



**Peer Review Report Form**

<b>Manuscript Title:</b>	Factors Behind the High Rate of Student Leavers: Basis for Retention Strategies
<b>Type of Article:</b>	Original Article

**FIRST ROUND**

**Editor**

**General Comments and Recommendations**

The reviewers recognize the value of your manuscript and recommend revisions to further enhance its clarity, organization, and overall quality. In addition, you are required to conduct a thorough inventory of the references in your manuscript. Please ensure that only the sources cited within the text are included in the References section, and likewise, that all references listed in the References section are properly cited in the manuscript. For example, if you have 20 cited references in the manuscript, then only 20 references should be included in the References section. However, please note that repeated citations of the same source within the text are counted as a single entry in the References list; therefore, the total number of entries in the References section may be lower than the total number of in-text citations.

**Reviewer 1**

**General Comments and Recommendations**

The paper tackles a very timely and relevant issue, especially aligning with the current thrust of DepEd's MATATAG agenda and the struggles of rural integrated schools. The localized context of Peñarrubia Integrated School provides good baseline data for creating contextualized retention strategies.

**Specific Comments and Recommendations**

1. The methodology states that survey questionnaires were used to gather measurable data, and frequency counts and percentages were utilized. However, the Results section only presents one table (Table 1), which is just the demographic and socioeconomic profile of the learners. Where is the table showing the quantitative results of the actual factors for dropping out? The text simply claims, "the most frequently reported reasons for leaving school were financial difficulty, the need to work..." but does not provide the statistical breakdown, mean scores, or frequencies to prove this. Kindly insert the data tables for the survey results.
2. The study used a mixed-methods design involving semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. However, the Results and Discussion sections purely summarize the findings in paragraph form without providing actual transcript excerpts or quotes from the participants. In qualitative or mixed-method research, it is highly recommended to include verbatim quotes (translated if necessary) to establish the credibility and authenticity of the lived experiences being described. Show, do not just tell.



3. Table 1 only profiles the 20 learners (10 former, 10 at-risk). The methodology mentions that 22 teachers, 10 parents, and 1 school administrator were also part of the purposive sampling. Their demographic profiles or basic characteristics are completely missing from the presentation. It is important to briefly establish who these other respondents are to give context to their answers.
4. An explanatory sequential design strictly means you gather and analyze the quantitative data first, and then use the qualitative data to explain those quantitative results. The current flow of the Results section just lumps everything together. To fix this, structure your Results section logically: present the quantitative survey findings on the dropout factors first (Phase 1), followed immediately by the qualitative themes and quotes from the interviews that explain why those survey results turned out that way (Phase 2).
5. The current Discussion repeats a lot of what was already said in the Results section. A good discussion should heavily synthesize the findings with the literature cited in the Introduction. For example, how do your localized findings in Abra compare with the studies you cited like Balzer (2020) or the PBEEd reports? Highlight what makes your rural findings unique compared to the urban studies you mentioned in your research gap.

Please indicate your recommendation by checking the appropriate box below.

<u>Decision</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Accept the manuscript for publication.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reconsider the manuscript after the authors have satisfactorily addressed and complied with the reviewers' comments and recommendations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reject the manuscript, as it is not suitable for publication.

**Reviewer 2**

<u>General Comments and Recommendations</u>
This paper addresses a very relevant school problem, and the topic has practical value for retention planning in rural public schools. The manuscript already shows that dropout is a multi-factor issue, but in its present form, the paper's biggest weakness is the weak alignment between the mixed-methods design, the reported results, and the evidence presented. Because of this, the conclusions and proposed interventions look reasonable, but they are not yet fully demonstrated by the data shown.

<u>Specific Comments and Recommendations</u>
My main concern is the results section. The study said it used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with survey, interviews, FGD, and document review, but the quantitative presentation is too limited and incomplete for that kind of design. Only one demographic table is shown, yet the discussion and conclusion already make strong claims about the "most prevalent reasons" for dropout, category-level patterns, and convergence across learners, parents, and teachers. These claims need clearer evidence in the results itself, such as a proper



table of dropout factors with frequencies or ranked responses, and a more transparent presentation of the qualitative themes with sample quotations per theme. At present, some narrative findings appear in the results without enough visible analytic basis. Also, the sample composition is very small and highly purposive, so the author needs to be more careful in wording the findings as school-specific and exploratory, not overly general.

Please indicate your recommendation by checking the appropriate box below.

<u>Decision</u>	
	Accept the manuscript for publication.
/	Reconsider the manuscript after the authors have satisfactorily addressed and complied with the reviewers' comments and recommendations.
	Reject the manuscript, as it is not suitable for publication.

**SECOND ROUND**

<u>Decision</u>	<u>Editor</u>	<u>Reviewer 1</u>	<u>Reviewer 2</u>
Accept the manuscript for publication.	/	/	/
Reconsider the manuscript after the authors have satisfactorily addressed and complied with the reviewers' comments and recommendations.			
Reject the manuscript, as it is not suitable for publication.			