



Accounts of Culled Out Students from Board Programs: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

The Culling System in every higher education institution ensures that only students who meet specific academic or performance standards remain in the program, which helps uphold the program's standards and effectiveness. Thus, this study aims to delve into the lived experiences of the students who were culled out from the board programs offered by the Kapalong College of Agriculture, Sciences and Technology in which qualitative research utilizing a phenomenological approach was utilized. The participants were the 14 students who were culled out from the board programs being offered by Kapalong College of Agriculture, Sciences and Technology who were purposively selected. Further, there were five (5) participants for the in-depth interview and another five (5) for the focus group discussion. The data gathered were analyzed through the use of coding and thematic analysis. The study is deemed beneficial since it can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of culling practices in board programs wherein higher authorities can use this information to evaluate existing policies and programs related to student retention and support. It may lead to identifying potential flaws or areas for improvement in the current system.

INTRODUCTION

One's life revolves around the importance of education. It is essential to future success and a wealth of life options. For people, education has various benefits. A successful career is made possible through education. We have many opportunities to work at whatever place we want. It improves the chances of finding better and simpler employment. Our opportunities in life improve as our education level rises. Education also sharpens our minds, supports our beliefs, and improves our morality and interpersonal relationships. It provides us with knowledge about many different subjects in general and our area of expertise, especially what we need to be proficient in for our professional careers.

Consequently, living comfortably or having a decent job is impossible without education ([Choudhury & Pattnaik, 2020](#)). With this, the need to produce quality graduates by the different tertiary institutions to meet the market demands and relevant qualifications was emphasized, thus making these graduates employable and most suitable for the job ([Thangeda et al., 2016](#)). To address these concerns, most higher education institutions established different policies to produce quality graduates.

A decision was made in the Netherlands to reserve 7% of the overall higher education budget for performance agreements with government higher education institutions. A policy known as "academic dismissal" (AD) was adopted by numerous universities as a result of the performance agreements. This intervention is based on a law passed in 1993 requiring higher education institutions to give counsel to

first-year students about continuing their education. Additionally, some universities have made this recommendation mandatory and decided to expel students from the institution and the study program if they did not achieve a certain credit threshold ([Sneyers & De Witte, 2017](#)). Also, [Gottner \(2021\)](#) found that academically dismissed students had less realistic goals, less awareness of their academic deficiencies, and assumed less responsibility for their actions than more successful students.

Most higher education institutions are currently dealing with a significant problem with student persistence and retention. Since more than 50 years ago, schools and universities have been concerned about retention issues. Today, nearly every institution of higher education still faces retention and persistence issues, and administrators continue to focus on these issues. It is commonly known how a college degree affects a student's life and potential earnings. Students who do not complete at least a college certificate are more likely to be unemployed, need social services, become incarcerated or earn less than those who do. Even so, slightly more than 50% of all students who enroll in a college or university will graduate with a degree or certificate, despite the overwhelming evidence that post-secondary education or training can significantly impact a person's life and wages ([Thangeda et al., 2016](#)).

Moreover, there has been growing attention to students on academic probation and dismissal as part of the national conversation on retention ([Houle, 2013](#)). However, despite the aim of every institution to produce quality education through the implementation of the academic dismissal policy, only a handful of evaluations have been performed to identify its impact in terms of selection, motivation and the overall academic career of the students. In a recent meta-analysis, [Sneyers and De Witte \(2017\)](#) found that academic dismissal generally increased first-year dropout but had little positive effect on student learning outcomes.

In this regard, various studies were being conducted that are somewhat related to this study, such as the study of [Ost et al. \(2018\)](#), which focuses on the financial impact of academic dismissal on the student in which the researchers utilized existing administrative data about enrollment from 13 public universities in the state of Ohio and compared it to unemployment insurance earnings by using regression discontinuity design. Also, the study of [Webber \(2018\)](#) entitled "*Reinstated Students: The Experiences and Perceptions of Academic Dismissal and Reinstatement*" is somewhat related to this study in which the researcher used a qualitative method to study reinstated students who were previously on academic dismissal from the institution of research whereas this study focused on the lived experiences of the students who were being culled out from the board programs being offered by the Kapalong College of Agriculture, Sciences and Technology, a local college in the province of Davao del Norte.

This study supports [Tinto's \(2012\)](#) Departure Theory, which states that leaving an institution is a long-term process and that students who feel isolation, adjustment challenges, difficulty, or incongruence with the institution are more likely to leave than students who do not. Students who struggle to adequately detach from pre-existing relations, encounter educational challenges, or discover they possess considerably different personal, political, or religious convictions than those of the institution may exhibit these variables ([Tinto, 2012](#); [Spradlin et al., 2010](#); [Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005](#)). Students who struggle in any of these four areas are more likely to persist if they have effectively integrated their objectives and commitments with those they feel the institution demonstrates through the campus' social and educational systems. Furthermore, the Attribution Theory of Motivation will frame this study by examining student experiences and behaviors.

Further, [Weiner \(1985\)](#) validated this in his study on motivation and emotion, stating that a motivational sequence is initiated by a result that individuals evaluate as positive or goal attainment and negative or goal non-attainment. This theory analyzes how people define the causes of failure and interpret those factors. These failures' causal explanations aid in explaining their following behaviors and reactions. If a student connects their failure on a paper or in class to a single cause, such as a lack of effort or aptitude, the attribution will influence their conduct in similar situations or activities in the future. Utilizing attribution theory as a framework will aid in identifying the causes of these individuals' academic difficulties.

This phenomenological study aims to delve into the lived experiences of students who were culled out from the board programs. This study also examined how those experiences shaped the students' decision to continue their studies and shape their future endeavors. The following research questions guided this study: 1) What are the lived experiences of the students who were culled from the board

programs? 2) How did the culled-out students cope with the challenges that they have experienced? 3) What insights can the culled-out students share with their fellow students and the academe? Other academics conducted similar studies, but the primary focus of this study is to unveil the lived experiences of students who were culled out from the board programs. It suggests that no research has explicitly focused on culled-out students' lived experiences, coping mechanisms and insights. Further, it is urgent to carry out this study since it could serve as a basis for dealing with students who were being culled out from the board programs and through this study, appropriate intervention programs that could assist the students will be crafted and implemented.

METHODS

Research Design

It is a qualitative research study that utilizes a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is the study of the nature of phenomena, which includes their quality, various manifestations, the context in which they emerge, or the perspectives from which they might be observed, but excludes their range, frequency, and place in an objectively specified chain of cause and effect ([Busetto et al., 2020](#); [Starks & Brown, 2007](#)). In this study, a qualitative research design is the best option, given the study's context, since it enabled the researcher to collect the data needed from the right participants who were chosen based on the criteria being established. Moreover, this study utilized a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology, as a philosophy and method of inquiry, is more than just a way of knowing; it is an intellectual engagement in interpretations and meaning formation that is used to understand human beings' lived worlds at a conscious level ([Qutoshi, 2018](#); [Giorgi, 2009](#); [Creswell & Poth, 2016](#)). Additionally, this phenomenological design will be of great help to the researcher to clearly understand the phenomenon through direct observation and participant responses regarding their experiences, challenges, and successful lessons learned about the phenomenon, as well as the participants' coping mechanisms and insights and this design, is suitable for answering the question being posed.

Research Participants

This study's participants were the students currently enrolled in the different board programs offered by Kapalong College of Agriculture, Sciences and Technology, specifically the Institute of Teacher Education and Human Services and the Bachelor of Science in Criminology. Ten (10) participants took part in the conduct of this study. Five (5) participants participated in the In-depth interview and the other five (5) in the focus group discussion in which they were purposely selected based on the following pre-inclusion criteria: (1) must be a bonafide student at Kapalong College of Agriculture, Sciences and Technology in any year level; (2) must be a student who was being culled out from the board programs of the institution; (3) must be currently enrolled on the non-board programs offered by the institution.

Data Collection

The researcher took the following steps in collecting the data and relevant information for the study: (a) asked permission from the college president of the institution where the participants are currently enrolled; (b) after the approval, the researcher then coordinated with the respective program heads of the board programs for the list of students who were culled out from their program; (c) asked permission and conduct orientation to the participants of the study with regards to the purpose of the study and proceed with the interview; (d) after gathering all the data needed for the study, the researcher transcribed and analyzed the data that were being collected.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data gathered, coding and thematic analysis were used. The researcher became the instrument for analyzing data and making decisions about coding, theming, decontextualizing, and recontextualizing the data. In addition, thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report themes to understand better the ideas generated during the interview. Also, analyzing data ensures that the study's findings carefully describe the precise features of the experienced phenomenon as they are presented to the researcher. Furthermore, when analyzing the data, the researcher classified the previous knowledge and information gathered about the phenomenon to remain open to the data revealed by the research participants ([Nowell et al., 2017](#)).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussions based on the data gathered, which were grouped into three categories: lived experiences, challenges experienced and insights gained by the students who were culled out from the board programs of KCAST.

Lived Experiences of Culled-Out Students

Based on the in-depth interview and focused group discussion of the participants on the first research question, five major themes were drawn. This talks about the lived experiences of the students who were culled out in the board programs. The major themes that emerged from the transcriptions of the participants in the research question consist of the overarching themes and the core ideas summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Lived Experiences of Culled-Out Students

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Difficulty in Navigating Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>finding it hard to adjust and cope with the new environment since it is more focused on business concepts</i>• <i>feel like giving up because there is a need to fit in and adjust again to the new course.- IDI02</i>• <i>need to adjust again and gain new friends again. -IDI05</i>• <i>losing hope and feeling devastated because it feels like going back to the basics and adjusting again to the new environment -FGD03</i>• <i>experiencing difficulty in adjusting to the new course FDG04</i>
Being Optimistic despite the difficulties experienced	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>experiencing self-disappointment, but still accepting that life must go on -IDI04</i>• <i>blaming oneself for what happened but still accepting what happened. 05</i>• <i>Reflecting on what happened it open some realizations on the things that had happened -IDI03</i>• <i>feeling disappointed, but must continue. -FGD04</i>• <i>Being criticized for being a culled-out student -IDI02</i>• <i>receiving many criticisms from other people and even family members but still accepting it since it was my fault- IDI04</i>
Being criticized by others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>It is more on being criticized for not surviving on the board program"-IDI05</i>• <i>Being judged by my classmates and friends".-FGD01</i>
Experienced Self-Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>feeling dismay and made many realizations because of things that I have done which leads me into this situation"- IDI01</i>• <i>Being saddened because of what happened, there are a lot of what ifs."-IDI03</i>• <i>I feel disappointed and have realized that it is because of my negligence-IDI05</i>• <i>Regret always comes too late".-FGD03</i>

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Difficulty in Managing Time Effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Failed to manage time well and failed to prioritize things - IDI02</i> ● <i>Time management has been a challenge since then". - IDI03</i> ● <i>Failure in the aspect of managing the time well".-IDI04</i> ● <i>Failed to identify and prioritize the task given based on their importance and urgency".-IDI05</i> ● <i>failed to reduce or even eliminate distractions such as social media".-FGD02</i>

The result of the study follows the result of the study conducted by [Astin \(1998\)](#) and [Upcraft \(1996\)](#), which posits that the majority of college students nowadays have experienced serious personal issues and even emotional distress, which eventually affect their ability to succeed in terms of their academic aspect ([Swail, 2004](#)). Further, it was added that there were various reasons why students failed to attain success in their academic aspect but not limited to failure to take school seriously, poor attendance in some/all courses, failure to manage time effectively, difficulty making the transition from high school to college or from their previous college or university and personal issues or concerns that distracted them.

Coping Mechanisms of Culled-Out Students

Four major themes were drawn based on the in-depth interview and focused group discussion of the participants on the second research question. This talks about the coping mechanisms of the students culled out in the board programs. The major themes that emerged from the transcriptions of the participants in the research question consist of the overarching themes and the core ideas summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Coping Mechanisms of Culled-Out Students

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Establishing Rapport with Colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Working collaboratively and effectively with new classmates"-IDI01</i> ● <i>engaging with new classmates helps a lot in coping up"-IDI02</i> ● <i>demonstrating interest in the new course enrolled."-IDI03</i> ● <i>keep on diverting one's attention to classmates-IDI05</i>
Managing distractions or difficult Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>adopting a positive mindset to condition oneself"-IDI02</i> ● <i>staying focused on life's goals despite what happened"-IDI04</i> ● <i>keep on reframing negative thoughts to continue".-IDI05</i> ● <i>focusing on one's strength and decided to strengthen it further."-FGD04</i>
Accepting the Situation Wholeheartedly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>recognizing the reality that this is the new situation now"-IDI01</i> ● <i>just accepting the fact that some things may not go as planned exactly."-IDI02</i>

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Relying on Faith or Spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>just accepted the situation and found a sense of calm.”-IDI03</i> ● <i>just focused instead on the current course enrolled”.-IDI04</i> ● <i>just sought meaning and purpose in the current situation-FDG01</i> ● <i>Having a belief in our Almighty Father God that everything will be okay.”-IDI 01</i> ● <i>looking on the positive side of life and still pray”-IDI04</i> ● <i>engaging in spiritual practices such as praying every night.”-IDI05</i> ● <i>Embracing uncertainty and praying”-FGD02</i>

The result of the study is aligned with the result of the study conducted by [Denovan and Macaskill \(2013\)](#), which claims that college students tend to apply various types of coping mechanisms in dealing with various difficulties, such as establishing self-control, trust and being able to think positively and accepting the current situation wholeheartedly to better adjust to some stressful situations. Additionally, every situation tends to require a specific coping strategy. Every time an individual faces a difficult situation, they evaluate it and look for appropriate coping strategies, such as asking for social support from family, loved ones or even friends.

Insights of Culled-Out Students Regarding Culling Policy

Based on the in-depth interview and focused group discussion of the participants on the third research question, six major themes were drawn. This talks about the insights of the students who were culled out in the board programs. The major themes that emerged from the transcriptions of the participants in the research question consist of the overarching themes and the core ideas summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Insights of Culled-Out Students

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Culling System Being a Positive and Motivating Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Finding the policy positive because of its great impact in one life even though others find it negative, I can see how it greatly impacted me.”-IDI02</i> ● <i>The policy meant to encourage the students to focus on their studies”-IDI04</i> ● <i>The policy helps the students stay focused on their studies.-IDI05</i> ● <i>Seeing it as a threat to every student at first and might bring disappointment, but as time passed, realizations were made that it helped in some positive ways.-IDI07</i>
Setting Goals in Life is Essential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>There is a need for us to set our goals in life, and this culling system will serve us as our guide in doing so.”-IDI 01</i> ● <i>Must not take for granted all the opportunities that we are being given, such as being part of the</i>

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Being a Responsible Student is a Must	<p><i>board programs and must be fully well acquainted with what we will take. -IDI03</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Must set goals in our lives for us to be well guided-IDI04</i> ● <i>Setting goals in life must be done by every student for us to be on track always.-IDI 06</i> ● <i>One must be responsible for one's studies.-IDI02</i> ● <i>Be responsible always.”-IDI03</i> ● <i>Taking full responsibility for one's studies is important-IDI05</i> ● <i>To fulfill our goals in life, we must be responsible in our studies.-IDI07</i>
Parental Involvement is Necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Parents must always be involved in the studies of every student for them to be well guided-IDI01</i> ● <i>The guidance of parents, particularly in dealing with studies, is important-IDI02</i> ● <i>involvement of parents is essential-IDI05</i> ● <i>Parental involvement should be encouraged.”-FGD01</i>
Must-Have Perseverance and Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Always look on the brighter side of life and keep going.-IDI01</i> ● <i>Being culled out from the program doesn't mean it is already the end of the world; continue and be determined to achieve your goals in life.-IDI03</i> ● <i>Always persevere and don't give up-IDI04</i>

The result of the study follows the study conducted by [Parveen \(2007\)](#), [Muola \(2010\)](#), and [Hoell \(2006\)](#), in which it was believed that the home environment of the child has a great impact on their overall development. It was emphasized that parents' attitudes play a dominant role and where it is supportive enhances children's performances and positively impacts their development. One contributing factor to improving an individual's linguistic, social and intellectual skills is the interaction and support of the family member. There is evidence that supportive home environments enhance children's confidence in his/herself and enable them to be sociable. This confidence helps students develop their adjustment capabilities in different environments, positively influencing their educational performances. Students living in non-supportive home environments struggle in every walk of life, including education ([Parveen, 2007](#); [Bandhana & Sharma, 2012](#); [Heider, 1985](#)).

Moreover, [Dennis et al. \(2005\)](#) affirmed that college students are more likely to succeed at a certain institution if they have been adequately prepared and supported, which can come from support from family counselors and adequate preparation from their prior education environments. It was also found that a lack of social support from friends or family means less encouragement to continue striving for a college education, ultimately creating a barrier to college success.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the participants who participated in this study could express their lived experiences, coping mechanisms and insights as a student who were culled out from the board program of the institution. Most of them have experienced various difficulties in dealing with the new environment that they are in, such as difficulty in navigating time, which is also one reason why they ended up with the non-board programs. To add, they also have experienced being criticized by others due to the fact they have been removed from the board program, which might imply to others their negligence in their

studies. After being removed from the board programs, the participants could also reflect on what they had done, leading them to regret what had happened. However, they are still looking at the brighter side of life and are still thinking that there are better plans for them. They tend to establish rapport with their new classmates for them to be able to cope with their new situation. Due to this, they could also accept the situation wholeheartedly and establish their faith in the Almighty Father God.

Nevertheless, the participants believed that the Culling System of the institution is beneficial not only to the institution but to the students as well since, through the policy being implemented, the students will tend to focus and take full responsibility for their studies. Therefore, the study is deemed beneficial since it can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of culling practices in board programs. Higher authorities can use this information to evaluate existing policies and programs related to student retention and support. It may lead to identifying potential flaws or areas for improvement in the current system. Also, the study's findings highlighted the challenges faced by students removed from board programs. It can lead to developing targeted interventions and support mechanisms for such students to address their specific needs and improve their chances of success. Additionally, this study is essential as it brings to light the voices of the students who have been culled out from board programs and gain a richer understanding of their experiences, challenges, and perspectives. Doing so aims to address potential gaps in the current educational system and foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the participants' responses to this study, various recommendations were crafted to address the challenges experienced by the students following the implementation of the culling system of the institution. Moreover, for the students who were culled out from the board program, it is recommended that (a) they must set goals in life and learn how to focus on their studies; (b) they must also seek guidance from their teachers, classmates and most especially to their parents; (they must also be resilient and persevere in everything they do; (c) they must know what and when to prioritize things. In addition, the teachers, academic heads, and even the administrators must (a) review and revise the practices of culling students from board programs. Consideration should be given to the impact of such decisions on the student's emotional well-being, academic progress, and personal development. The focus should be on creating interventions that provide support and guidance to struggling students rather than solely resorting to culling as a solution; (b) invest in early identification systems to detect students who may be at risk and implement targeted interventions to address their specific needs. These interventions may include academic tutoring, counseling, mentorship programs, or other forms of personalized support; (c) focus on equipping teachers with the skills to identify struggling students, offer appropriate support, and foster a positive and inclusive learning environment lastly, since the study underscored the importance of involving families and communities in the education process. Teachers and school administrators should work to strengthen these partnerships, providing resources and support to families to help their students succeed in school.

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