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Quiet Now, Proof Later: Academic Stereotyping, Silence, and Help-Seeking among Industrial Technology Students

Karl Lorenze Gumsat[1], Lalaine Lopez[2], Pearlie Mae Pagat[2], Nova M. Cabias[1*]

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ABSTRACT

Technical students are often judged by what others can see: their silence in class, their program, their fatigue, and their phones. Little research has examined how students perceive and respond to such judgments, particularly in Philippine higher education. Twenty-one students took part in face-to-face semi-structured interviews after the second semester of academic year 2025–2026. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, checked by each participant, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Five themes describe evaluative judgments drawn from observable behavior, generational stereotypes, the separation of an observed trait from the judgment drawn about it, silent responses combined with attempts to prove one's competence, and appeals to be understood before being judged. The accounts also included anticipated judgment and cases in which students reported no direct labeling. Some students connected fear of judgment with reluctance to participate or seek help; others described help-seeking difficulties without attributing them to stereotyping. The findings suggest that teachers and counselors can respond by inviting students to explain their circumstances and by making support approachable. The proposed relationship between perceived judgment and participation remains an interpretation rather than a demonstrated causal sequence.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers and peers judge students quickly, and they do so on the basis of what is observable. A student who does not respond instantly is seen as lacking knowledge. A student who submits work late is seen as lazy. A student in a technical program may be assumed to be good with tools but weak with ideas. Such inferences are ordinary, but when they harden into labels they can shape how students see themselves, whether they speak, and whom they ask for help (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Link & Phelan, 2001; Steele, 1997).

Studies of stereotyping in education have concentrated mainly on group-level stereotypes such as those based on race, gender, or socioeconomic class, and most have used experimental or survey methods (Major & O'Brien, 2005; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Less attention has been paid to the everyday, behavior-based labels applied to students in ordinary classrooms: tahimik (quiet), tamad (lazy), puro cellphone (always on the phone). Even less attention has been given to how students perceive and respond to these labels in collectivist cultures, where concerns for harmony, face, and respect for teachers limit what students can say (Bulatao, 1964; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000).

Two further reasons make this question important in the Philippine context. First, discussions of "Generation Z" students often attribute their attitudes to technology and parenting style, even though research on generational differences does not support these claims (Costanza *et al.*, 2012; Rudolph *et al.*, 2021). Second, students in technical and vocational programs carry a long-standing perception that their courses are less academic than others, a perception tied to the lower esteem often given to vocational education (Billett, 2011). Philippine policy reviews likewise call for improving the public image of technical and vocational education (Orbeta & Esguerra, 2016). Students in a college of industrial technology may therefore meet labels from three directions at once: their behavior, their generation, and their program.

Within guidance and counseling, these everyday labels matter because they sit upstream of help-seeking. Students who expect to be judged as incapable tend to avoid asking questions (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997), and students who doubt their fit in a setting read ordinary setbacks as proof that they do not belong (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Understanding the label from the student's side can therefore inform how teachers, advisers, and counselors approach students in difficulty.

This study explored how students in a college of industrial technology at a Philippine state university experienced, interpreted, and responded to academic stereotyping. It was guided by one central question: How do students in a Philippine college of industrial technology experience, make sense of, and respond to academic stereotyping? Four sub-questions guided the inquiry:

1. What labels and assumptions do students report meeting in their academic life, and in what situations?
2. How do students interpret these labels and the intentions of those who express them?
3. How do students respond emotionally, academically, and interpersonally, including in their sense of belonging

[1] Mariano Marcos State University, Batac City, Ilocos Norte, Philippines
[2] La Consolacion University Philippines, Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines
[*] Corresponding author's email: n02205018@gmail.com

and help-seeking?

4. What support do students want from teachers and the university?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Labels, Inference, and Expectation

The labeling perspective holds that a label does more than describe: it places a person in a category associated with undesirable features, which in turn alters how others treat that person (Becker, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001). In education, a related body of research shows that teachers' expectations can influence students' outcomes, although the effects are usually modest and depend on how accurate and rigid the expectation is (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

Attribution theory explains how such expectations form. People tend to interpret others' behavior in terms of stable traits and to underweight situational factors, a tendency known as the correspondence bias or fundamental attribution error (Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Ross, 1977). A late submission is read as laziness rather than a broken laptop; silence is read as ignorance rather than wariness. This framework is relevant here because many of the labels students reported were inferences about capacity drawn from a single behavior.

Stereotype Threat, Belonging, and Help-Seeking

When a negative stereotype is "in the air," students may worry about confirming it, and that worry can lower performance and pull them away from the domain (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Belonging uncertainty works in a similar way: students who doubt that people like them fit in a setting read small slights as evidence that they do not (Goodenow, 1993; Walton & Cohen, 2007). Both processes bear on help-seeking. Asking a question exposes what one does not know, so students who fear being seen as incapable often avoid it, even when help is available (Karabenick, 2003; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Recent studies in other settings show a similar pattern. University students in Malawi concealed psychological distress for fear of judgment and labeling and relied on peers rather than formal services (Kachingwe *et al.*, 2026), and Filipino high school students who experienced bullying tended to keep it to themselves while drawing support from peers, family, and selected teachers (Alipasa & Alipasa, 2026).

Responding to Labels

Labeled individuals are not passive. The stigma literature describes several responses to labeling, including withdrawal and concealment, deflection of the label, open challenge, and attempts to disprove it, with the choice depending on the cost of each option in a given situation (Major & O'Brien, 2005; Thoits, 2011).

Filipino Relational Values

In Filipino settings, those costs are shaped by relational values described in Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino psychology). Hiya, often glossed as shame, is better understood as sensitivity to how one stands in the eyes of others; it restrains self-assertion, especially toward people of higher status (Bulatao, 1964; Enriquez, 1992). Pakikisama, getting along with the group, places a premium on smooth relations and the avoidance of open conflict (Lynch, 1973). Pakikiramdam, a heightened attention to unspoken cues, lets people sense judgment that is never voiced (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). These values do not determine behavior, but they make some responses to a label, such as silence, easier and others, such as confronting a teacher, costlier.

Generational and Program Labels

Two kinds of group label are also relevant. Generational labels attribute characteristics to an age group and blame technology or parenting, yet research finds small differences that are largely confounded with age and period (Costanza *et al.*, 2012; Rudolph *et al.*, 2021). Even the phone, a common cue in such scripts, does not map neatly onto disengagement: among Filipino performing arts students, heavier TikTok use was associated with higher rather than lower class engagement (Lobo *et al.*, 2022). Program labels attach to students in technical and vocational programs, whose studies are seen as practical rather than intellectual (Billett, 2011)—an image problem noted in Philippine policy reviews (Orbeta & Esguerra, 2016).

These perspectives frame academic stereotyping as a cycle that runs from an observable cue to an inference by the observer, through the student's interpretation and response, and back to new observable cues. The study used this framing to sensitize the analysis, not to impose categories on it.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

The study used a qualitative descriptive-interpretive design with reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2022). This design suits questions about how people make sense of their experiences in their own terms. Reporting follows the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (O'Brien *et al.*, 2014).

Setting and Participants

The study took place in a state university in Northern Philippines that offers technology programs, and most of its students come from the surrounding provinces. Participants were recruited purposively from undergraduate classes. Inclusion criteria were enrollment in the college and willingness to describe one's experiences of being judged or labeled as a student. Students did not need to have experienced stereotyping to take part, so that the study could also capture its absence.

Twenty-one students took part, all male: 18 first-year and two second-year students. Three volunteered their age (18, 18, and 21); the oldest described entering college about 3 years later than his peers. One described himself as a

working student. Table 1 summarizes each participant's record. Codes were assigned at random and do not follow name order. A further partial record that carried no name was excluded because its consent could not be linked.

Table 1: Participants and the Main Label Each Reported

Code	Program, year	Language of interview	Main label or assumption reported	Source of the label
P01	1st	Filipino	"Mabait na bata, mahiyain" (a good, shy kid)	Friend
P02	1st	English	Lazy, because he plays games in free time	Classmate
P03	1st	Filipino	Automotive students are weak in academics, only know repair	Acquaintances outside the program
P04	1st	Filipino, Ilocano	Quiet, so "walang alam" (knows nothing); sensed rather than heard	Classmates
P05	1st	English	Automotive students are only good at practical work	Students unfamiliar with the program
P06	1st	Filipino	Too young and inexperienced to lead; his generation gives up easily	People in authority; strangers
P07	1st	Filipino, English	"Suplado," "tahimik masyado," "mahina sa klase," "pabigat sa group"	Groupmate; teachers (generational)
P08	2nd	English, Filipino	None directed at him in class; assumed to neglect studies for online games	Unspecified
P09	1st	English	Quiet, shy, not active	Classmates
P10	1st	Filipino	None voiced; sensed being seen as quiet	None identified
P11	1st	Filipino	Tahimik, mahiyain, not smart	Classmates during group work
P12	1st	English	Quiet, less active; sensed rather than heard	Classmates
P13	1st	English	Quiet, shy, does not participate	Classmates
P14	2nd	Filipino, English	None reported	—
P15	1st	English	Always tired, not serious about studies (working student)	Classmates and others
P16	1st	Ilocano, Filipino	Not capable of a class presentation	Classmate who is a close friend
P17	1st	English	None reported	—
P18	1st	English	Quiet, slow to understand	Classmates; educators (generational)
P19	2nd	Filipino	None reported	—
P20	1st	Filipino, English	"Tamad, puro cellphone, Gen Z kasi" (lazy, always on the phone, because Gen Z)	Subject teacher, in front of the class
P21	1st	English	"Last card" of the family	Family

Note: Codes were assigned at random. A dash indicates that no label was reported.

Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide had 31 open questions in eight parts: background; experiences of academic stereotyping; interpretation and meaning-making; emotional, academic, and interpersonal responses; belonging and help-seeking; navigating stereotyping; support needs; and a closing reflection. Eight follow-up probes invited examples, sequence, and meaning (e.g., "Can you give me a specific example?"). The guide was bilingual in English and Filipino, and participants answered in English, Filipino, Ilocano, or a mix of these.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted face to face by two trained members of the research team, a registered guidance counselor and a technology teacher. With consent, each interview was audio-recorded. Members of the research team then transcribed each recording verbatim in the language the participant used. Each transcript was

returned to the participant, who checked it and confirmed that it reflected what they had said, or corrected it. This member check served as a point of participant verification rather than as validation of the analysis (Birt *et al.*, 2016). The analysis worked from these participant-verified transcripts.

Analysis

Analysis followed the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022; Byrne, 2022). First, members of the research team read all transcripts several times, including those in Ilocano and Filipino, which the researchers translated into English. Second, codes were developed inductively through line-by-line reading of each transcript, with attention to the sensitizing concepts noted above. Third, codes were grouped into initial themes across transcripts and across sections of the guide rather than according to the guide's headings. Fourth, initial themes were reviewed against the coded data and the full transcripts. Fifth, themes were defined and named. Sixth, the report was written, drawing on illustrative extracts.

Two data-based decisions shaped the coding. Statements written in the hypothetical ("I would respond calmly") were coded as anticipated responses, not as reported experience. Where a transcript contradicted itself, for example a participant who reported no experience of stereotyping but later described its effects, the explicit earlier statement was treated as authoritative, and the inconsistent items were not used as evidence of experience. Transcripts that reported no direct experience were kept and analyzed as negative cases.

In line with reflexive thematic analysis, the study did not seek saturation or inter-coder agreement (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Sample adequacy was judged by information power: the aim was narrow, the participants were specific to the aim, and the transcripts were rich enough on the key questions (Malterud *et al.*, 2016).

Quality and Reflexivity

Trustworthiness was supported by participant verification of each transcript, an audit trail from extract to code to theme, attention to negative cases, and team discussion of competing readings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Two from the research team are registered guidance counselors. Their training gave insight into how students talk about judgment and help-seeking, but it also brought a counseling lens that could favor themes about support. The team checked this by asking, for each theme, whether it was grounded in what participants said rather than in what counselors would hope to hear. The two technology teachers on the team served as a further check on this lens. Their knowledge of technology programs, shop work, and the theory that technical courses demand helped the team read students' accounts of course-based labels, such as the assumption that technology students know only practical work. As teachers, however, they also belong to the group whose judgments some participants described. This position could lead them to soften students' accounts of teachers or, in the other direction, to overstate them. To guard against both, the team discussed every extract about teachers together and reported these accounts in the students' own words, with the teacher's side left as an acknowledged gap. Neither of them taught any participant at the time of the study, so they also read the accounts from outside the classroom relationships being described.

Ethics

Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent for the interview, the recording, and the use of their answers in published material. Names were replaced with codes, and recordings and transcripts were stored securely in line with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (2012) and the national ethical guidelines (Philippine Health Research Ethics Board, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Five themes answer the central question and its four sub-questions (Table 2). The themes led to answer the Central Question. Quotations keep the participant's language; English translations follow in brackets. Ellipses mark omitted words.

Table 2: Themes and What Each Captures

Theme	What it captures
1. Verdicts from the visible surface	Quietness, program, and circumstance read as incapacity or laziness
2. "Gen Z kasi"	Generational and upbringing scripts that frame individual incidents
3. Separating the description from the verdict	Accepting the observed trait while rejecting the inference
4. Quiet now, proof later	Strategic silence and proof through work, and their costs to participation and help-seeking
5. Alamin muna (find out first)	Ask before judging, privately and calmly; small acts of recognition

Note: SQ = sub-question.

Theme 1 Verdicts From the Visible Surface

Most labels the participants reported did not refer to a group to which they belonged. Rather, they were judgments of capacity drawn from a single behavior or situation.

Quietness read as incapacity. The most frequent label began with silence. Describing his first group activity, P07 reported, "Hindi ako masyadong nag-suggest, so one of my groupmates said na parang wala akong ambag at tahimik lang" [I didn't suggest much, so a groupmate said it seemed I had nothing to contribute and was just quiet]. The labels that followed moved from observation to interpretation: "They called me 'suplado,' 'tahimik masyado,' and 'mahina sa klase.' Some even said 'pabigat sa group' before they got to know me" [snobbish, too quiet, weak in class, a burden to the group]. P11 stated the inference that silence implied: "May ilang tao na nag-aakala na hindi ako gaano katalino o kahusay dahil tahimik lamang ako" [Some people assumed I was not that smart or skilled because I am quiet].

The participants associated silence with thought, not with ignorance. P11 said he waited "dahil iniisip ko muna kung ano ang magandang sabihin" [because I first think about what is good to say], and P12 said, "Sometimes, I just needed a little more time to think." Several had not heard the label spoken at all. P04 said, "Hindi ko sila naririnig pero nararamdaman ko" [I don't hear them, but I can feel it].

Circumstance read as character. A second group of labels turned a situation into a trait. P20 submitted a project late because his laptop broke and he had no internet; his teacher, checking outputs "sa harap ng klase" [in front of the class], called him "tamad, puro cellphone, Gen Z kasi" [lazy, always on the phone, because Gen Z]. P15, a working student, said people "think that I cannot focus on my studies because I also have a job. They do not always understand that I am trying my best to manage both." P02 was called lazy by a classmate who saw him playing games during a break.

The program as a verdict. Two participants met labels attached to Automotive Technology itself. P03 said people outside the program assumed that "ang mga estudyanteng Automotive ay puro praktikal na gawain lamang ang alam at hindi gaanong magaling sa mga akademikong asignatura" [Automotive students know only practical work and are not good at academic subjects]. He answered with a list of what the course demands: "May mga teorya, pagsusulit, praktikal na gawain, at problemang kailangan naming pag-aralan at solusyunan" [There are theories, exams, practical work, and problems we have to study and solve].

Labels also came from close to home. P21, the youngest child and the only one in school, called himself the family's "last card," "the last option to lift my family up." For him the label was an expectation, not an insult.

Theme 2 (SQ1, SQ2): "Gen Z Kasi"

Many participants had heard comments describing students like themselves as lazy, easily distracted, undisciplined, or poorly raised. Most of these scripts circulated in general conversation, but some were voiced by teachers about particular episodes. P07 recalled that "when [a student] is late, 'kasi ganyan kayong mga kabataan ngayon, puro social media lang'" [because that's how you young people are now, all social media]. P20 heard that "Gen Z daw tamad at mahina kasi mali daw pagpapalaki" [Gen Z are supposedly lazy and weak because they were raised wrong].

The generational script turned one late project into an explanation of a whole generation and its parents. Participants rejected the generalization, not the facts. "It is unfair kasi not all students are like that," said P07. Another participant offered a different description: "Marami paring estudyante ang masipag, responsable, magalang at nagsisikap makatapos at para matulungan ang kanilang pamilya" [Many students are still hardworking, responsible, respectful, and striving to finish and to help their families]. P20 ended the interview by saying, "nagsisikap kami kahit nahihirapan para sa pamilya" [we strive, even when it is hard, for our families].

The script was not only used against students. P08, who reported no label directed at him in class, used upbringing to explain a classmate he admired: "I want to know what parenting guidance did he experience and I want to get the level that he is in." In his account, upbringing could explain excellence as easily as failure.

Theme 3 (SQ2): Separating the Description From the Verdict

Participants rarely denied the trait that others had seen. They denied what had been inferred from it. P11 explained, "Maaaring may katotohanan ito dahil minsan ay talagang tahimik ako. Ngunit hindi ako sumasang-ayon na dahil lamang tahimik ako ay wala na akong alam" [There may be some truth to it, because I really am quiet sometimes. But I don't agree that just because I'm quiet, I know nothing]. P09 and P12 drew the same line in English: "I partly agreed because I know that I can be quiet and shy sometimes. However, I disagreed with the idea that being quiet means I am not capable" (P09).

To explain why others had judged them, participants pointed to what the observer could not see. "Hindi nila ako kilala nang lubusan" [They don't fully know me], said P07. P16 concluded that the judgment "nagmula iyon sa kakulangan ng impormasyon, hindi sa tunay kong kakayahan" [came from a lack of information, not from my real ability]. In attribution terms, participants corrected the observer's error: they restored the situation that the observer had left out.

Many also read the speaker's intent generously while faulting the manner. P07 thought his groupmates "were just frustrated during the group work . . . Hindi naman nila sinasadya na manakit" [They didn't mean to hurt]. Of the teacher who called him lazy in front of the class, P20 said, "Gusto lang niya ako pagsabihan pero mali

yung way" [He only wanted to correct me, but the way was wrong]. Over time, several participants reframed the episode as a challenge. P06 chose to see it "bilang isang hamon sa halip na dibdibin" [as a challenge rather than taking it to heart].

Theme 4 (SQ3): Quiet Now, Proof Later

The most common response was to stay silent in the moment and to answer later through work. Participants gave relational reasons for the silence: to avoid trouble ("para iwas gulo," P07), to keep things from getting worse ("ayaw kong lumala ang sitwasyon," P03), or to avoid becoming a target: "Pinili kong manahimik kasi takot mapag-initan" [I chose to stay quiet because I was afraid of being singled out] (P20). P03 sometimes left altogether: "pumupunta na lang ako sa dagat para mawala ang aking sama ng loob" [I just go to the sea to let go of my hurt].

The answer came through effort. "Pinatunayan ko na lang sa gawa" [I just proved it through my work], said P07, echoing his parents' advice: "patunayan sa gawa, hindi sa salita" [prove it with deeds, not words]. P15 "showed through my actions that I was serious about my studies."

Speaking up was conditional. P07 spoke "kapag alam kong mali na yung label" [when I know the label is plainly wrong], weighing "kung makakatulong ba yung pagsasalita o hindi" [whether speaking would help]. P16, one of the few who explained himself on the spot, did so "iti narespeto a pamay-an" [in a respectful way].

This strategy protected relationships, but it had costs that participants described plainly. P20 stopped answering in recitation "kahit alam ko sagot" [even when I knew the answer], lost the will to attend class, and felt "hindi ako belong, parang ako lang nahuhuli" [I don't belong, as if I'm the only one falling behind]. Hesitation to ask questions was common: P18 avoided questions "if I think the person might say that my question is easy to answer."

When participants did seek help, they went to friends, classmates, or family, "kasi sila yung hindi nanghuhusga" [because they are the ones who don't judge] (P07). The silence that followed a label could thus produce the very behavior the label described.

In hindsight, many wished they had spoken sooner. P08 said that he should have been more open "sa halip kinimkim ko ang aking saloobin. Sa paraan mas maaga sanang naresolba ang mga maling akala at hindi ako masyadong na-stress" [instead of bottling up my feelings; that way the wrong assumptions would have been cleared up sooner and I would not have been so stressed]. P16 held both views at once: "Nalabit a nasayaat koma no imbagbagak ti nasapsapa ti mariknak. Ngem maawatak no apay a nagulimekak pay laeng idi" [Perhaps it would have been better if I had said what I felt earlier. But I understand why I stayed silent then].

Theme 5 (SQ4): Alamin Muna (Find Out First)

Asked what teachers should understand, participants gave a consistent answer: find out first. "Alamin muna background ng estudyante bago manghusga" [Find out the student's background first before judging], said P20. P08 named what a low grade might hide: "personal na problema, sa pinansyal o pagod, at hindi dahil sa katamaran lang" [personal problems, financial or exhaustion, and not just laziness].

They also specified the manner. Most participants asked to be approached calmly, and many specified privately: "Sana kausapin nila nang mahinahon at private, hindi sa harap ng maraming tao" [I hope they talk to us calmly and privately, not in front of many people] (P07). P16 described an order of steps: listen to the student's situation first, "saka mag-alok ng praktikal na suporta o gabay" [then offer practical support or guidance].

The teachers participants remembered had done exactly this. P07 recalled, "May isang guro na kinausap ako after class at tinanong kung okay lang ako. Sinabi niya na okay lang maging tahimik basta may natututunan. Doon ko naramdaman na may nakakaintindi sa akin" [A teacher talked to me after class and asked if I was okay. The teacher said it was fine to be quiet as long as I was learning. That was when I felt someone understood me]. P20, the student labeled in front of his class, recalled another professor who spoke to him privately: "okay lang yan, magsabi ka lang pag nahihirapan ka" [that's okay, just tell me when you're struggling].

Positive labels were welcomed as fuel. Being called "masipag" [hardworking] motivated P06, P07, P12, P15, and P16, and P20 cherished "tahimik pero masipag" [quiet but hardworking], a label that kept his quietness and added his effort. As P21 put it, "labeling a student is helpful but at the same time not helpful." Beyond the classroom, participants asked for a friendly counseling service where students could speak "ng walang takot na baka mahusgaan" [without fear of being judged] (P08), for policies on bullying and how to report it (P19), and for realistic deadlines for working students (P15).

Where Labels Did Not Land

Three participants reported no experience of being labeled at all (P14, P17, P19), and one described only a mild, pleasant term (P01). P08 began by saying he had never been labeled but later in the interview said others assumed he neglected his lessons because he played online games, showing that labeling sometimes surfaced only toward the end of an interview. P10, like P14, reported never having been labeled, but he sensed a possible label without hearing one: "sometimes I just think that maybe I'm considered quiet or shy." This suggests that silence and reluctance to seek help may be a broader coping pattern that labels reinforce, not only a reaction to them. P19, however, said that if it happened he would "komprontahin ang taong sangkot sa maayos na paraan" [confront the person involved in a proper way], indicating that silence is not always the rule.

Answering the Central Question

Together, these findings answer the four sub-questions.

The labels were inferences about capacity drawn from an observable cue: quietness, a late submission, tiredness, a phone, or the program itself. They arose during group work, class discussion, recitation, and the checking of outputs. Most came from other students, while some came from teachers in front of the whole class. Scripts about generation and upbringing (e.g., "Gen Z kasi") recurred in several accounts (Themes 1 and 2).

Students acknowledged the trait others had observed but rejected the judgment drawn from it. They attributed the label to the observer's lack of knowledge about them, and they read the speaker's intentions generously while criticizing the delivery (Theme 3). Hiya, sadness, and self-doubt characterized these episodes. Students responded strategically, first with silence and later by proving themselves through hard work. This response preserved relationships but cost them recitation, question-asking, and a sense of belonging, and it channeled help-seeking toward people close to them (Theme 4; Where Labels Did Not Land). What they asked for was that teachers approach them first, do so calmly and privately, and acknowledge their effort (Theme 5).

The answer to the central question follows. Students experienced academic stereotyping as everyday judgments based on visible cues and reinforced by scripts about their generation and their program. They made sense of these judgments by separating what was true about them from the conclusions drawn from it. They responded by staying quiet first and proving themselves later, a culturally rational strategy that maintains relationships but hides the problem and can sustain the stereotype. What they asked for in return was "alamin muna": find out first.

Discussion

This study asked how students in a Philippine college of industrial technology experience, make sense of, and respond to academic stereotyping. The central finding is that labeling was mostly a judgment of capacity based on one visible cue, and that students' own responses could feed it.

Labels as Verdicts From Visible Cues

Studies of educational stereotyping often begin with group identity. In this study, group identity came second. What came first was an inference from behavior: silence became ignorance, a late submission became laziness, and a game during break became neglect. This is the mechanism attribution research calls correspondence bias, in which observers explain behavior through traits rather than situations (Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Ross, 1977). Group scripts then generalized the inference: "Gen Z kasi" turned a late submission into a characterization of a generation and its parents, and "Automotive lang" turned a program into a ceiling. Students' own interpretations completed the step the observers had skipped by restoring the situation, whether a broken laptop, a job, or simply time to think.

The generational scripts deserve particular attention because teachers voiced some of them. The literature offers no evidence of stable generational differences in traits such as work ethic (Costanza *et al.*, 2012; Rudolph *et al.*, 2021), and even heavy phone use does not reliably signal disengagement (Lobo *et al.*, 2022), yet the script offered an easy explanation for an individual's behavior. When a teacher voices the script in class, it carries the weight of authority and is witnessed by peers. Students could not dispute the facts, only the generalization, and they answered the stereotype of spoiled youth with an account of striving for their families.

Silence, Proof, and a Self-Sealing Loop

The stigma literature describes responses ranging from withdrawal to deflection to challenge (Major & O'Brien, 2005; Thoits, 2011). Here, deflecting the label away from the self ("hindi nila ako kilala") and challenging it through performance ("patunayan sa gawa") were the most common strategies; open challenge was infrequent and conditional. These responses are readily explained

A label can produce the silence it describes

Figure 1. Self-sealing loop proposed from participants' accounts

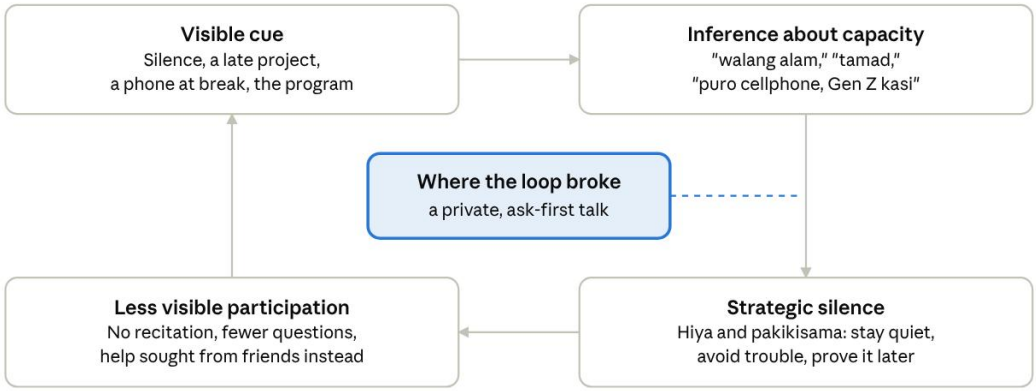

Figure 1: Self-Sealing Loop of Labeling and Silence Proposed From Participants' Accounts

Note: A visible cue invites an inference about capacity; students answer with strategic silence, which reduces the visible participation that observers read as the next cue. Private, ask-first conversations interrupted the loop between inference and silence.

in the Filipino context. Hiya makes assertion toward a teacher costly, pakikisama encourages harmony, and the parental advice to prove oneself "sa gawa, hindi sa salita" justifies working hard quietly (Bulatao, 1964; Enriquez, 1992; Lynch, 1973).

The same process exacted a toll. Staying silent after being labeled reduced the visible participation that had prompted the label (Figure 1). When a student stops raising his hand in recitation "kahit alam ko sagot," he supplies more of the cue that produced the label. Hesitation to ask questions worked the same way: asking draws attention to a gap, and students who have learned that they will be judged as incapable avoid exposing gaps (Karabenick, 2003; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Help-seeking was therefore channeled to family and friends, where it was safe but invisible to the teacher, a pattern also reported among students in other settings (Alipasa & Alipasa, 2026; Kachingwe *et al.*, 2026). Belonging declined as students felt that they alone were falling behind (Walton & Cohen, 2007). The loop did not require an actual label. Even participants who had heard nothing could sense judgment through pakikiramdam, a Filipino counterpart to Steele's (1997) "threat in the air." The loop also explains the regret some participants expressed. In hindsight, they felt they could have spoken much earlier, while one also said he understood why he had stayed silent at the time.

Where the Loop Broke

Participants also showed how the loop can be broken. The teachers who made students feel heard did three things: they approached the student privately, asked before evaluating, and separated the trait from the evaluation ("okay lang maging tahimik basta may natututunan"). This mirrors what students did themselves in Theme 3 and resembles empathic discipline, in which teachers who are prompted to understand students' perspectives before correcting them halve suspension rates (Okonofua *et al.*, 2016). Positive labeling worked when it kept the trait and added effort: "tahimik pero masipag" did not ask the student to stop being quiet.

Implications for Practice

The study suggests five actions for teachers:

1. Ask before assuming. Lateness, silence, or a phone during break is a clue, not an answer. A quick, private question such as "Okay ka lang? May problema ba?" can recover the situation the clue was hiding.
2. Avoid correcting in public. Public correction turns a single comment into a label with classmates as witnesses. Participants spoke almost with one voice in asking for calm, private conversations.
3. Broaden what counts as participation. Wait time, written responses, pair work, and demonstrations allow quiet students to show learning without having to speak first (Reda, 2009).
4. Do not use generation to explain individual behavior. "Kasi Gen Z kayo" says nothing about any one student and invites the whole class to adopt the label.
5. Name effort. Acknowledgment such as "masipag" was remembered and used as fuel.

For guidance services, three directions follow. First, outreach should not depend on referrals, because the students who most need help tend to avoid formal help-seeking channels; brief check-ins with quiet students and working students are likely to be more effective. Second, classroom guidance sessions could teach help-seeking as a skill and normalize asking questions as part of learning, an approach participants themselves suggested. Third, counselors can support teachers through in-service training on attribution bias, private correction, and the labels attached to technical programs, as one participant proposed.

Limitations

Several constraints limit how far these findings extend. First, all participants came from one college at one state university, and all but one were technology students, most in their first year, and all were male, so the findings may not reflect how female students experience and respond to academic stereotyping. Second, students may have described teachers favorably given the respect teachers receive in Filipino society and in academic settings. Finally, the study reflects only students' perspectives; teachers' and classmates' motives are interpreted through students' accounts.

Future Research

Future research could include teachers' views of the same events and compare technical with non-technical programs. The self-sealing loop is an interpretation of students' accounts, not a tested model; longitudinal studies could examine whether labeling, silence, and reduced participation actually occur in sequence over a term.

CONCLUSION

The academic stereotyping experienced by the students in this study was never overt. It was one word during group activities, one comment while their outputs were being evaluated in class, or the feeling that their classmates have already put them in a box. The stereotypes arose from observable traits and were justified by scripts about Generation Z and about technical programs. The students' reaction was predictable. They would accept the observed trait, but refute the stereotype associated with it; they would be silent to avoid trouble, and they would try to prove themselves through performance. This reaction served to protect interpersonal relations but at a price. Silencing inhibited recitation and questioning, transferred help-seeking to family and friends, and could provide the very cue which led to stereotyping. Indeed, the advice given by the students is clear: "alamin muna" (find out first). In Philippine technical education, instructors and guidance counselors may use this advice by asking discreetly before stereotyping, by correcting the error without an audience, and by making help easily available. Given that the loop

proposed in this paper is based on students' experience, further research needs to incorporate teachers' views and follow the students longitudinally.

Statements and Declarations

Informed consent. All participants gave informed consent for the interviews, the audio recording, and the publication of de-identified quotations.

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Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement. The de-identified, participant-verified interview transcripts and thematic coding framework generated during this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to approval by the institutional review board to ensure participant privacy is maintained.

Use of generative AI. The authors used Anthropic's Claude during the writing process to assist with text generation, including drafting the initial literature review overview and refining paragraph transitions. The generated text was thoroughly reviewed, rewritten, and cross-referenced with primary sources by the authors, who take full responsibility for the final text.

Author contributions (CRediT). KLG: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, and writing.PMP, LL, and NMC: writing of the literature review, data collection, coding, and analysis.

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