Exploring the Causes of Learners' Disengagement: A Study of Key Stages 1 and 2

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Abstract: This study investigated the causes and performance of learners' disengagement in the basic education Key Stages 1 and 2. Using a mixed-method research design, data were gathered from thirty (30) teachers from selected public elementary schools in the Juban District through a researcher-made questionnaire and interviews. Findings revealed that teacher–learner interaction, technology utilization, and assessment of learning outcomes are primary factors contributing to disengagement. Reduced direct contact learning time (mean = 4.63) and unclear classroom routines (mean = 4.42) were the most significant teacher-related issues, while technology-related concerns included too many distractions in learning materials (mean = 4.57) and unclear task instructions (mean = 4.56). Assessment practices also influenced disengagement, with complex instructions (mean = 4.21) and unfamiliar formats (mean = 4.02) identified as major contributors. Qualitative data highlighted patterns such as selective attention, limited acknowledgment of learners' ideas, and vague instructions reducing active engagement. To mitigate disengagement, the study proposed innovative activities focusing on interactive teacher–learner strategies, immersive technology integration, and meaningful assessment practices. Conclusions emphasized that addressing these factors through collaborative discussions, structured routines, engaging digital tools, and formative assessments can foster active participation and improve academic performance. Recommendations include implementing interactive teaching methods, designing distraction-free digital resources, and simplifying assessments with timely feedback to sustain learner engagement in Key Stages 1 and 2.

Keywords: Learners' Disengagement, Technology Utilization, Selective Attention, Technology Integration, Key Stages 1 and 2.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education occupies a central place in Philippine political, economic, social, and cultural life. It is a strategic priority that powers economic progress and fosters a forward-looking, tolerant, and inclusive society. Education serves as both an expectation builder and a force multiplier. For individuals, growth and maturity hinge on making the right choices in the present to shape a desired future. In this context, obtaining the right kind of education for a chosen career becomes essential. The orientation, training, and preparation acquired by a person largely determine success or even survival.

In this regard, the teacher has been tasked to prepare young people to become useful, upright, and active citizens in the community. To be equal to the task, teachers need to develop certain competencies and skills. This calls for a clear understanding of the teaching process and the roles and responsibilities concomitant to their position in the classroom. Meanwhile, education research and theory clearly imply that a student's disengagement from school is the culmination of numerous factors spanning far back in their life; these predictors can appear as early as primary school or even earlier. Teacher instructions and learning activities influence student engagement (Bergdahl & Bond, 2021). A more recent study identified that responses between teachers differ: some teachers express frustration at having "a certain type of students" and ignore students who display disengagement, while others employ a higher work pace than their students when trying to activate them and redeem passivity in the classroom. The study identified learning situations where teacher behavior influenced a shift from disengagement to engagement and vice versa (Bergdahl & Bond, 2021). Notably, engagement researchers have also found that students can display engagement and disengagement simultaneously, for example, feeling bored (emotional disengagement) yet completing the work (behavioral engagement), or choosing to focus on another, more pressing assignment in another subject during which time engagement in the first subject will shift to disengagement (Fredricks et al., 2019; Amerstorfer & von Münster-Kistner, 2021).

Internationally, engagement is conceptualized as multidimensional, comprising behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, with some scholars adding agentic and social aspects to capture students' proactive contributions and relational ties (Fredricks et al., 2004; Reeve & Tseng, 2011). Disengagement, therefore, is not merely the absence of engagement but a dynamic process influenced by classroom climate, teacher–student relationships, peer interactions, task design, and school-level norms (Fredricks et al., 2019; Bond & Bergdahl, 2022). Finn's (1989) participation–identification model underscores that reduced participation and weak identification with school can trigger cycles of withdrawal, absenteeism, and eventual dropout—cycles that may begin in the earliest grades. Large-scale longitudinal work has also shown that behavioral engagement (attendance, homework completion, on-task behavior) is a strong prospective predictor of dropout risk, reaffirming the importance of daily routines in preventing later school leaving (Archambault et al., 2009; Finn, 1989).

Teacher behavior is a decisive lever for engagement. Observational research indicates that motivating teaching, grounded in Self-Determination Theory (supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness), correlates with higher engagement, while chaotic or controlling approaches correlate with lower engagement. In high-engagement lessons, teachers build relationships, begin with enthusiasm, and activate students through guided practice and room for experimentation; in low-engagement lessons, demotivating behaviors appear early and students' effort wanes (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2021; Amerstorfer & von Münster-Kistner, 2021). In blended and digital contexts—common since COVID-19—classroom leadership, pacing, and technology use can trigger shifts from engagement to disengagement and vice versa, especially in socially disadvantaged schools, highlighting the need for visible learning, calibrated work pace, and digital management strategies in the early grades (Bergdahl & Bond, 2021; Bond & Bergdahl, 2022).

At the systems level, European scholarship reframes early school leaving (ESL) as a process linked to school effect variables—compositional factors, organizational and pedagogical practices, and teacher expectations. These studies call for proactive school–family partnerships, early identification of disengagement, nurturing climates, and challenging curricula to prevent cumulative withdrawal (Tarabini et al., 2019; Montero-Sieburth & Turcatti, 2022). A comprehensive model synthesizing 122 variables groups non-academic factors (individual, family, friendship) and academic factors (student, school, teacher, classmates), illustrating ESL's complexity and the need for multilayered interventions that begin in the early years (González-Rodríguez et al., 2019).

Global commitments such as Education for All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasize inclusive, equitable, quality education and early detection of exclusion. The Philippines' EFA 2015 National Review documented progress and persistent barriers in access, participation, and quality, underscoring the need to reduce dropout and

strengthen basic skills from the earliest grades (UNESCO, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified risks to engagement worldwide. International analyses show that learning poverty—the proportion of children unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10—rose sharply after school closures, with East Asia and Pacific seeing significant setbacks (World Bank, 2022; BusinessMirror, 2023). These disruptions revealed fragile foundational instruction and limited capacity to sustain engagement when face-to-face schooling is interrupted.

The consequences of early disengagement are well documented: absenteeism, grade repetition, behavioral incidents, and ultimately dropping out. These trajectories translate into long-term social costs and reduced human capital. Finn's models and subsequent longitudinal work emphasize that preventing disengagement in the early years yields disproportionate benefits for completion and later learning, especially in contexts where foundational literacy and numeracy are fragile (Finn, 1989; Archambault et al., 2009). Given Philippine performance trends (learning poverty; stagnant PISA outcomes), early interventions must be instruction-centered and relationship-rich—explicit reading instruction (systematic decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies), daily math routines focused on number sense and problem solving, formative feedback, and structured practice—embedded within safe, caring environments that cultivate belonging and agency. These approaches align with MATATAG's pillars and with international recommendations to recover and accelerate learning post-pandemic (DepEd, 2024; World Bank, 2022). Theoretical frameworks such as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Self-Determination Theory offer lenses for understanding disengagement in Key Stages 1 and 2. These perspectives emphasize the interplay of individual, classroom, school, and community factors in shaping engagement. Drivers of early disengagement include poverty, family responsibilities, weak instructional practices, and systemic shocks like school closures. Consequences range from absenteeism and grade repetition to eventual dropout, with long-term social and economic costs. Moreover, as of 2018, it was noted that 18% of junior high school learners did not proceed to senior high school, compared to roughly 8% of sixth grade pupils who do not graduate and enter seventh grade (Cervantes, 2018).

Juban District schools in Juban, Sorsogon are learning institutions aim to scientifically provide every learner a quality secondary education and develop a value-oriented, academically competent and technically prepared learners through formal and non-formal education. Apparently, in selected elementary schools in Juban District such as Añog Elementary School, Bacolod Elementary School, Tublijon Elementary School, Tampi Elementary School and Sipaya Elementary School pupils are facing problems specifically on low performing pupils due to some factors that hinder their improvement in academics.

Finally, the researcher was prompted to conduct the study in order to ascertain whether the existing related factors affecting the performance of pupils. This study also aims to

further the understanding of the circumstances and potential solutions to some existing problems given the present expectations of schools regarding the competency of pupils. Thus, it is the great need of the hour to determine the Causes of Learners' Disengagement in the Basic Education Key Stages 1 and 2 to formulate intervention in order to address the issues and concerns regarding grade retention.

II. OBJECTIVES

This study determined the causes and performance of learners' disengagement in the basic education key stages 1 and 2.

- To identify the primary factors contributing to learners' disengagement in key stages 1 and 2.
- To examine how teacher-learner interaction in the classroom influences learners' disengagement.
- To analyze the impact of technology utilization in the classroom on learners' disengagement.
- To evaluate how the assessment of learning outcomes affects learners' disengagement.
- To propose innovative activities aimed at mitigating learners' disengagement in key stages 1 and 2.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed-method research design as this study is about knowing the causes of learners' disengagement of key stages 1 and 2 in selected schools of Juban District.

Further, descriptive study is characterized as simply the attempt to determine, describe or identify what are the causes of disengagement. It is aimed at casting light on current issues or problems through a process of data collection that enabled them to describe the situation more completely than was possible without employing this method. The three main purposes of this study can be explained as describing, explaining and validating research findings. In its essence, descriptive study was used to describe various aspects of the phenomenon. In its popular format, descriptive research was used to describe characteristics and/or behavior of sample population.

Finally, it was aimed at casting light on current issues or problems through a process of data collection that enabled them to describe the situation more completely than was possible without employing this method.

Teachers at the selected schools in the Juban District were the chosen respondents of the study. There were thirty (30) teachers from selected Juban District Elementary Schools as respondents. In each identified school, the study has six (6) teachers as respondents. Añog Elementary School has six (6) teachers, Bacolod Elementary School has six (6) teachers, Tampi Elementary School has six (6) teachers, Tublijon Elementary School has six (6) teachers and Sipaya Elementary School has six (6) teachers.

IV. RESULTS

This chapter presents the results derived from the collected and statistically analyzed data. Quantitative data are systematically organized in tables, accompanied by detailed statistical interpretations. Meanwhile, qualitative data and insights are presented using a thematic approach to highlight recurring patterns and key perspectives.

A. Primary Factors Contributing to Learners' Disengagement in Key Stages 1 and 2

Teachers' interaction with learners plays a vital role in shaping students' engagement in the classroom. Table 1.1 reveals several key indicators contributing to learners' disengagement in Key Stages 1 and 2. Among these, reduced direct contact learning time emerged as the most significant factor, with a mean score of 4.63, described as Always, indicating that limited face-to-face interaction consistently leads to disengagement.

Another critical concern was unclear classroom routines, which obtained a mean of 4.42 and was also rated Always, suggesting that a lack of structured procedures frequently causes confusion and withdrawal among learners. Other indicators were rated Often, including teachers dominating the discussion (mean = 3.75), teachers' control of learners' disruptive behavior (mean = 3.62), and teachers' control of pupils' restlessness (mean = 3.75). These findings imply that while classroom management and teacher-centered approaches occur regularly, they moderately influence disengagement compared to the more persistent issues of unclear routines and reduced direct contact time.

The overall average mean score of 4.03, categorized as Often, reflects that teacher-learner interaction factors significantly affect learners' engagement, with some issues occurring consistently and others moderately.

Table 1. Teacher-Learner Interaction as a Factor Contributing to Learners' Disengagement

Indicators	Mean	Descriptions
Reduced direct contact learning time	4.63	Always
Teachers' control of learners' disruptive behavior	3.62	Often
Teachers control pupils' restlessness	3.75	Often
Unclear classroom routines	4.42	Always
Teachers dominate the discussion	3.75	Often
Average	**4.03**	**Often**

In relation to learning technology as a factor contributing to learners' disengagement, Table 1.2 presents

several key concerns. The most prominent issue identified was too many distractions in the learning materials, which

received the highest mean score of 4.57, described as Always, indicating that excessive distractions consistently lead to disengagement. Closely following was unclear learning task instructions with a mean of 4.56, also rated Always, suggesting that unclear directions frequently hinder learner focus and participation.

Similarly, materials that have limited engagement scored highly, with a mean of 4.53 and rated Always, showing that content lacking interactive or stimulating elements strongly affects learner motivation. Poor design of learning materials was another notable factor, with a mean of 4.02 and rated Often, while lecture-style contents received the lowest mean score of 3.67, also categorized as Often, though still contributing to disengagement.

The overall average mean score of 4.27, described as Always, indicates that issues related to the design and delivery of learning technologies consistently play a substantial role in learner disengagement.

Table 2 Learning Technology as a Factor Contributing to Learners' Disengagement

Indicators	Mean	Descriptions
Poor design of learning materials	4.02	Often
Materials that have limited engagement	4.53	Always
Lecture-style contents	3.67	Often
Too many distractions in the learning materials	4.57	Always
Unclear learning task instructions	4.56	Always
Average	**4.27**	**Always**

The data on assessment of learning outcomes as a factor contributing to learners' disengagement reveal several important insights. The indicator with the highest mean score was instructions in the assessment are complex, which received a mean of 4.21, described as Always, indicating that overly complex instructions consistently contribute to disengagement. This was followed by learners being unfamiliar with the assessment format, with a mean of 4.02 and rated Often, suggesting that unfamiliarity with assessment types frequently hinders learner confidence and participation.

Other contributing factors were also rated Often, including assessment contents are not interactive (mean = 3.68), delayed feedback about assessment results (mean = 3.67), and assessment contents focus too much on right and wrong answers (mean = 3.54). These findings imply that while all indicators influence disengagement, complexity of instructions stands out as the most persistent issue.

The overall average mean score of 3.82, categorized as Often, suggests that the way assessments are designed and delivered plays a significant role in learners' disengagement, with some factors occurring regularly and others moderately.

Table 3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes as a Factor Contributing to Learners' Disengagement

Indicators	Mean	Descriptions
Assessment contents are not interactive	3.68	Often
Learners are unfamiliar with the assessment format	4.02	Often
Assessment contents focus much on the right and wrong answers	3.54	Often
Instructions in the assessment are complex	4.21	Always
Delayed feedback about assessment results	3.67	Often
Average	**3.82**	**Often**

B. How the Teacher-Learner Interaction in the Classroom Affects Learners' Disengagement

The qualitative data revealed several patterns in how teacher-learner interactions contribute to disengagement among pupils. The recurring themes were that teachers' selective attention affects class participation, limited knowledge of learners' ideas, and providing complex instructions reducing active engagement.

➤ *Selective Attention Affects Participation*

When teachers consistently direct the students' attention toward a select group of students, often those who are more vocal or academically inclined, others feel excluded. This selective attention leads to a sense of invisibility among less-recognized pupils, discouraging them from participating in class activities.

Participant 2 said, "I've noticed that when I unintentionally focus more on my top-performing students, the quieter ones tend to participate less in the class. It's not that they don't have ideas; they just stop trying to share them because they feel overlooked."

Moreover, Participant 6 stated that "I've seen how selective attention can shape classroom dynamics. When the same few students are always called on, others start to believe their input isn't valued. It's subtle, but over time, it affects their willingness to participate."

Participant 1 also noted that consistently calling on the same vocal students can subtly shape classroom dynamics, leading others to feel their contributions are not valued. Over time, this perception diminishes their willingness to participate. Similarly, Participant 5 recounted instances where students expressed feeling "invisible" during discussions. She

stressed the importance of being intentional in engaging all learners, not just those who readily respond, highlighting the need for inclusive teaching practices.

A consistent pattern of how teachers' selective attention can negatively impact classroom participation. When teachers habitually focus on a few vocal or high-achieving students, it inadvertently marginalizes quieter or less-recognized learners. This exclusion fosters a sense of invisibility, as highlighted by multiple participants. Collectively, these insights underscore the importance of equitable engagement strategies to ensure all students feel seen, heard, and encouraged to participate actively in the learning process.

➢ *Limited Acknowledgment of Learners' Ideas*

When students' ideas are overlooked or not given space during classroom discussions, they tend to feel undervalued. This destruction of learner voice creates an environment where students hesitate to share their thoughts, fearing criticism or disregard.

According to Participant 3, "I've seen this happen in my own classroom. When students feel like their ideas aren't being heard or are quickly dismissed, they just stop participating. It's like they think, 'Why bother?' And honestly, it's heartbreaking because some of those quiet students have brilliant insights".

Participant 4 said, "I've noticed that when I don't actively encourage student input, the energy in the room drops. Students become passive. They're afraid of being wrong or ignored, so they just stay silent. Giving them space to speak really changes the dynamic." Likewise, Participant 7 stated, "I think when we suppress their voices, even unintentionally, it sends a message that their thoughts aren't valuable. That leads to disengagement. I've found that when I validate their contributions, even if they're off-track, they're more willing to take risks and join discussions."

Therefore, limiting acknowledgement of the student ideas can significantly hinder participation and engagement. When learners feel their contributions are undervalued, they often withdraw from discussions, fearing judgment or irrelevance. However, validating student input, even when it's imperfect, can empower learners to take intellectual risks and become more active participants. Thus, it underscores the importance of fostering an inclusive and supportive environment where all students' ideas are welcomed and valued.

➢ *Complex Instructions Reducing Active Engagement*

Instructions that are overly complex or unclear often leave learners confused and uncertain about what is expected of them. Instead of seeking clarification, many students resort to passive compliance, completing tasks mechanically without genuine understanding or interest.

Participant 8 noticed that when she gives instructions that are too detailed or have too many steps, her students tend to just nod and go through the motions. They rarely ask questions or show any real engagement. Moreover,

Participant 9 also observed the same thing in his class. When directions aren't clear or are too complex, students seem overwhelmed. Instead of trying to understand, they just do what they think is expected, without really grasping the task.

It illustrates how overly complex or unclear instructions can hinder student engagement and understanding. When directions are not straightforward, learners often feel confused and uncertain about what is expected of them. Instead of seeking clarification, many resort to passive compliance, completing tasks mechanically without genuine interest or comprehension. The participants' insights emphasize the importance of clarity and simplicity in instructional delivery to foster meaningful learning and active participation.

C. *How the Use of Learning Resources Affects Learners' Disengagement*

The integration of technology in education has transformed the way students interact with learning materials, offering new opportunities for engagement and personalized instruction. However, when not thoughtfully implemented, educational technology can inadvertently contribute to learner disengagement. This section explores how learning resources affect learners' engagement.

➢ *Unclear Technology Design Leads to Skipped Tasks*

Participants reported that when educational technology tools are not well-designed, for instance, lacking clarity, structure, or relevance, they tend to disengage from the learning process. Tasks that are confusing or not intuitively presented often lead students to skip them entirely, as they struggle to find meaning or direction in the activity.

As stated by Participant 2, "When the platform we use has unclear instructions or a cluttered interface, my students often just skip the activity. They tell me they don't understand what to do, and I can't blame them; it's not intuitive at all." Additionally, Participant 5 said, "I've noticed that when tasks are not well-structured or seem disconnected from the lesson objectives, students lose interest quickly. They either rush through it without understanding or skip it entirely."

Participant 3 also quoted, "There was this one module with a confusing layout and vague directions. More than half of my class didn't complete it. They said it was too hard to follow, and honestly, I agreed with them." Participant 6 added, "Educational tools should guide learners, not confuse them. If the design lacks clarity or relevance, students won't engage. I've seen them skip tasks simply because they couldn't figure out what was expected."

Hence, when digital tools lack clarity, structure, or relevance, students often disengage, leading to skipped tasks and diminished learning outcomes. Teachers consistently observed that confusing layouts, vague instructions, and disconnected content hinder student participation. It further affirms that effective educational technology must prioritize user-friendly, coherent, and meaningful design to support student learning and prevent disengagement.

➤ *Lack of Interaction Reduces Interest*

Technology-based learning materials that offer minimal opportunities for interaction or creativity were found to discourage active participation. Pupils expressed that when digital content is overly passive or repetitive, it fails to capture their interest, resulting in reduced motivation and involvement in classroom activities.

Participant 1 said, "Some of the apps we use are too repetitive. The students already know what to expect, and it doesn't challenge them anymore. Their participation drops significantly." Participant 4 added, "I've noticed that when the digital content is just videos or slides with no interaction, my students quickly lose interest. They become passive and disengaged." Moreover, Participant 5 also said, "Technology is helpful, but when the materials don't allow students to explore or create, they tend to tune out. They need something more hands-on to stay involved."

Technology-based learning materials lacking interactive or creative elements significantly contribute to pupil disengagement in the classroom. Teachers observed that when digital content is overly passive, such as repetitive apps or non-interactive videos and slides, students quickly lose interest and become less motivated to participate. Teachers highlight that predictable and non-challenging materials fail to stimulate learners, leading to a decline in classroom involvement.

➤ *Vague Instructions Lower Participation*

When tasks embedded in learning technologies are vague or lack explicit instructions, pupils often feel uncertain about how to proceed. This ambiguity leads to hesitation and reduced participation, as learners become more focused on trying to interpret the task than engaging with its content meaningfully.

According to Participant 7, "There are times when the instructions in the learning software are too vague. My pupils often ask me what to do next, and some just stop trying altogether." Participant 8 also quoted, "I've had to re-explain digital tasks multiple times because the directions weren't intuitive. It really affects how much the students participate."

Vague or poorly explained tasks within learning technologies can significantly hinder pupil engagement. Teachers reported that when digital instructions lack clarity, students often become confused and unsure of how to proceed, which leads to hesitation and reduced participation. These insights underscore the importance of designing technology-based tasks with clear, user-friendly instructions to support meaningful engagement.

D. *How the Assessment of Learning Outcomes Affects Learners' Disengagement*

Assessment plays a critical role in shaping learners' engagement and motivation, yet its design and delivery can sometimes lead to unintended disengagement. This section explores how certain assessment practices, such as non-interactive formats, unfamiliar structures, and an overemphasis on right versus wrong answers, can negatively impact students' willingness to participate and their overall learning experience.

➤ *Non-Interactive Assessments Cause Boredom*

The data revealed that assessments lacking interactive elements, such as visual aids, hands-on tasks, or engaging formats, often lead to boredom. When assessments are purely text-based or repetitive, students lose interest quickly, which negatively affects their motivation and overall engagement with the learning process.

Participant 2 quoted, "My students are more engaged when assessments involve activities or visuals. When it's just text-based, they tend to get bored and disconnected from the task." Participant 6 also said, "I've noticed that when assessments are just paper-and-pencil tests, many of my students lose focus quickly. They seem uninterested and often rush through without much effort." Participant 7 added, "I can see the difference in motivation, when assessments are interactive, students participate more actively. But with traditional formats, they often appear disengaged and less enthusiastic."

Additionally, Participants 8 and 9 both explained that repetitive assessment formats may contribute to reduced student attention and engagement. Some learners have hinted at feeling uninterested, which seems to correlate with a dip in their academic performance.

Hence, a clear connection between non-interactive assessment formats and student disengagement. Teachers observed that assessments lacking visual aids, hands-on activities, or engaging formats often result in boredom and reduced motivation among learners. Participant feedback consistently pointed to the ineffectiveness of traditional, text-heavy assessments in maintaining student interest. It suggests that incorporating interactive elements into assessments may be crucial for sustaining learner engagement and improving outcomes.

➤ *Unfamiliar Formats Lead to Task Avoidance*

Pupils expressed difficulty in completing assessments that use unfamiliar formats. When they are not accustomed to the structure or style of the tasks, they tend to avoid participation altogether. This avoidance stems from uncertainty and a lack of confidence, which contributes to disengagement during evaluation activities. Participant 1 said, "Whenever I introduce a new type of assessment, some students hesitate to participate. They seem unsure of what to do and often choose not to complete the task."

Additionally, Participant 3 noticed that when the format of the test is different from what they're used to, many pupils become anxious and avoid trying altogether. Participant 4 further agreed that students tend to perform better when they are familiar with the structure of the assessment. If it's something new or unexpected, they often disengage or ask to skip it. Similarly, Participant 5 observed that unfamiliar

formats seem to intimidate some learners. Instead of asking for help, they just refuse to attempt the activity.

Thus, there is a strong link between unfamiliar assessment formats and learner avoidance. When students encounter tasks with structures or styles they are not accustomed to, they often experience uncertainty and a lack of confidence, which leads to disengagement. It suggests that consistency and familiarity in assessment design play a crucial role in maintaining student engagement and encouraging active participation.

➤ *Focus on Right/Wrong Answers Reduces Motivation*

Learners also noted that assessments heavily focused on identifying correct versus incorrect answers can be discouraging. This binary approach often overlooks the learning process and critical thinking, making students feel pressured rather than supported. As a result, their motivation to engage meaningfully with assessments diminishes.

Participants 10 and 11 observed that students get discouraged when assessments only highlight what they got wrong. It makes them feel like failing rather than learning. Also, "when the focus is just on correct answers, students tend to worry more about making mistakes than understanding the lesson. This pressure affects their willingness to participate." Participant 12 further added, "Learners often lose interest when assessments don't allow room for explanation or reasoning. They feel it's all about getting the answer right, not about how they think or solve problems."

It underscored the negative impact of assessments that emphasize right and wrong answers on student motivation. This binary approach tends to overlook the value of the learning process and critical thinking, leading students to feel more pressured than supported suggesting that a more process-oriented and reflective approach to assessment may foster deeper engagement and motivation among learners.

Drawing from teachers' insights, the data above reveals that when assessments lack engaging elements, present unfamiliar formats, or focus solely on correctness, learners often respond with boredom, anxiety, and avoidance. It highlights the importance of designing assessments that are interactive, familiar, and process-oriented to foster deeper engagement and support meaningful learning.

E. Proposed Innovative Activities in Mitigating Learners' Disengagement

➤ *Rationale*

Learner disengagement remains a pressing challenge in today's educational landscape, often leading to decreased academic performance, lack of motivation, and increased dropout rates. Traditional teaching methods may no longer fully address the evolving needs, interests, and learning styles of 21st-century learners. To effectively respond to this issue, it is essential to implement innovative and learner-centered activities that promote engagement, foster curiosity, and support holistic development.

The Department of Education (DepEd) recognizes the importance of adapting teaching strategies to meet learners' needs. In DepEd Order No. 35, s. of 2016, the department emphasized the need for continuous professional development and the use of appropriate, innovative strategies to improve teaching and learning. It highlights that successful teaching involves selecting and implementing effective instructional strategies that promote students' learning and holistic development.

Moreover, the shift to flexible learning modalities during and after the pandemic has further underscored the need for creative approaches that can bridge learning gaps and re-engage students. By integrating technology, gamification, collaborative projects, and real-world applications into the curriculum, educators can create dynamic learning environments that inspire participation and reduce disengagement.

➤ *Goals*

The proposed innovative activities aim to mitigate learners' disengagement. Specifically, it aims to:

- Introduce creative and interactive learning activities that capture students' interest and sustain their motivation throughout the learning process.
- Encourage learners to participate actively through hands-on projects, peer collaboration, and real-world problem-solving tasks.
- Address different learning styles and preferences by incorporating multimedia, technology, and flexible learning formats.
- Build a supportive classroom culture where students feel valued, connected, and confident to express themselves.
- Increase student performance and retention by making learning more meaningful, relevant, and enjoyable.
- Provide opportunities for learners to explore, experiment, and innovate through open-ended tasks and creative expression.

V. DISCUSSION

I. Primary Factors Contributing to Learners' Disengagement in Key Stages 1 and 2

➤ *Teacher-Learner Interaction as a Factor Contributing to Learners' Disengagement*

The findings presented in Table 1.1 underscore the critical role of teacher-learner interaction in shaping student engagement during Key Stages 1 and 2. The highest-rated factor, reduced direct contact learning time, suggests that limited face-to-face instructional time significantly hinders learners' ability to connect with both the content and the teacher. This aligns with the Teaching Through Interactions (TTI) framework, which posits that student engagement is not merely a trait but a dynamic outcome shaped by the quality of teacher-student interactions (Hofkens & Pianta, 2022). When instructional time is minimized, opportunities for meaningful relational and instructional support diminish, leading to disengagement.

The second most influential factor, unclear classroom routines, highlights the importance of structure in maintaining engagement. Predictable routines provide a sense of security and autonomy, which are essential psychological needs for learners. According to Connell and Wellborn's self-system model, when students feel competent, autonomous, and related to others, they are more likely to engage emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally. Unclear routines disrupt this balance, fostering confusion and detachment (Pérez-Salas et al., 2021).

Teacher dominance in discussions and inadequate control of disruptive behavior further illustrate how classroom dynamics can either support or hinder engagement. When teachers monopolize discourse, students may feel undervalued or disconnected from the learning process. Similarly, unchecked disruptive behavior can create a chaotic environment, reducing the overall quality of learning experiences. These findings echoed Hofkens and Pianta's (2022) assertion that engagement emerges from relationally mediated participation, where students are challenged and supported through consistent and effective interactions. Lastly, pupil restlessness reflects a behavioral manifestation of disengagement, often stemming from unmet psychological needs or a lack of stimulating instruction.

➢ *Learning Technology as a Factor Contributing to Learners' Disengagement*

The data presented in Table 1.2 highlights critical concerns regarding the use of learning technology in primary education and its impact on learner engagement. The most significant factor, too many distractions in the learning materials, suggesting that digital content overloaded with animations, pop-ups, or irrelevant multimedia can overwhelm young learners, diverting their attention from core learning objectives. This aligns with findings by Mayer (2009), whose Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning emphasizes that extraneous elements in digital content can overload working memory and hinder meaningful learning.

Closely following this is the issue of unclear learning task instructions, which can leave learners confused and uncertain about expectations. In early education, clarity and simplicity are essential for fostering autonomy and confidence. When instructions are vague or overly complex, students may disengage due to frustration or fear of failure. This is supported by Bergdahl et al. (2020), who found that poorly structured digital tasks often lead to reduced motivation and participation among primary learners.

The fact that materials with limited engagement further underscores the importance of interactivity and stimulation in digital learning environments. Passive content, such as lecture-style videos or static texts, fails to capture the attention of young learners who thrive on exploration and interaction. Similarly, poor design of learning materials and lecture-style content reflects a mismatch between the pedagogical potential of technology and its actual implementation. When technology replicates traditional, teacher-centered approaches, it misses the opportunity to foster creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.

The overall average indicates a strong consensus that the design and delivery of learning technologies significantly influence learner engagement. These findings suggest that educational technology must be thoughtfully curated, with attention to cognitive load, clarity, interactivity, and age-appropriate design. Teachers and instructional designers should be trained not only in using technology but in applying learning science principles to ensure that digital tools support rather than hinder engagement.

Moreover, Zyngier's review of student disengagement in primary schooling emphasizes that technology can either empower or isolate learners depending on its application (Zyngier, 2025). Programs that fail to incorporate social support and interactive elements often reinforce students' sense of detachment. In contrast, when technology is used to foster collaboration, creativity, and agency, it can significantly enhance engagement. This duality highlights the need for educators to critically assess not just the presence of technology in the classroom, but its pedagogical integration.

In light of these findings, the implications for practice are clear: educators must receive adequate training in digital pedagogy, and schools should prioritize technologies that support active, student-centered learning. Without these supports, technology risks becoming a barrier rather than a bridge to meaningful engagement.

➢ *Assessment of Learning Outcomes as a Factor Contributing to Learners' Disengagement*

The data on assessment of learning outcomes reveals several critical insights into how assessment design and delivery can influence learner engagement in Key Stages 1 and 2. The most prominent factor, complex instructions in assessments, suggests that when learners struggle to understand what is being asked of them, their cognitive load increases, leading to frustration and disengagement. This is particularly concerning in early education, where clarity and accessibility are essential for fostering confidence and participation.

The second-highest rated factor, unfamiliarity with assessment formats, further emphasizes the importance of consistency and scaffolding in assessment practices. When students encounter unfamiliar formats without adequate preparation, they may feel anxious or incapable, which undermines their motivation to engage. Zyngier (2025) noted that such systemic practices often alienate students, especially when assessments are perceived as disconnected from their lived experiences and learning contexts

Other notable contributors include non-interactive assessment content, delayed feedback, and an overemphasis on right and wrong answers. These factors reflect a traditional assessment paradigm that prioritizes correctness over process and growth. Bae and Kokka (2016) argued that such approaches reduce opportunities for students to create

meaning and invest cognitively in tasks, thereby undermining engagement. Their research advocates for performance-based assessments that emphasize relevance, authenticity, and higher-order thinking, elements that are often missing in conventional formats.

Therefore, it indicates that assessment practices, when not thoughtfully designed, can significantly contribute to disengagement. It also suggests a need for assessment reform in primary education, focusing on clarity, familiarity, interactivity, and timely feedback. By adopting assessment for learning strategies and integrating student voice into assessment design, educators can transform assessments from a source of anxiety into a tool for empowerment and engagement.

II. How the Teacher-Learner Interaction in the Classroom Affects Learners' Disengagement

The findings reveal critical insights into how teacher-learner interactions influence learners' disengagement in the classroom. Three major themes emerged: Selective Attention Affecting Participation, Limited Acknowledgment of Learners' Ideas, and Complex Instructions Reducing Active Engagement. These patterns underscore the relational dynamics between teachers and students and their profound impact on learners' motivation, participation, and sense of belonging.

The data show that when teachers consistently focus on a select group of vocal or high-achieving students, others feel marginalized. This selective attention fosters a sense of invisibility among quieter learners, leading to reduced participation. Participants noted that even unintentional favoritism can discourage quieter students from sharing their ideas. This aligned with Hofkens and Pianta's (2022) assertion that engagement is not merely a student trait but a product of relational interactions in the classroom. Their Teaching Through Interactions (TTI) framework emphasizes that meaningful engagement arises when students feel consistently supported and challenged through equitable teacher interactions.

Participants also described how limited acknowledgment of learners' ideas leads to emotional withdrawal and passive behavior. When students perceive their ideas as undervalued, they become hesitant to participate, fearing criticism or irrelevance. This finding resonates with the self-system model proposed by Connell and Wellborn (1991), which posited that engagement is driven by the satisfaction of psychological needs: relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Suppressing student voice undermines these needs, particularly relatedness and autonomy, thereby fostering disengagement (Pérez-Salas et al., 2021).

The study further found that complex or unclear instructions result in passive compliance, where students complete tasks mechanically without genuine understanding. This behavior reflects a lack of cognitive engagement, as students are not mentally invested in the learning process. Fredricks et al. (2004) define cognitive engagement as the

effort and strategy used in learning, which diminishes when learners are confused or overwhelmed. Clear, concise instructions are therefore essential to promote active learning and deeper comprehension.

These findings highlight the importance of inclusive and intentional teaching practices. Teachers must be aware of how their attention, feedback, and instructional clarity affect student engagement. Equitable participation, validation of student ideas, and simplified instructions are not just pedagogical choices; they are essential strategies to combat disengagement. As Pianta et al. (2013) emphasized, improving the quality of teacher-student interactions can significantly enhance student outcomes across diverse classroom settings.

III. How the Use of Technology in the Classroom Affects Learners' Disengagement

The integration of technology in classroom instruction has introduced new possibilities for personalized learning and engagement. However, the findings of this study reveal that when educational technology is not well-designed or implemented without clear instructional strategies, it can contribute to learner disengagement. Three key themes emerged: Unclear Technology Design Leads to Skipped Tasks, Lack of Interaction Reduces Interest, and Vague Instructions Lower Participation.

Participants consistently reported that when digital platforms lack clarity, structure, or relevance, students tend to skip tasks or disengage entirely. Confusing layouts and vague instructions diminish the perceived value of the activity. This aligns with findings from Bergdahl, Nouri, and Fors (2020), who emphasized that poor design in technology-enhanced learning (TEL) environments can lead to disengagement, especially when students struggle to interpret tasks or navigate interfaces. Their study found that while digital skills correlate with engagement, even students with high digital proficiency may disengage when faced with poorly designed tools.

Teachers observed that technology-based materials lacking interactive or creative elements fail to sustain student interest. Passive content, such as repetitive apps or non-interactive slides, leads to reduced motivation and participation. This supports the evidence map by Bond et al. (2020), which found that behavioral engagement is most affected by the nature of digital content, with interactive and blended learning formats showing higher engagement levels. The study highlights the importance of designing technology that fosters active involvement rather than passive consumption.

Vague explained tasks embedded in digital platforms were found to cause confusion and hesitation among learners. Participants noted that students often required repeated clarification, which disrupted the flow of learning. This finding is echoed in research by Bergdahl et al. (2020), who found that ambiguity in digital instructions negatively impacts engagement and performance. Their study suggests

that clear, intuitive task design is essential for meaningful participation in TEL environments.

These findings underscore the need for intentional and learner-centered design in educational technology. Tools must be intuitive, interactive, and aligned with instructional goals to support engagement. Teachers play a critical role in mediating technology use, ensuring that digital tasks are clearly explained and meaningfully integrated into the learning process. As digitalization continues to shape education, understanding the nuanced relationship between technology and engagement is vital for fostering inclusive and effective learning environments (Bergdahl et al., 2020).

IV. How the Assessment of Learning Outcomes Affects Learners' Disengagement

Assessment is a powerful tool in shaping learners' motivation, participation, and overall engagement. However, the findings of this study reveal that certain assessment practices, particularly those that are non-interactive, unfamiliar, or overly focused on correctness, can inadvertently lead to disengagement. Three key themes emerged: Non-Interactive Assessments Cause Boredom, Unfamiliar Formats Lead to Task Avoidance, and Focus on Right/Wrong Answers Reduces Motivation.

Teachers consistently observed that traditional, text-heavy assessments lacking visual or hands-on elements often result in boredom and reduced motivation. Students tend to disengage when assessments do not stimulate their curiosity or offer varied formats. This aligns with the findings of Evans and Zhu (2023), who developed the Assessment Engagement Scale to measure how students interact with assessment contexts. Their research emphasizes that meaningful engagement in assessment is enhanced when students understand their role and are given opportunities to interact with the content in diverse ways.

The data also shows that unfamiliar assessment formats can cause anxiety and avoidance among learners. When students are unsure of how to approach a task due to its unfamiliar structure, they often choose not to participate. This supports the work of Marôco et al. (2016), who found that students' engagement is closely tied to their confidence and familiarity with assessment expectations. The Assessment Engagement Scale highlights the importance of clarity and consistency in assessment design to foster confidence and reduce avoidance behaviors.

Participants noted that assessments emphasizing correct versus incorrect answers discourage critical thinking and diminish motivation. Students feel pressured to avoid mistakes rather than explore ideas, which undermines the learning process. This finding resonates with the work of Dalrymple et al. (2014), who argued that assessment should be process-oriented and reflective to support deeper learning. When assessments prioritize understanding and reasoning over binary correctness, students are more likely to engage meaningfully.

These findings underscore the need for inclusive, interactive, and process-focused assessment practices. Teachers must consider how assessment design affects learners' emotional and cognitive engagement. Incorporating familiar formats, interactive elements, and opportunities for reasoning can transform assessments from mere evaluation tools into meaningful learning experiences. As Evans and Zhu (2023) suggested, assessments should promote dialogue between students and teachers about expectations, roles, and learning goals.

V. Proposed Innovative Activities in Mitigating Learners' Disengagement

Learner disengagement continues to be a significant concern in today's educational landscape, often resulting in poor academic performance, diminished motivation, and increased dropout rates. The traditional methods of instruction, while foundational, may no longer be sufficient to meet the evolving needs of 21st-century learners who thrive in dynamic, interactive, and personalized environments. As outlined in the rationale, the Department of Education (DepEd) has recognized this shift, particularly in DepEd Order No. 35, s. of 2016, which emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development and the adoption of innovative teaching strategies that promote holistic student development.

The proposed activities under the themes of teacher-learner interaction, technology utilization, and assessment of learning outcomes are designed to address these challenges by fostering engagement, curiosity, and meaningful learning experiences. Enhancing teacher-learner interaction through activities such as role reversal, feedback carousels, and learning contracts encourages mutual respect, empathy, and accountability. These strategies empower students to take ownership of their learning while enabling teachers to better understand and respond to individual needs. Paolini (2015), said that effective teaching is closely linked to active learning, constructive feedback, and culturally responsive practices, all of which are embedded in these proposed activities.

Technology utilization plays a pivotal role in modern education, especially in the wake of the pandemic, which accelerated the shift to flexible learning modalities. Integrating tools such as augmented reality, podcasts, digital escape rooms, and AI-powered study assistants not only makes learning more accessible but also more immersive and personalized. Kim and Song (2023) found that technology-mediated feedback in online formative assessments significantly enhances teacher-learner interaction and supports differentiated instruction. These findings underscore the importance of using digital tools to create engaging and inclusive learning environments that cater to diverse learning styles and preferences.

Assessment of learning outcomes must also evolve to reflect the complexity and diversity of student learning. Traditional assessments often fail to capture the full spectrum of student understanding and creativity. The proposed activities, such as gamified quizzes, performance-based assessment fairs, and digital portfolios, offer authentic and

formative assessment opportunities that allow students to demonstrate their learning in varied and meaningful ways. Research supports the use of performance-based and formative assessments to improve teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. These methods not only provide a more accurate picture of student progress but also motivate learners by making assessments relevant and enjoyable.

Therefore, the proposed innovative activities are not merely supplementary strategies but essential components of a responsive and effective educational framework. They align with national directives and global best practices, offering practical solutions to the pressing issue of learner disengagement. By enhancing teacher-learner interaction, leveraging technology, and reimagining assessment practices, educators can create vibrant learning environments that inspire participation, foster growth, and ultimately improve student performance and retention.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

➢ *Conclusion*
- To sustain learner engagement and improve outcomes, teachers must prioritize stronger teacher- learner interactions, structured technology use and simplified timely assessment feedback.
- Teacher-learner interaction plays a vital role in either promoting or hindering student engagement. When teachers exhibit selective attention, overlook learners' ideas, or provide overly complex instructions, students tend to disengage, underscoring the need for equitable participation and clear, inclusive communication strategies.
- Learning resources play an important role in shaping learner engagement. When these resources lack clarity, interaction, or explicit instructions, learners experience uncertainty and reduced participation, highlighting the need for well-structured and interactive materials to support active involvement.
- Assessment of learning outcomes can affect learner engagement when assessments lack interactivity, use unfamiliar formats, or focus mainly on correctness, learners may experience boredom, uncertainty, and reduced motivation, emphasizing the need for clear, engaging, and supportive assessment practices.
- To mitigate learners' disengagement, teachers should use collaborative activities, immersive technology like AI and virtual tours and creative assessments such as gamified quizzes to make learning feel more personal and interactive.

➢ *Recommendations*
- Teachers combine interactive, peer- led activities with streamlined digital tools and meaningful, timely feedback to create a learning environment that is both focused and deeply engaging.
- Promote equitable participation and use clear, inclusive communication strategies to ensure all learners feel valued and engaged.

- Develop clear, well-structured, and interactive learning resources with explicit instructions to foster active learner participation.
- Design assessments that are clear, interactive, and supportive, using familiar formats and constructive feedback to maintain learners' motivation and engagement.
- To boost learners', focus and motivation, combine interactive peer-led activities, immersive digital tools like AI and virtual reality and creative timely feedback to make learning feel personal and relevant.

➢ *Significance of the Present Study*
This study contributed significantly to the understanding of learner disengagement in primary education. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, it offers a comprehensive view of the factors that hinder student engagement and provides practical solutions for educators. The findings align with national and global educational priorities that emphasize learner-centered, inclusive, and technology-enhanced teaching practices.

The study's proposed innovative activities serve as a blueprint for transforming traditional classrooms into dynamic learning environments. These strategies not only address disengagement but also promote holistic development, creativity, and lifelong learning. As education continues to evolve, this research provides timely and actionable insights that can guide policy, practice, and future investigations.

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