



Common Problems Encountered by High School Students: A Descriptive Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the common problems encountered by junior and senior high school students in Cantilan National High School and including their demographic characteristics, like age, sex, grade level, and location. A descriptive quantitative research design was employed, involving 151 student respondents who answered a structured and validated survey instrument based on existing guidance office records. The findings revealed that online game addiction was the most frequently reported issue, followed by poverty, negative peer influence, parental neglect, bullying, absenteeism, and child labor. These challenges spanned across various age groups and grade levels, reflecting the complex interplay between behavioral, familial, and socio-economic factors that affect students' academic engagement and emotional well-being. The results highlight the need to strengthen data-informed guidance and counseling services in schools and to enhance collaboration with families and local government units to address root causes of student distress. This study offers valuable insights for school administrators and education stakeholders by providing local evidence to support the design of more responsive and targeted intervention programs that promote student welfare and reduce academic disengagement.

Keywords: Student problems, Online game addiction, Poverty, School intervention, Academic Engagement, Descriptive Quantitative

1. Introduction

Students in basic education face various challenges that can affect their academic success, emotional stability, and social relationships (Sarkar and Chakraborty, 2021). These problems often become evident through their behavior, classroom performance, or interpersonal conflicts, and are commonly brought to the attention of the guidance counselor's office. According to Chemnad et al. (2024), issues such as academic difficulties, behavioral concerns, peer pressure, family-related stress, and emotional struggles are among the frequently reported concerns. Left unaddressed, these problems may escalate and hinder students' personal growth and overall school experience.

The guidance office plays a critical role in supporting students by identifying, documenting, and responding to these concerns (Arfasa & Weldmeskel, 2020). As to Hines et al. (2020), analyzing the records of the guidance office offers an opportunity to understand the most common issues students face and determine whether current interventions are responsive to their needs. It also helps in evaluating the effectiveness of guidance programs and in identifying areas where improvements are necessary. Orchowski et al. (2023) shown that school-based interventions are more effective when they are grounded in real student experiences and data from actual school records.

Despite the vital role of guidance services, there is limited research that systematically analyzes the documented problems of students and relates them to their demographic background. In many schools, especially in the Cantilan District, there have been increasing cases of students facing difficulties in school that eventually lead to absenteeism or dropping out. However, there is a lack of proper documentation that captures the students' side or explanation for these incidents. According to Pendakur (2023), most guidance records focus on incidents rather than student reflections or root causes, resulting in missed opportunities to understand deeper issues from the learner's perspective. This gap highlights the need for a more intentional, data-informed approach to identifying problems and creating responsive school interventions.

Various factors contribute to school difficulties and student dropouts, including poverty, family problems, lack of motivation, learning difficulties, bullying, and poor mental health (Hameed et al., 2024; Banaag et al., 2024; Thaise, 2023). While these issues are often discussed in general terms, there is a lack of school-level evidence that captures how these problems manifest in everyday student experiences. In the Cantilan District, anecdotal reports from teachers and school heads point to recurring student struggles, but these are rarely reflected in official records or systematically analyzed. As a result, the real reasons behind absenteeism or dropping out often remain unexamined from the student's perspective. Without reliable data, schools may rely on assumptions rather than informed decisions when designing support programs (Huber & Helm, 2020). This study intends to help bridge that gap

by analyzing available guidance counselor records and linking them to students' demographic profiles to gain a clearer picture of what students are going through and who among them are most vulnerable.

General Objectives

This study aims to explore the common problems encountered by students based on guidance counselor records and to describe the demographic profile of the students involved. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, grade level, and location?

What are the common problems met by the students as recorded by the guidance counselor's office?

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide school administrators, counselors, and teachers with relevant data that can guide the development of more targeted, responsive, and proactive student support services. The findings of this study will serve as a valuable basis for improving existing interventions or designing new programs that address the specific needs of students, especially those who are at risk of academic failure or dropping out. Identifying both the challenges faced by students and the context in which they occur, the study hopes to contribute to enhancing student welfare, guidance services, and the overall learning environment within the schools of Cantilan District.

2. Literature Review

Guidance and counseling services play a vital role in schools, particularly in helping students manage academic, behavioral, and emotional difficulties. These services aim to support learners' well-being and development by providing individual counseling, referrals, monitoring, and interventions. When properly implemented, guidance programs can reduce risks related to poor school performance, mental health concerns, and eventual school dropout. Lazarus et al. (2022) emphasized that effective counseling services empower students to handle school-related stress while also improving their social and emotional skills.

Students face a wide range of problems throughout their educational journey. These include academic struggles such as failing grades, low comprehension, and lack of motivation; behavioral issues like disobedience, tardiness, or absenteeism; and personal challenges such as family conflict, bullying, or emotional stress. According to Amerstorfer et al. (2021), these problems can affect a student's ability to focus, engage in class, and build positive relationships. When these concerns are not addressed early, they can escalate and lead to more serious consequences such as school avoidance or long-term disengagement.

Understanding the demographic background of students is important in addressing these issues more effectively. Age, sex, grade level, and geographic location often influence the kind of challenges students face and how they respond to them. For example, older students may experience more pressure related to performance and future planning, while younger learners may struggle with school adjustment. Mason et al. (2023) observed that female students were more likely to report emotional concerns, whereas male students tended to exhibit behavioral problems. Additionally, students in rural areas like those in the Cantilan District often experience barriers such as limited access to guidance services, poor family support, and economic difficulties, all of which can intensify school-related problems.

In many rural communities, there has been growing concern about students leaving school due to unresolved problems. Studies have linked dropout rates to recurring issues such as poverty, family responsibilities, bullying, and emotional strain. Guzmán (2021) noted that in rural areas, dropping out is often the result of accumulated stressors that students are unable to manage. Unfortunately, many of these cases go undocumented or are only recorded as simple attendance concerns, without exploring the underlying reasons from the students' point of view. This lack of insight makes it harder for schools to create effective and responsive support systems.

Although guidance offices are tasked with documenting student cases, not all schools maintain consistent or detailed records. Some rely solely on basic incident logs or disciplinary reports, which fail to capture the root causes of student concerns. As DeLaTorre (2023) pointed out, the absence of detailed student narratives in records limits the school's capacity to understand recurring issues, especially when behavioral incidents are involved. In the Cantilan District, informal reports from teachers and administrators indicate increasing numbers of students in distress, yet few schools have reliable records to support data-informed decisions.

To address this gap, schools must embrace a more data-driven approach to student support services. Collecting and analyzing data from guidance records, especially when paired with demographic information, can help identify patterns that are often overlooked. Wong and Li (2020) argued that when interventions are based on actual student data, they become more targeted and relevant. Rather than relying on general assumptions, schools can design specific programs that meet the needs of their most vulnerable learners, ultimately improving retention and academic outcomes.

This growing body of literature highlights the importance of looking deeper into the actual records of student problems, especially in under-documented rural settings. While there are existing studies on student behavior and dropout, few have explored how school guidance records reflect the lived experiences of students in connection to their demographic profile. The present study seeks to address this gap by analyzing guidance counselor reports and demographic data from students in Cantilan District.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

This study used a descriptive quantitative research design to gather and analyze numerical data related to the students' demographic profile and the common difficulties they face in school. The goal of this design is to describe what exists in terms of student challenges, based on frequency, distribution, and relationships among variables such as age, sex, grade level, and location.

3.2 Environment

The research was conducted at Cantilan National High School, a public secondary school located in Cantilan, Surigao del Sur. The school is home to a diverse population of junior and senior high school students from different barangays within the district. With its active academic programs and student support services, Cantilan National High School provided an ideal setting for gathering data related to student concerns.

3.3 Participants

The study involved 151 student-respondents selected through purposive sampling. The participants included students from various grade levels who were identified either through their existing records in the guidance office or by teacher referral as having encountered academic, behavioral, or personal difficulties. The inclusion criteria required that the students be officially enrolled in the current academic year and willing to participate voluntarily. This ensured that data collected would reflect actual school experiences relevant to the study objectives.

3.4 Instrument

A structured survey questionnaire served as the main data-gathering tool. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part collected demographic data such as age, sex, grade level, and location. The second part listed possible school-related problems categorized into academic, behavioral, social, emotional, and family-related issues. Students were asked to check or rate the problems they experienced. The instrument was reviewed by field experts for content validity and was pilot-tested with a small group of students to ensure clarity and reliability.

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher first obtained formal approval from the school principal and coordinated with the guidance counselor and class advisers. After identifying the eligible respondents, the questionnaire was distributed in printed form during class hours with the consent of teachers. Before answering, students were briefed about the purpose of the study and how their data would be used. Completed forms were collected and checked for completeness. The researcher then encoded the data for statistical processing.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study complied with ethical standards in conducting research involving students. Consent was obtained from the school administration and verbal assent from the student participants. No identifying personal data were collected to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed that they could withdraw at any point without consequence. The collected data were used solely for academic purposes and stored securely by the researcher.

3.7 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentage distribution. These methods were applied to determine the demographic characteristics of the students and identify the most common problems they reported. Results were presented in tables and graphs to clearly show patterns and trends. Interpretations focused on how student background characteristics may relate to the types of problems encountered, with implications for improving school-based interventions.

4. Results

Table 1. Demographics of the Respondents

Demographic Profile		Frequency	Percentage
Age	13-14 years old	80	53%
	15-16 years old	71	47%
	Total	151	100%

Sex	Male	64	42%
	Female	87	58%
	Total	151	100%
Grade Level	Grade 7	38	25.2%
	Grade 8	37	24.4%
	Grade 9	38	25.2%
	Grade 10	38	25.2%
	Total	151	100%
Location	Magasang	39	26%
	Pag-antayan	33	22%
	Linintian	32	21%
	Magosilom	25	17%
	Calagdaan	22	14%
	Total	151	100%

Table 2. Common Problems Faced by Students (N=151)

Problems Met	Frequency
Poverty	76
Child-Labor	33
Separation from Parents	25
Parental Neglect	51
Violence	23
Psychological or emotional instability	5
Early romantic teenage pregnancy	10
Health issues	15
Online game addiction	120
Bullying	51
Lack of community support	14
Influenced by bad peers	67
Absenteeism	45

5. Discussion

5.1 Profile of the Respondents

The results presented in Table 1 provide valuable insights into the demographic profile of the respondents, which can be analyzed through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Examining the age distribution, it is evident that the majority of the respondents, 53%, fall within the age range of 13-14 years old, while the remaining 47% are aged 15-16 years old. This distribution aligns with the developmental stage of early adolescence, emphasizing the importance of understanding the influence of the microsystem, which includes family, peers, and school, on students' development and experiences (Chan & Kiang, 2021). Additionally, the higher proportion of female respondents, accounting for 58%, highlights the significance of the mesosystem, which encompasses the interactions between different microsystems, in shaping students' help-seeking behavior (Helsing, 2020).

Analyzing the distribution across different grade levels, it is noteworthy that each grade level represents approximately 25.2% of the total respondents. This even distribution highlights the importance of considering the mesosystem and its impact on students' educational experiences. Guidance counseling

services play a critical role in supporting students at different stages of their academic and personal development, providing an essential link between the microsystem (e.g., individual students) and the larger school system (Karaman et al., 2021). Recognizing the diverse needs and challenges faced by students at various grade levels, the guidance counseling program can effectively tailor its interventions to meet their specific developmental needs within the educational context.

Considering the distribution across different locations, it is evident that the respondents are spread across multiple areas, with Magasang having the highest representation at 26%. This variation in location emphasizes the importance of the exosystem, which represents external influences such as the community and local resources, in shaping students' experiences. Different locations may present unique challenges or resources that influence students' development and well-being (Capone et al., 2020). Understanding these regional disparities and considering the exosystem, the guidance counseling program can develop targeted interventions to address specific community-related challenges and provide necessary support to students in different locations.

To sum, the demographic profile of the respondents, including age, sex, grade level, and location, provides valuable insights into the sample composition within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Considering the influence of the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem on students' development and experiences, we gain a deeper understanding of the factors that shape their needs and challenges. These findings will inform the subsequent analysis of the study's outcomes and contribute to the enhancement of the guidance counseling program, ensuring that it effectively addresses the diverse needs of the student population within their ecological contexts.

5.2 Common Problems Faced by Students

The findings in Table 2 reveal that students at Cantilan National High School face a variety of problems, many of which are interconnected and rooted in economic, social, and behavioral challenges. Among the 151 respondents, the most commonly reported issue was online game addiction, with 120 students (nearly 80%) indicating it as a concern. This trend aligns with studies highlighting the rising impact of digital addiction on student performance and attention span. Biswal (20123) emphasized that excessive gaming can lead to decreased academic engagement, impaired social interaction, and increased psychological distress. The ease of access to mobile games and the absence of digital boundaries at home or in school settings may be intensifying this issue among learners.

The second most prevalent problem was poverty, reported by 76 students. This reflects a significant barrier to education that is commonly observed in rural public schools in the Philippines. Financial difficulties affect students' ability to meet basic needs such as transportation, school supplies, and even daily meals. Azevedo (2020) stressed that poverty is one of the strongest predictors of school failure, absenteeism, and dropout, particularly in developing regions. Students living in poverty often face additional stressors at home, which can lead to chronic absenteeism or early involvement in income-generating activities.

Influence from bad peers was cited by 67 students, underscoring how peer pressure can shape behavior both positively and negatively. According to Delgado et al (2022), adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer influence, especially in environments lacking strong parental or institutional guidance. Students surrounded by peers involved in unproductive or risky behavior may be more likely to mirror those actions, further derailing their academic progress. Another concerning issue is parental neglect, reported by 51 students, the same number who identified bullying as a problem. Parental neglect, whether due to parental absence (e.g., working abroad or in distant cities) or lack of involvement, has long-term effects on a child's self-esteem and academic motivation (Floricia et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, bullying remains a significant problem in schools across the Philippines, contributing to anxiety, poor concentration, and school avoidance. A study by Baldry and Farrington (2000) shows that both victims and perpetrators of bullying are at increased risk for academic difficulties and emotional problems. Absenteeism was experienced by 45 students, a concern often linked to poverty, child labor, or lack of motivation. According to Keppens (2023), absenteeism is one of the leading contributors to poor academic performance and early dropout rates in secondary schools.

Child labor (33) and separation from parents (25) were also notable. These are often intertwined, as children in low-income households are either left behind or forced to contribute financially, limiting their time and energy for schooling. Other less frequently reported, but equally serious problems include violence (23), health issues (15), lack of community support (14), early romantic involvement or teenage pregnancy (10), and psychological or emotional instability (5). While these figures are relatively low, their impact on student mental health and future life outcomes can be significant. Price (2023) emphasize that even a small proportion of students facing trauma or emotional challenges require immediate and specialized intervention to prevent escalation.

These findings underscore the need for multi-level intervention strategies. At the school level, guidance programs should not only address behavioral issues but also include digital literacy and wellness campaigns. For example, structured awareness sessions about the risks of online gaming and the importance of academic balance could be helpful. Community outreach programs may help mitigate the effects of poverty and parental neglect by connecting families with available resources or social services. Meanwhile, peer mentoring programs may serve as protective factors against negative peer influence and bullying. The results also highlight the importance of data-driven intervention planning. The information gathered in this study can serve as a foundation for improving existing support systems, particularly the programs facilitated by the guidance counselor's office. It offers school administrators and policy-makers evidence of the pressing challenges students face and helps them prioritize which issues require immediate attention such as technology addiction, financial hardship, and peer-related risks.

6. Conclusion

Understanding the difficulties faced by students requires not only identifying what those challenges are but also considering the context in which students live and learn. In many rural schools across the Philippines, learners are affected by a combination of social, economic, and behavioral issues that disrupt their academic performance and personal growth. In the case of Cantilan National High School, guidance records and student responses shed light on the reality that many students are silently struggling with problems that range from poverty and child labor to online game addiction and lack of parental support. These challenges, if left unaddressed, may contribute to absenteeism, poor academic outcomes, and even early dropout.

The results of the study revealed that students of Cantilan National High School face various challenges that significantly affect their academic participation and overall well-being. Demographically, the respondents varied in age, sex, grade level, and residence, which may influence how they experience and respond to these difficulties. Among the most reported problems were online game addiction, poverty, negative peer influence, parental neglect, bullying, absenteeism, and child labor. These issues reflect a combination of behavioral, social, and economic factors affecting the lives of students in and beyond the school setting. Online game addiction stood out as the most common issue, suggesting a growing concern over excessive screen time and its impact on students' focus, time management, and academic engagement. Poverty and related challenges such as child labor and absenteeism also remained significant barriers to consistent school participation. Furthermore, the presence of peer-related issues, family neglect, and emotional instability highlights the need for interventions that go beyond academics and address students' holistic development.

7. Recommendations for Future Studies

In light of these findings, the study recommends two key interventions. First, schools should enhance and systematize their guidance and intervention programs based on actual data gathered from students. Regularly assessing students' needs and maintaining open communication channels between students and the guidance office, schools can implement targeted support services that address issues like gaming addiction, bullying, absenteeism, and emotional well-being. These interventions should also include regular awareness campaigns, structured peer mentoring, and counseling activities. Second, it is essential to strengthen collaboration between schools, families, and local government units to address challenges rooted in poverty, parental neglect, and community support. Coordinated efforts that include family outreach programs, livelihood initiatives for low-income households, and the activation of child protection mechanisms in the community can help create a safer and more supportive environment for students. Engaging stakeholders in shared responsibility will ensure that students receive the academic and emotional support they need both at school and at home. Future researchers are encouraged to explore the perspectives of students through qualitative methods to gain deeper insights into the root causes of these issues. Likewise, conducting comparative studies across other schools within the district could help validate the findings and contribute to broader intervention strategies across the region.

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