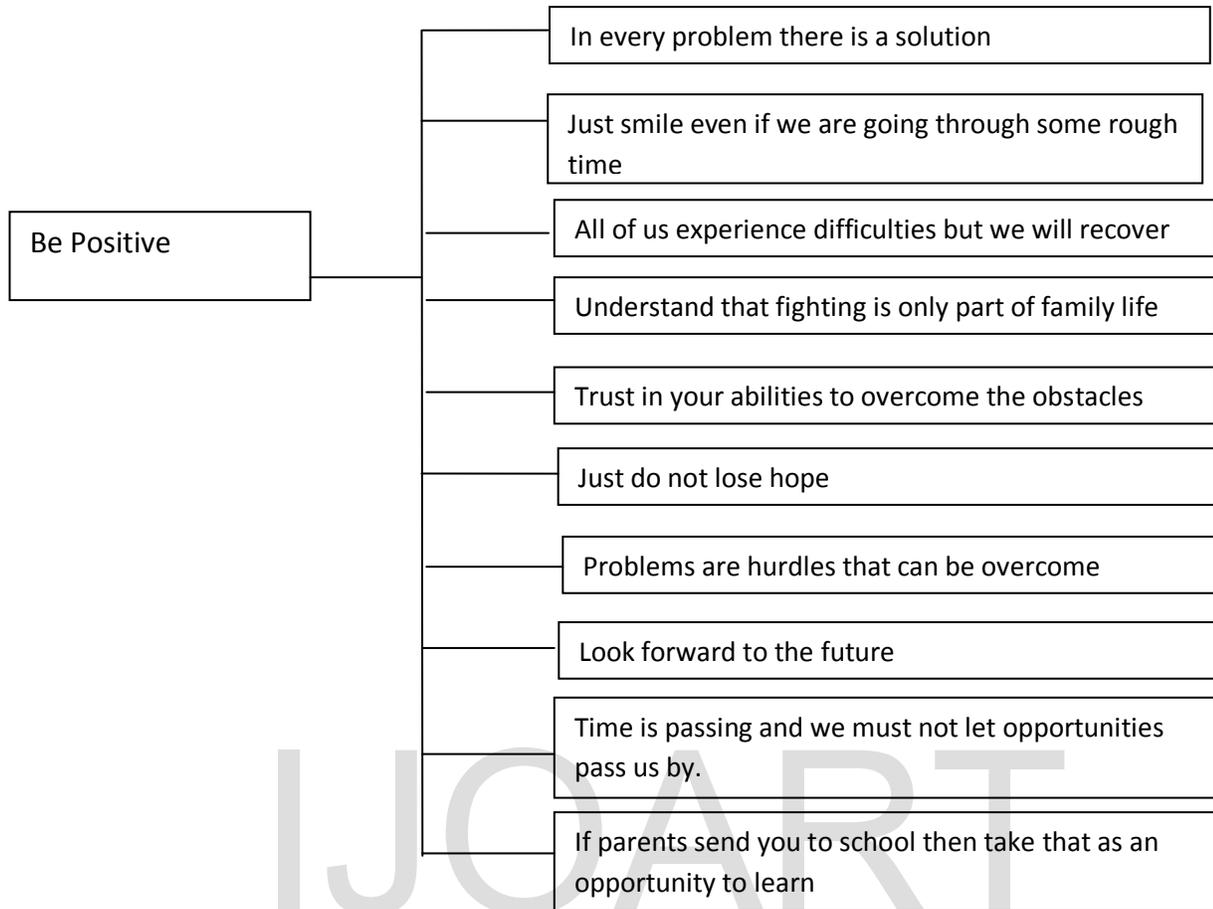




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**Figure 3. Root and Branch Codes on the insights of students at risk of dropping out.**





## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter presents the discussions, conclusions, implications for practice and for future research. This was based from the root and branch codes which emerged from the data analysis. Since this study has clearly pointed out its purpose, that is to recall the experiences of students at risk of dropping out of school. It aims to be deliberative and comprehensive bringing out the different emotions and insights of the participants to indicate what concepts must be gathered from the findings. There were six root codes which emerged: Adversity, Family Hostility, Peer Influence, Learning Difficulty, Low Self-esteem and Poor Disposition, and Negative Social Interaction.

### ***Implications for Practice***

Collective actions to lower the incidence of students at risk of dropping out of school are significant as related to the findings. This implies that school officials may create an action plan, devise programs and implement activities to encourage, motivate and assist students who categorically belong to the list of at risk of dropping out. Likewise, provide students personality trainings and workshops to boost their self-esteem, self-discipline and disposition in life. In addition, conduct parents' seminars and symposium that family is vital in the academic performance of students. Additionally, let the SARDO go through the process of motivational programs and sessions before or after class to let them know that despite their circumstances and adversities they face in life, they are still valued by the school, their teachers and their classmates. Students who were involved in extracurricular exercises have greater chances in completing high school education. If students cease to participate in extracurricular programs, dropout rate increases. It is interesting to note that even an hour a week of participation in extracurricular activities has a significant effect on graduation rate (Lam et al., 2005).

In order to build a positive school environment among students, additional seminar and forum may be initiated for educators to be an effective motivator in their classrooms. Activities (with PTA) such as: family sports festival, teacher-student outing and bonding can also be encouraged to build a strong relationship between the students' families and the teachers as well as the school administrator. This way, the students will be open to their personal troubles, making them confident to share with their Guidance Counsellor and teacher when they feel troubled and uncomfortable in their house, community and school. The School Heads may also consider faculty assessment through classroom observation and solicit insights and viewpoints of students as regards to their relationship with their teachers.

In the community, the socio-related factors that affect the students' personality and self-esteem may be intervened through community joint efforts, activities and programs that will enrich the harmony, camaraderie and unity within the community. Communities play a compelling role in adolescent growth along with families, schools, and friends. Population characteristics or demography of communities are associated with dropping out, but not in a direct manner: living in an impoverished neighborhood is not necessarily destructive for students to complete high school-level academic skills, but rather living in an affluent neighborhood is beneficial and contributes to school success. This suggests that well-off neighborhoods provide more access to community

resources (e.g., educational organizations, health care organizations, and religious and cultural organizations) and become positive role models for students (Rumberger et al., 2009). Moreover, Burrus et al. (2012) accentuated that dropping out of high school can be anticipated due to psychosocial factors pertinent to personality and motivation. For example, it is plausible to use as to what extent the students, their parents and teachers actively engaged in the educational process to assume how possibly the students are to graduate.

### ***Implication for Future Research***

Future research on the experiences of students at risk of dropping out of school may be advantageous when the study is not limited in number of participants. In as much as this study is limited to public secondary school of Davao del Sur, the following future research are recommended: further research can consider the role of school administrators in creating intervention programs that can assist the SARDO to continue their studies until graduation. A research on the community as regard to the role of society in the academic motivation and status of students can also be conducted.

Parents, whose families experience difficulties and adversities at home in terms of finances and relationship at home, thus, role of parents in encouraging their children to continue their studies, parents, together with the community leaders can create a livelihood activity and program to increase income from potential sources such as: vegetable planting and farming for fathers and art craft from native products for mothers. This way, family income can be raised in order to sustain the needs of children at home and in school. The findings of this study were based from the experiences of students at risk of dropping out of school. Further research may be conducted to determine the school administrators' and teachers' insights on drop out incidence among secondary students to confirm the findings of this study.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

From the findings of the study, I have observed how financial adversities and family hostility greatly affected the students at risk of dropping out (SARDO). The same is true when a student lives in a community which does not help him/her to develop his/her optimum potential, and negative influence (e.g. illegal drugs and alcoholism) surround the student's environment, the risk of dropping out will certainly increase.

The investigation on the experiences of students at risk of dropping out of school made me come up with a conclusion that school heads, teachers and community can do a concrete plan to lessen if not eliminate the growing rate of dropping out. Students whose families are living in slums with impoverished neighborhood turn violent for many a reason. Financial constraints, job loss and chronic unemployment, addiction to alcohol and illegal substances can lead to frequent feud within the family. This can be unbearable for the emotions of children; they lose interest in attending school pointing to low academic performance that may result in dropout (Woititz, 2010).

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