

Pathways of Senior High School Graduates in the Philippines: A National Tracer Study

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ABSTRACT

This comprehensive national tracer study offers insights into the educational and career journeys of the first wave of Senior High School (SHS) graduates in the Philippines who completed the K to 12 Basic Education Program in the 2017-2018 academic year. The study investigates four primary curriculum exits: higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, and middle-level skills development. Employing a probability sampling method, participants were selected from a diverse array of public schools across major regions, encompassing Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao, and the National Capital Region. Employing a holistic mixed-methods approach, the study wove together survey questionnaires with illuminating focus group discussions. The key findings from this study shed light on essential aspects of SHS graduates' experiences. Firstly, the choice of SHS track revealed that the Technical-Vocational Livelihood (TVL) track was the most popular, with the Academic track close behind, with personal interests playing a pivotal role in track selection. Secondly, the curriculum exits pursued by graduates unveiled a predominant trend toward higher education, with a notable fraction venturing into employment, entrepreneurship, or middle-level skills development, and a minority not transitioning to any intended exit. Lastly, a complex interplay of internal and external factors influenced graduates' decisions, ranging from personal aspirations to economic considerations and familial influences.

Keywords: Curriculum Exits, Senior High School, Tracer Study, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental component of economic progress and growth. Nations allocate resources towards education with the underlying conviction that it fosters economic advancement, fosters democratic principles and stability, enhances public health and

familial welfare, and stands as a potent tool in combating poverty and ignorance. According to Doronila (1997), the perpetuation of society or the community across future generations necessitates the transmission of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to the younger members at every developmental stage. Every government endeavor to enhance its education system due to this underlying conviction.

In 2015, the United Nations Member States adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a means of demonstrating their collective dedication to enhancing the quality of education on a worldwide scale. The SDGs, often referred to as the Global Goals, encompass a comprehensive and inclusive initiative that aims to address poverty eradication, environmental conservation, and the promotion of peace and prosperity for all individuals by the year 2030. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) pertains to the need to guarantee comprehensive and equitable access to high-quality education, while concurrently fostering possibilities for lifelong learning among all individuals. In accordance with the established timeline, it is imperative for the education sector to eliminate gender gaps in education and guarantee equitable access to all levels of education and technical vocational training for marginalized populations by the year 2030. Another objective within this goal is to construct and enhance educational infrastructure. Undoubtedly, the attainment of comprehensive and high-quality education for all individuals reinforces the conviction that education serves as a paramount catalyst for sustainable development.

Ensuring the provision of high-quality education is regarded as a paramount concern by the government in the Philippines. In accordance with Article 14, Section 1 of the 1987 Constitution, the state affirms its resolute dedication to safeguarding and advancing the entitlement of every person to receive education of high caliber across all levels.

In the year 2013, the Philippines implemented a significant transformation in its educational framework through the enactment of Republic Act 10533, also referred to as the "Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013." The aforementioned legislation stipulates that:

SEC. 2. The State shall establish, maintain, and support a complete, adequate, and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people, the country, and society-at-large. Likewise, it is hereby declared the policy of the State that every graduate of basic education shall be an empowered individual who has learned, through a program that is rooted on sound educational principles and geared towards excellence, the foundations for learning throughout life, the competence to engage in work and be productive, the ability to coexist in fruitful harmony with local and global communities, the capability to engage in autonomous, creative, and critical thinking, and the capacity and willingness to transform others and one's self.

The enactment of Republic Act 10533 facilitated the transition of the nation's educational framework from a 10-year basic education system to a 13-year program encompassing Kindergarten through Grade 12. The K to 12 Basic school Program encompasses a single year of kindergarten instruction, followed by a span of six years dedicated to elementary school, and culminating in an additional six years focused on secondary education. Secondary education encompasses a duration of four years dedicated to Junior High School education, followed by an additional two years dedicated to Senior High School education. In order to facilitate comprehension among stakeholders, the Department of Education (DepEd) has released DepEd Order (DO) 21 s. 2019, which is more commonly referred to as the Policy Guidelines on the K to 12 Basic Education Program. It outlines the comprehensive framework and standards for implementing the K to 12 curriculum in the

Philippines. It includes directives on curriculum structure, assessment methods, teacher training, resource allocation, and strategies for inclusive education and stakeholder engagement.

The Department of Education (DepEd) has prepared curriculum guidelines for the K to 12 program in order to effectively fulfill the provisions outlined in Republic Act 10533. The primary objective is to guarantee that each graduate possesses a comprehensive set of skills and knowledge. This includes the development of a well-rounded Filipino individual who has established a strong educational groundwork applicable throughout their lifetime. Additionally, graduates should be equipped with essential competencies such as information, media, and technology skills, as well as learning and innovation skills, life and career skills, and effective communication skills (DepEd, 2018; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). These proficiencies are crucial for addressing the complexities and capitalizing on the prospects presented by the 21st century. The primary objective is to enhance the quality of the Philippine basic education system, aligning it with global benchmarks through the implementation of measures that guarantee its appropriateness, responsiveness, and relevance to the student population.

In senior high school (SHS), students are exposed to a comprehensive core curriculum, engage in applied courses, and delve into specialized disciplines within one of four distinct tracks, namely academic, technical-vocational and livelihood (TVL), sports, or arts and design. The curriculum is bolstered by an extensive career guidance program, as mandated by DepEd Order No. 41, series of 2015, to assist Senior High School (SHS) students in making well-informed judgments pertaining to their selection of academic tracks.

Whereas the country's previous basic education system prepared Filipino students primarily to pursue certificate/diploma courses, or degree programs after four years of high school, graduates of the K to 12 program are envisioned to proceed to four possible exits: (1) higher education, (2) employment, (3) entrepreneurship, and (4) middle-level skills development. From the different curriculum exits, the stakeholders anticipate that these SHS graduates shall become part of the Philippine's engine for social and economic development.

The research gap highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of the post-graduation trajectories and decisions made by Senior High School (SHS) graduates within the K to 12 Basic Education Program in the Philippines. In order to fill this need, the study's objectives are formulated:

1. To determine the distribution of SHS graduates from the 2017-2018 academic year across diverse SHS tracks.
2. To conduct a comprehensive analysis of the distribution of SHS graduates based on their curriculum exits, delineating the proportions opting for higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, or middle-level skills development.
3. To explore the considerations that SHS graduates take into account when selecting their curriculum exits, encompassing personal aspirations, economic factors, familial influences, and societal pressures.

This research endeavor is poised to furnish insights into the efficacy of the K to 12 Basic Education Program in the Philippines, thereby providing critical guidance to policy makers, educators, and stakeholders in their tireless efforts to continually enhance the nation's education system. By shedding light on the experiences and trajectories of SHS graduates, this study seeks to contribute substantially to the ongoing dialogue on education reform and sustainable development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the midst of discussion about the senior highschool program in the Philippines, the program was deemed successful by the implementers as indicated by the high enrollment rate (Brillantes et al., 2019). In fact, the transition rate from Grade 10 to Grade 11 in 2016 was reported to be approximately 93%, which is significantly higher than the 50% transition rate from high school to college in the past (Brillantes et al., 2019). However, this is just one of the many aspects that must be explored when discussing the overall effectiveness of the program. It is also necessary to include in the discussion the possible paths that the students take after graduation to make sense of the impact of the program to their career and quality of life.

Curriculum Exits of Senior High School Students in the Philippines

Multiple studies in the Philippines on SHS curriculum exit concur that pursuing Higher Education is still the top option for majority of the students after graduation. This is true for both private (e.g. Awi, et al., 2021; Cundangan, 2023) and public institutions (e.g. Bacaling, 2018; Royo, 2019; Rin & Domondon, 2021). Even city or provincial level reports showed similar results (e.g. Intad, 2021; Colobong, 2023). Findings nationwide also confirm that the majority (70%) of the senior high school graduates in the Philippines pursue Higher Education (Orbeta and Potestad, 2020). This was consistent with various studies which showed that Higher Education covers a significant proportion of curriculum exits which ranges from 75% (Cundangan, 2023) to as high as 98% (Rin and Domondon, 2021) of sampled groups of senior high school graduates. All these results provide compelling evidence that many senior high school students in the Philippines choose to pursue Higher Education over other curriculum exits.

While studies consistently showed that Higher Education is the preferred curriculum exit by the majority, the ranking of the other three (3) curriculum exits varied across existing studies. Reports of Bacaling (2018), Awi et al. (2021), and Cundangan (2023) showed that Employment is the second reported curriculum exit for students, following Higher Education. This is supported by a national-level report highlighting that 20% of the senior high school students join the labor force after graduation (Orbeta and Potestad, 2020). In contrast, reports of Rin and Domondon (2021), and Intad (2021) showed Skills Development as the second reported curriculum exit of their respondents instead of employment. As for entrepreneurship, engaging in entrepreneurial activities following graduation consistently appears to rank lowest (Bacaling, 2018; Awi et al., 2021) or second lowest (Rin and Domondon, 2021) among curriculum exits.

Alignment of Senior High School Strand and Curriculum Exit

As students are encouraged to choose a Senior High School strand related to their intended careers, it is also crucial to look into the alignment of the SHS program to the curriculum exit of the graduates.

For those who pursued higher education, numerous cases showed that most students took undergraduate courses that are aligned to their SHS strand (Royo, 2019; Rin and Domondon, 2021; Awi et al., 2021; Cho-oy, 2023; Colobong, 2023). The remaining proportion of students who took undergraduate courses that are not aligned to their SHS strand was also reported. For one, in the study of Awi et al. (2021), around 19% of the STEM students took undergraduate courses related to social sciences, business, multimedia arts and sports which align better to other SHS strands. In addition, Colobong (2023) reported that STEM graduates and ABM graduates in Isabela province had

the lowest and highest misalignment rates, respectively, with around 10% and 28% of them taking higher education courses that are not aligned to their SHS strand. For those who sought employment, Colobong (2023) also reported that the vast majority of senior highschool graduates in Isabela were unable to secure employment related to their SHS strand. Based on these results, it seems evident that while there is a significant alignment between SHS strands and those pursuing higher education, improvements to align SHS strand to possible career paths for those seeking employment after graduation must be facilitated.

Considerations of Senior High School Graduates when Choosing Curriculum Exits

There are various factors that influence the curriculum exits of senior high school students after graduation.

The relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and aspirations for university attendance has been extensively explored in the literature, with studies conducted by James (2002), Foley (2007), Bowden and Doughney (2010), and other Australian researchers. These studies consistently indicate that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more inclined to aspire to attend university. In contrast, those with a lower SES tend to pursue vocational training at technical and further education colleges or enter the workforce immediately after completing secondary school.

Similarly, empirical studies in the Philippines demonstrate the influence of economic factors on senior high school graduates' career choices. In a study of Intad (2021) among senior highschool students in the province of Agusan del Norte, economic considerations significantly affect students' likelihood of choosing to get employed or engage in business after graduation. This is supported by a study of Palabrica & Ferolino (2023) which highlighted that economic-related aspects such as family income and educational expenses were considered by the senior high school students in Sorsogon City when they opted to earn a living right after graduation. Indeed, studies concur that socioeconomic considerations play a crucial role in determining career paths of senior highschool students.

Access to resources in general is also a crucial determinant of choosing a career after senior highschool graduation. In the study of Intad (2021), it was revealed that access to scholarships determines the likelihood of students to choose a techno-vocational career pathway or employment career pathway. It was also found in the study that exposure to business and access to other opportunities influence the likelihood of students to engage in an entrepreneurial career path. These highlight the importance of availability and accessibility of resources to determining and developing career pathways for students.

The impact of familial and social relationships is observed as well on SHS graduates' education and career choices. The role of parents, peers, and other social networks emerges as a recurrent theme, emphasizing the interconnectedness of personal decisions with broader familial and societal contexts. Family plays a significant role in shaping educational choices and outcomes. Shostak (1967) highlights the complex interplay between schools and families, with the latter heavily influencing a child's education. The impact of family involvement on educational outcomes is generally positive, with early parental involvement promoting long-term success (Hsu, 2009).

In the Philippines, a country known for its collectivist culture, the influence of familial and community relationships to the education and career trajectories of individuals is very evident.

Empirical studies among senior highschool students in the country and their career paths were reported to have been influenced by their family and other social support. For one, parents' preference was identified by Rin and Domondon (2021) as among the mostly cited factors influencing senior high school students when choosing a career path. These results also align with the study of Intad (2021) which found that family characteristics, social and environmental factors have a significant relationship with the career choices of senior highschool students. Intad (2021) further explained that parents have a major influence on the senior high school student's decision to attend college or find employment after graduation. Peer influence, in addition, is a determining factor in the likelihood of pursuing a techno-vocational career. Community variables, as mentioned in the study, hold the same influence on the likelihood to take on college or business careers after graduation. All these findings reflect the undeniable influence of social support to the academic and career development of senior highschool students in the Philippines.

In addition to those previously identified, the works of Rin and Domondon (2021) and Palabrica and Ferolino (2023) seem to show the same emphasis on personal preference as a significant factor influencing career choice of senior high school students in the Philippines. Other factors such as, future opportunities, academic, and cultural considerations were also reported to have influenced senior highschool students in deciding their career path. The discussion of these variables must be further explored.

In summary, the literature review discusses the distribution of senior high school graduates across curriculum exits, their reasons for choosing such paths, and the factors that may have influenced their decision. The existing references already provided insights on the proportion of students across curriculum exits. The present study validates this with the involvement of a larger sample of respondents from all over the country. In addition, the existing references highlighted the factors that influence senior high school graduates in pursuing a curriculum exit, primarily through quantitative approaches. The present study offers a comprehensive presentation, not only of quantitative findings on a larger sample size, but also in-depth discussion of the qualitative responses.

The present study contributes to the existing knowledge by providing a holistic understanding of SHS graduates' choices, considering diverse curriculum exits and the myriad factors influencing their decisions. The synthesis of previous research underscores the interconnectedness of various themes and paves the way for more targeted interventions and policy recommendations in the Philippine educational landscape.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) provides a visual representation of the key elements and relationships that guide the exploration of SHS graduates' curriculum exits. The conceptual framework shows the transformative power of education and its central role in shaping individual and national destinies. Building upon the foundations laid earlier, the study navigates the intricate terrain where the Philippine education system intersects with the unique journeys of Senior High School (SHS) graduates (Figure 1)

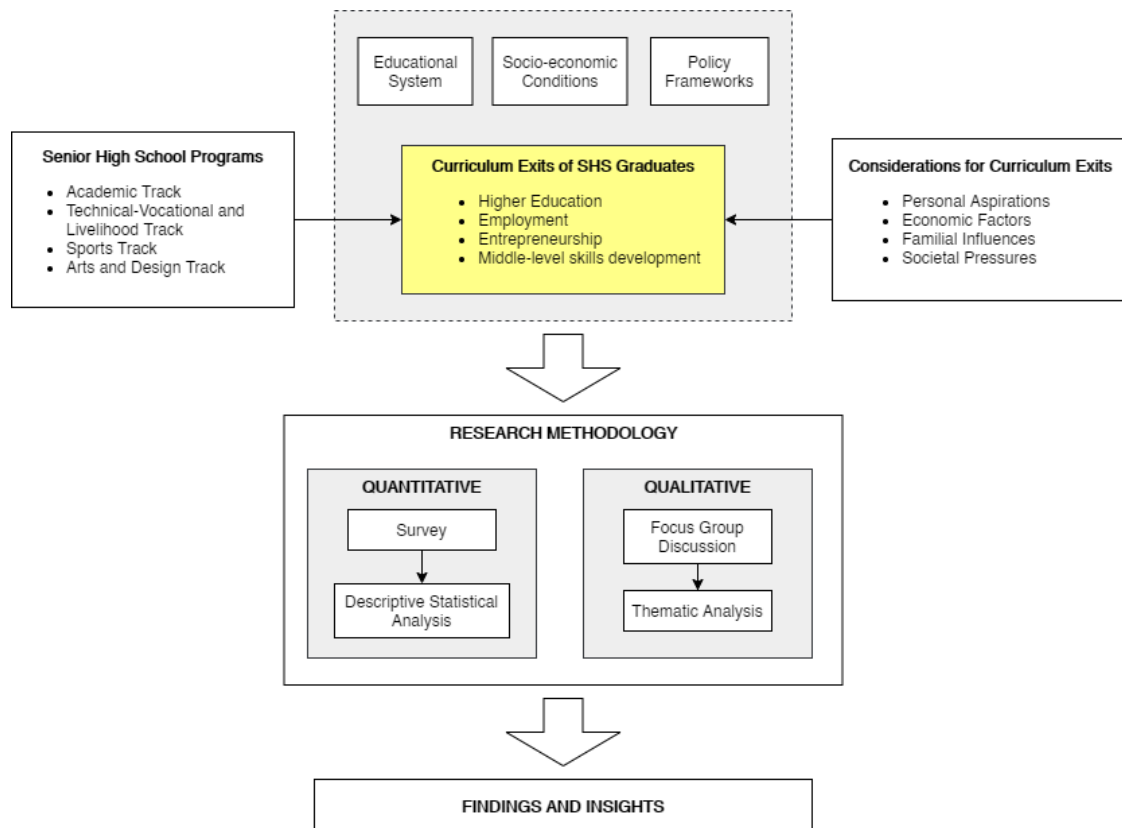


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The framework highlights the influence of the distribution of SHS graduates across diverse tracks. This component acknowledges the importance of the educational background as a foundational input shaping graduates' subsequent choice. The four distinct tracks - academic, technical-vocational and livelihood (TVL), sports, or arts and design - represent the diverse pathways available to students. Understanding the distribution across these tracks provides context for the study.

The four curriculum exits - higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, and middle-level skills development - encapsulate the diverse trajectories that SHS graduates can embark upon. Furthermore, the framework shows the multifarious considerations that influence graduates' decisions. These considerations, including personal aspirations, economic factors, familial influences, and societal pressures, are interconnected and play a pivotal role in shaping curriculum exits. This component underscores the nuanced and intricate decision-making processes that the study seeks to unravel.

By including the contextual factors, the present study acknowledges the broader influences shaping graduates' decisions. The educational system, socio-economic conditions, and policy frameworks collectively create an environment that impacts the decision-making process. This element recognizes that individual choices are embedded within a larger socioeconomic and policy context.

In sum, the framework emphasizes the study's objective of generating valuable insights regarding SHS graduates' curriculum exits. The culmination of the research process, where the collected data and analysis contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing graduates'

choices was highlighted in the framework. As the study delves deeper into this framework, it aims to illuminate the interplay between educational theories and the experiences of SHS graduates, providing insights into the evolving educational landscape in the Philippines. This framework acts as a compass, guiding the exploration of the multifaceted pathways that lead SHS graduates to higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, or middle-level skills development, setting the stage for the comprehensive analysis that follows.

METHODOLOGY

This tracer study used a concurrent mixed methods approach that integrated both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. This method enables a more thorough comprehension of research findings and is supported by Creswell & Clark (2007), Johnson & Christensen (2004), and Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004). The interpretation and comprehension of the findings were enhanced by the qualitative data, which gave the quantitative data depth and perspective.

Participants and Sampling Design

The research focused on Senior High School (SHS) graduates from the 2017–2018 school year, using information from the 2018 DepEd End-of-School-Year Report. The study sought a representative sample size of 2,393 respondents out of the 646,857 SHS graduates enrolled in public schools. With a 2% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, this size was determined to assure statistical significance under the assumption of a 50% response distribution.

For the purpose of sampling, the country was split into four main regions: the National Capital Region (NCR), Mindanao, Visayas, and Luzon. The number of respondents from each region in relation to the total number of graduates in each was determined by proportionate sampling. Six divisions, each representing a distinct socioeconomic grouping, were chosen at random within each main area. Proportionate sampling was used to calculate the number of respondents from each school after two schools were randomly selected from each of these divisions. The distribution of SHS respondents and graduates according to the total number of graduates in each main area is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Proportion of Respondents to SHS Graduates per Major Area

	Luzon	Visayas	Mindanao	NCR	Total
Total Number of Graduates	306,033	168,282	141,737	30,805	646,857
Sampling Fraction	47%	26%	22%	5%	100%
Respondents per Area Proportional to the Total Number of Graduates	1,124	623	526	120	2,393

Survey Questionnaire

In order to collect quantitative data, the survey questionnaire was an essential instrument. It was divided into five categories based on the various career pathways taken by SHS graduates: going to college, working, starting a business, or becoming an entrepreneur, taking short-term training or middle-level skill development courses, and not being in any of the four curriculum exits. A thorough examination of the distinct experiences and difficulties faced by each group was made possible by this division.

The survey instrument's validation required pilot testing. The survey must be given to 210 SHS graduates from a few different departments. Face validation was used in the process to make sure the questionnaire was relevant and easy to understand. Furthermore, twenty specialists from various departments carried out content validation, thereby enhancing the survey's validity and relevance.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were used to collect qualitative data, providing a more in-depth look at the experiences, and thought processes of the graduates. These conversations were designed to cover both general inquiries for each participant and curriculum-specific questions regarding their exits. This methodology facilitated a thorough comprehension of the diverse routes pursued by the graduates and the elements impacting their choices.

Data Collection Process

The period of data collecting in 2019 was two months, from October to November. The survey was originally intended to be administered on-site, but in order to assist respondents with logistical issues, it was also administered online. The administration of the on-site survey and the ensuing focus group discussions were guided by BCD professionals and a consultant. To guarantee that the various curriculum exits were represented, the survey respondents were carefully selected as the FGD participants.

Data Analysis

With the use of SPSS software, descriptive statistics—more particularly, frequencies and percentages—were used to examine the survey's quantitative data. This gave a comprehensive picture of the distribution and patterns among the various SHS graduation groups. Thematic analysis was used for the FGDs' qualitative data. Coding the transcripts, spotting themes and patterns, and comprehending the backgrounds and experiences of the graduates were all part of this process. Thematic analysis played a crucial role in illuminating the participants' underlying narratives and insights.

Ethical Considerations

This study's adherence to ethical guidelines was crucial. All participants in the survey and focus group discussions gave their agreement to participate in the study, and permissions were obtained from the relevant DepEd agencies. They received guarantees of privacy and secrecy with relation to the information gathered. This ethical rigor preserved the integrity of the research process and guaranteed that the participants in the study would not suffer any harm.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Distribution of the 2017-2018 Senior High School Graduates across Tracks

In senior high school (SHS), students are exposed to a comprehensive core curriculum, engage in applied courses, and delve into specialized disciplines within one of four distinct tracks, namely academic, technical-vocational and livelihood (TVL), sports, or arts and design. The curriculum is bolstered by an extensive career guidance program, as mandated by DepEd Order No. 41, series of 2015, in order to assist Senior High School (SHS) students in making well-informed judgments pertaining to their selection of academic tracks.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents according to SHS Tracks

SHS Tracks	<i>f</i>	%
TVL Track	985	51.30
Home Economics	428	22.29
Industrial Arts	334	17.40
Information and Communication Technology	172	8.96
Agri-Fisheries	42	2.19
Maritime Specialization	9	0.47
Academic Track	920	47.92
GAS	407	21.20
HUMSS	203	10.57
ABM	192	10.00
STEM	117	6.09
Pre-Baccalaureate Maritime Specialization	1	0.05
Arts and Design Track	14	0.79
Sports Track	1	0.05
TOTAL	1,920	100.00

**There are 15 missing responses to this question.*

In general, the three strands that garnered the biggest proportion of respondents were TVL-Home Economics, with 428 respondents accounting for 22.29% of the total, Academic-GAS, with 407 respondents accounting for 21.20%, and TVL-Industrial Arts, with 334 respondents accounting for 17.40%.

The data indicates that a greater number of respondents opted for the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) route as compared to the Academic track. The Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) route focuses on developing skills that are crucial for employment or entrepreneurship, particularly beneficial for students who may have uncertainties regarding their pursuit of higher education. In contrast, a growing number of students opted for the Academic-General Academic Strand, which afforded them the opportunity to pursue optional courses from many career-oriented tracks, including STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and HUMSS (Humanities and Social Sciences). This finding suggests that the course preferred by the majority of

participants is the one that is deemed suitable for senior high school students who have not yet determined their specific area of focus.

The Senior High School (SHS) program provides students with the opportunity to choose a focus that aligns with their individual interests and objectives. Therefore, this study also examined the elements that exerted the greatest influence on the respondents' selection of Senior High School (SHS) track or specialization.

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of the survey participants based on the elements that influenced their decision-making process in selecting their Senior High School (SHS) track.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents according to the Influential Factors in Choosing SHS Tracks

Influential Factors	<i>f</i>	%
Personal Interest	1,418	71.83
Parents/Guardian	281	14.24
Peers/Friends	194	9.83
National Career Assessment result	41	2.08
Teacher	28	1.42
Others		
Availability of tracks/No other option or track	7	0.35
Other reasons (Unspecified)	3	0.15
Undecided	1	0.05
Siblings	1	0.05

The findings highlight that personal interest emerged as the most potent influential factor, resonating with 71.83% of the respondents. Additionally, parents or guardians played a role in guiding 14.24% of the decisions, while peers and friends exerted influence over 9.83%. Furthermore, the results of the aptitude test, specifically the National Career Assessment Examination (NCAE), influenced some respondents. An additional, uncontrollable factor surfaced in respondents' decision-making process—the availability of Senior High School (SHS) offerings in their geographic area. This aspect was particularly emphasized by participants in the focus group discussions (FGD), who mentioned that they often opted for tracks available in local schools, even if it diverged from their primary interests.

During the FGD sessions, participants shared their perspectives, and some pseudonymous statements encapsulate their experiences:

I chose the General Academic Strand (GAS) because that was the available track in our school (Mike, CARAGA).

For instance, someone like me who was supposed to take STEM might end up taking GAS because it's the only available option (Justine, Pangasinan).

We were still looking for other strands (from other schools), but because they were far and we had limited resources, we just chose what was available here (Anna, Samar).

Distribution of the SHS Graduates based on Curriculum Exits

The findings indicate that a significant proportion of the participants, specifically 1,593 individuals or 82.67% of the whole sample, opted to pursue further education. In contrast, a smaller percentage of respondents, specifically 197 individuals or 10.22% of the total sample, chose to enter the workforce. Table 4 reveals that a mere 1.30% of the participants are actively involved in entrepreneurship, while a meager 0.42% are engaged in middle-level skills development.

Table 4. Distribution of SHS Graduates in Curriculum Exits

SHS Curriculum Exits	<i>f</i>	%
Higher Education	1,593	82.67
Employment	197	10.22
Entrepreneurship/Business	25	1.30
Middle-Level Skills/Short Training Course	8	0.42
TOTAL	1,823	94.60
Not in any of the four curriculum exits	104	5.40
GRAND TOTAL	1,927	100

**There are 8 mission responses to this question.*

The findings of this study suggest that a significant number of participants opted to pursue further education, irrespective of the academic pathways they pursued during their senior high school years. Higher education, being chosen by the majority of senior high school students in the Philippines after their graduation aligns to the results of previous studies (e.g. Bacaling, 2018; Royo, 2019; Orbeta and Potestad, 2020; Awi, et al., 2021; Intad, 2021; Rin & Domondon, 2021; Colobong, 2023; Cundangan, 2023). These findings also indicate that individuals who have not followed the traditional academic track are also able to pursue higher education. Moreover, a greater number of graduates from the Technical-Vocational Livelihood (TVL) track opted to continue higher education rather than pursuing occupations that focus on vocational learning or technical-vocational livelihood. This finding indicates that a significant majority of students continue to pursue a college degree with the aim of enhancing their prospects for future chances (Cuy & Salinas, 2019). Furthermore, the assertion made by Garcia (2018) is substantiated by the fact that Filipino households exert considerable effort in ensuring their children's access to education.

However, the status of eight respondents following their graduation from Senior High School (SHS) was not indicated, namely whether they pursued any of the curriculum exits or not.

In summary, a greater proportion of responders (94.61%) fall inside the four curriculum exits compared to those who do not (5.39%). The findings indicate that a majority of the participants demonstrated a substantial understanding of the Department of Education's aim, which is to enable Senior High School graduates to pursue their preferred curriculum choices.

Considerations that SHS Graduates in Selecting their Curriculum Exits

The considerations that SHS graduates had for each curriculum exit were discussed per section to provide context-specific explanations.

Considerations of SHS Graduates in Pursuing Higher Education

The considerations of SHS students for pursuing higher education after graduation were listed. As can be seen from Table 5, obtaining a college degree (741 responses) is on top of the list of the respondents, followed by finding a job (550 responses). Other considerations cited include supporting their family (243 responses), achieving their dreams (229 responses), and improving or gaining additional knowledge (138 responses).

Aside from internal factors, some considerations are external to the respondents, such as the influence of their family (29 responses), values upheld by their family (17 responses), and the provision of a scholarship (2 responses).

Table 5. Considerations of SHS Graduates in Pursuing Higher Education

Considerations	f	%
to obtain a college degree	741	34.05
to find a job	550	25.28
to support the family	243	11.17
to achieve dreams	229	10.52
to gain/improve additional knowledge	138	6.34
to be successful	74	3.40
to improve skills	50	2.30
family influence	29	1.33
to have more opportunities in life	20	0.92
personal interest/decision	18	0.83
family values	17	0.78
to pay back	17	0.78
to be independent	12	0.55
to help the community	11	0.51
to apply knowledge	7	0.32
to maximize time	6	0.28
to gain additional experience	4	0.18
to establish own business in the future	3	0.14
government scholarship/scholarship	2	0.09
to be well respected in the community	2	0.09
to serve for future family	2	0.09
to qualify for the board exam	1	0.05
GRAND TOTAL	2,176	100.00

These considerations were elaborated during the FGD. The following figure shows the results of the thematic analysis of the considerations of the FGD participants in pursuing higher education.

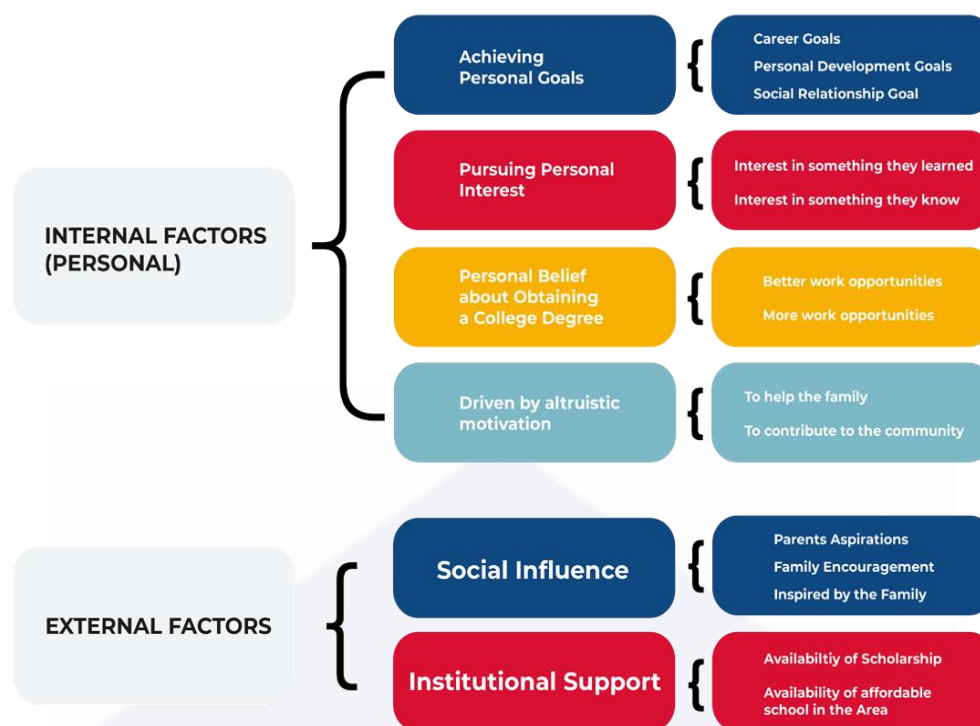


Figure 2. Thematic map of the considerations of SHS graduates in pursuing higher education

AmBisyon Natin 2040 stipulates the collective long-term vision of Filipino people to have a comfortable and secure life. Having a good job is central to the realization of this vision. The acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits are fundamental and imperative through formal education in order to improve the quality of life (NEDA, 2015). However, not all learners can proceed to higher education. On the part of the SHS graduates who were able to pursue college, there were internal and external factors which they considered to be influential to their decision. The following reflects the responses of the SHS graduates.

Internal Considerations

Achieving Personal Goals

The SHS graduates share a common desire to achieve their various goals, encompassing career, personal development, and social relationships. When it comes to their career goals, these graduates harbor ambitions of becoming teachers, policemen, engineers, nurses, ship crew members, guidance counselors, information technologists, horticulturists, chefs, and managers. To fulfill these aspirations, they recognize the importance of pursuing higher education, building upon the foundations laid during their SHS years. Their time in SHS has instilled in them a sense of purpose and the belief that the knowledge and skills gained will be invaluable assets as they strive to attain their dream jobs:

Yes, I really wanted it, so I liked it more when they told me about the possibilities, like setting up a company, and just hiring the people I wanted in accounting and such. That's why I chose business finance (Karen, Cavite).

Personal development goals are equally vital to these graduates. Many of them recognize the need to further enhance their knowledge and skills, even though the SHS program provided them with the competencies necessary for employment (Maulion, 2018). Their desire for continuous learning and skill development drives them to pursue higher education, where they can acquire theoretical knowledge while honing practical skills relevant to their desired professions. They believe that the education and experiences they gained in SHS have laid the foundation but are insufficient for their dream jobs, necessitating higher education for a more comprehensive preparation:

[P]ursuing college is like you are importing your knowledge from the instructor [to] yourself in college. It is because education is really the powerful... [a] powerful weapon that you could use in the future (Melissa, Davao Oriental).

Moreover, the graduates are also motivated by their social relationship goals, particularly the desire for respect and recognition within their communities. This aspiration aligns with the unique and special characteristics often attributed to Filipino post-millennials, who seek recognition and appreciation for their achievements (Monaco & Martin, 2007). They are determined to gain the respect of their peers and avoid being subjected to contempt or discrimination, which they believe can be mitigated through higher education:

I will study and finish four years of college so that I won't be looked down upon by others. Then, when I look for a job, I won't have a hard time... because there are others who didn't finish their studies and some people tell them that they are inferior (Erik, Bayugan City).

The SHS graduates are driven by a combination of career ambitions, personal development aspirations, and the desire for social recognition and respect. They recognize that higher education is a critical pathway to achieving these multifaceted goals, and they are committed to pursuing it as a means to unlock a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

Pursuing Personal Interests

The third internal factor drawn from the FGD is linked to the pursuit of personal interests. This result is congruent with the findings of Nyamwange (2016) on the influence of interest on career choice/ decisions among first year university students. In her study, she found that the interest of a student is significant in deciding what to pursue after high school. Personal interests include the preferences of the students based on something they learned in the past and on the things they know as embedded in the ideal job that they want, including the type and place of work.

Participants in the FGDs shared that their choice of degree programs often stems from subjects they found interesting during their primary and secondary education. For instance, one participant expressed a passion for mathematics, which motivated them to pursue an engineering course. Another SHS graduate articulated her love for science, leading her to major in education with a science focus. Another participant had a clear preference:

That's really my own interest, Sir. Ever since I was young, Sir, I've really wanted to work on a ship (Alex, El Salvador City).

These narratives highlight the powerful role that personal interests play in guiding students' academic and career choices, fostering a deep sense of motivation and engagement in their educational pursuits (Harackiewicz, Smith & Priniski, 2016).

Participants also emphasized that they personally selected their courses, ranging from maritime studies, vocational teaching, office administration, agriculture, engineering, to hospitality management. Some had harbored interests in these fields long before enrolling in Pre-Baccalaureate Maritime Specialization or SHS. For example, one participant had always aspired to be a seafarer:

It is my personal interest, Sir. Ever since I was a kid, I really wanted to work on a ship (Alex, El Salvador City).

Another participant expressed their interest in vocational teaching, aiming to become a professional educator or work for a government agency, stating,

I dream to become a teacher. She said that she is passionate about teaching because she believes it is the noblest profession (Unidentified participant).

A current Bachelor of Science in Industrial Technology student expressed contentment with their course and envisioned a successful future in their chosen field. On a different note, one participant disclosed that her interest in office administration was driven by both her passion for the subject and her family's economic situation:

Their economic status and her plans to alleviate his family from poverty further heightened this interest" (Unidentified participant).

In conclusion, personal interests emerged as a pivotal factor in influencing the educational and career decisions of SHS graduates. These interests encompassed subjects they were passionate about, knowledge they had acquired, and long-held aspirations. Recognizing the role of personal interests in guiding their choices, these graduates embarked on educational paths that aligned with their passions and career aspirations, driven by a deep-seated motivation to succeed in their chosen fields.

Personal Beliefs about Obtaining a Baccalaureate

The third internal factor relates to the participants' belief that obtaining a baccalaureate will facilitate their job search. They perceive that a baccalaureate not only increases the number of job opportunities available to them but also makes these jobs more stable, decent, and higher-paying. This perspective aligns with the notion that higher education serves as a mechanism for achieving social mobility, as it leads to prestigious occupations and higher income (Nazimuddin, 2015).

Many participants strongly associate the acquisition of a baccalaureate with the abundance of job opportunities and the ease of finding employment. They believe that having a degree will simplify the job search process, as it opens more opportunities for them. They view their diploma and professional licenses or certifications as crucial prerequisites for employment. Some participants emphasized this viewpoint:

When you apply for jobs, they often consider your educational attainment (Regine, Passi City).

In today's world, many opportunities are available to those with a bachelor's degree (Ace, Cebu).

People often say that having a degree makes it easier to find a job (Bernard, Dinagat Island).

Participants are motivated to complete their college education in pursuit of stable and decent employment opportunities that would enable them to support their families. They believe that possessing a degree provides them with a distinct advantage over those who do not hold one. To secure better job prospects, they consider completing college essential:

To secure a better job and have an advantage during the application process, having a degree is crucial. It also affects the salary and can help secure a stable job, not just part-time work, but a genuinely stable job (Timothy, Cebu).

For the participants, a professional job represents stability and decency, enabling them to earn a higher income. One participant even believes that obtaining a professional license would enhance job stability.

Altruistic Motivation

The final internal factor revolves around the altruistic motivations of the SHS graduates, which have driven them to pursue higher education. This factor underscores that their pursuit of college education is not solely for personal growth but also for the betterment of their families and communities. Despite facing socio-economic challenges, they are determined to realize their dreams (Jarabilo, 2019), not only for their own benefit but also for the greater good.

SHS graduates are motivated to pursue higher education primarily because they want to assist their families by providing for their needs. They aspire to achieve success in life to improve their family's economic situation. Many participants come from low-income backgrounds, and they believe that completing higher education can elevate their social status. One participant shared how her family's situation served as inspiration for her pursuit of higher education, driven by a desire to uplift her family from poverty:

I was inspired because of my family's situation. I wanted to uplift us from poverty. So, I want to pursue my education (Patricia, Northern Samar).

Another participant revealed that his father emphasized the importance of completing college, regardless of the chosen course. His father's perspective was that any degree would significantly increase his employability, which, in turn, would assist in meeting their family's needs and ultimately allow his father to retire from his overseas work in Malaysia:

All my father wanted for me is to obtain my degree so that I could work and help my parents. I know it is difficult for them to sustain our daily needs. I also want my father to come from Malaysia (Howard, Quezon).

Similarly, another participant expressed a strong determination to finish college, intending to work and contribute to his family's financial well-being. As the eldest in his family, he felt a sense of responsibility to assist his family in the future, given the non-permanent nature of his father's job as a fisherman:

I have this mindset after obtaining a degree, I will help my family since I am the eldest. My father's job is not permanent. He is engaged in fishing and the sole breadwinner in our family. My brother and I have the same mindset (Abdul, Lamitan City).

Participants in various ways emphasized the importance of completing college, understanding their roles and the financial challenges faced by their families. They recognized that obtaining a degree was a means to secure a better future for their families.

In addition to personal and family concerns, participants also saw themselves as valuable contributors to their communities once they had completed a degree. Some participants aimed to become successful professionals to make a positive impact on children and society. Others aspired to be nurses to provide care to individuals and contribute to their community's welfare, including taking care of their aging parents.

Moreover, several participants expressed their ambition to become police officers with a strong sense of duty. They wanted to help maintain peace and order in their communities and guide individuals to become law-abiding citizens. Some expressed a desire to serve their country, while others felt inspired by their exposure to social work and wanted to pursue careers that involve serving others.

These narratives indicate that SHS graduates envision themselves as active contributors to the well-being of their families and communities. Their aspirations align with the goals of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) outlined by UNESCO, which aims to empower learners of all ages to become promoters of more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure, and sustainable societies (Leite, 2022).

Ultimately, these participants' motivations for pursuing higher education extend beyond personal goals, reflecting their desire to create positive change in their families, communities, and society as a whole.

One participant shared her journey toward choosing social work as her college course. Initially considering education, her perspective shifted during Grade 11 when they conducted documentation on social work and interviewed social workers. This exposure inspired her to pursue social work in college. She realized that this field allowed her to focus on more than just her own well-being but also the welfare of others, reflecting a broader sense of purpose and altruism:

At first, I wanted to take up education. When we were in Grade 11, we had documentation of social work and interviewed social workers. It seemed that this inspired me to take social work as a college course. So there, I realized that social work is better because, you know, you don't only think about yourself (Marjorie, Kalinga).

These narratives collectively highlight the altruistic motivations of SHS graduates. Their commitment to higher education extends beyond personal and familial aspirations to encompass the broader community and societal goals. They are driven by a genuine desire to create positive change, support their families, and contribute to the well-being of others, reflecting a deep sense of social responsibility and empathy. These motivations underscore the transformative potential of higher education in shaping not only their individual futures but also the communities they aim to serve.

External Factors

As shown in Table 5, the external factors motivating respondents to pursue higher education include family influence, family values, and scholarships. These external factors were categorized into two broader factors: social influence and institutional support.

Social Influence

Social influence encompasses the impact or effect of other individuals on the decision of SHS graduates to pursue higher education. Participants considered the aspirations of their parents, the

encouragement they received from both family and non-family members, and the inspiration they derived from others when deciding to pursue college and their chosen courses.

For many participants, the decision to pursue higher education was significantly influenced by their parents. This reflects the importance Filipino families place on their children completing their education (Garcia, 2018).

My family also wanted me to finish schooling before I enter the workforce (Richard, Davao Oriental)

My parents wanted all of their four children to finish schooling. Last year, our eldest graduated from college. They want the same for me and my other siblings (Andrei, Camiguin).

Interestingly, the FGD results also revealed that some respondents relied on their parents' preferences when choosing their college courses.

Nursing was my father's choice. I really wanted to take Business Administration (Bea, Paranaque).

One participant shared how the opinion of his/her parents ultimately made him/her choose another course (Marjorie, Kalinga).

While not explicitly directed by their parents to pursue higher education or a specific course, some participants considered their parents' wishes and aspirations when making their decisions. One participant wanted to achieve what her mother had not attained, reflecting the family-oriented nature of the post-millennial generation. These SHS graduates value their family's desires and dreams, drawing inspiration from their parents' aspirations to achieve success (Monaco & Martin, 2007). Similarly, they respect and follow their parents' advice to choose a cost-effective college course that leads to a stable source of income (Pascual, 2014).

Apart from their parents' wishes for them to complete their education, active encouragement from their families played a crucial role in motivating respondents. Some participants highlighted the importance of encouragement from both family and non-family members in pursuing higher education.

The presence of family members who had already completed college influenced some respondents to pursue higher education. For example, one participant mentioned that almost all of their siblings had graduated from college, motivating them to follow suit.

Having role models within the family inspires participants to strive for academic achievement. The same applies to the choice of college courses. One respondent was inspired by their sister to pursue criminology, while another was encouraged by an uncle to choose the same course.

Friends also played a significant role in participants' decisions regarding both their SHS tracks and college courses. Participants shared that as the first batch of SHS students, they were uncertain about their choices. Some made decisions based on the courses their friends were planning to take, even if it did not align with their initial plans. This influence from peers demonstrates the millennial trait of wanting to make important decisions in collaboration with their peers (Monaco & Martin, 2007).

These external factors underscore the social dimension of the decision-making process for pursuing higher education among SHS graduates. They consider the opinions and aspirations of their

parents, draw inspiration from their family members and peers, and value the guidance and encouragement they receive from their social networks. These factors collectively contribute to shaping their educational and career paths.

Institutional Support

The decision of participants to pursue higher education was also influenced by factors related to institutional support. Specifically, they cited the availability of financial support and the presence of affordable schools within their respective areas as decisive factors.

Financial constraints are a significant challenge faced by SHS students (Orbeta et al., 2018). During the FGD, participants emphasized the role of financial opportunities in encouraging them to continue their studies. Some participants mentioned that they were able to secure scholarships, which made it possible for them to pursue their college education. For many, without this financial support, continuing their education would have been challenging. One participant viewed the opportunity as a chance to pursue a course that wasn't originally part of their plans.

I consider this as an opportunity. I will grab the opportunity given to me. My college course is not my dream as it is very different from what I took in senior high. It is not related to the TVL track which I took in SHS. I'm taking agriculture because we have land (Ernesto, Koronadal City).

Actually, I am a scholar, so I continued with my studies (Glaiza, Passi City).

Participants also considered the availability of affordable schools in their local area when choosing their college courses. Due to financial constraints, respondents often had no choice but to take their parents' concerns into account. One participant considered the proximity of the school to their home, making it a more affordable option.

It is cheaper. The first basis in choosing the school is proximity. My parents said that while they are still strong, we have to study because that is the only thing they can leave us. We are not rich, so that is all they can provide as an inheritance. My parents support me, and the scholarship granted by our mayors helps, too (Fernan, El Salvador City).

These findings highlight that, even with scholarships, students must carefully consider other expenses before embarking on their college journey. Despite the full implementation of RA 10931, also known as the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, which provides free tuition and other school fees in public higher education institutions, many Filipinos still face challenges in pursuing higher education. As a result, these SHS graduates are constrained in their options due to their family's socioeconomic status.

Choosing nearby higher education institutions is perceived as a cost-effective option, as it eliminates expenses related to boarding and transportation. In addition to cost savings, it offers the convenience and safety of attending school without the burden of long commutes or the uncertainties of heavy traffic. For parents, this choice provides reassurance about their children's convenience and security while pursuing their education (Sudhir Memorial Institute, 2020).

Considerations of SHS Graduates in Pursuing Employment

The decision-making process for pursuing employment among SHS graduates was influenced by various factors, with economic reasons being the most prevalent (83 responses). This was followed by the desire to support their families (51 responses), save for future education (20 responses), and continue their education (17 responses).

Table 6 presents a breakdown of the considerations that influenced SHS graduates in pursuing employment, based on 197 respondents' input.

Table 6. Consideration of SHS Graduates in Pursuing Employment

Considerations	<i>f</i>	%
Financial Problem/Difficulties	83	39.71
To support the Family	51	24.40
To save for the future/education	20	9.57
To earn money	17	8.13
To establish own family	8	3.83
To be independent	5	2.39
Personal decision	4	1.91
To gain additional experience	4	1.91
To save and establish own business	3	1.44
Support to sibling's education	3	1.44
To support college education	2	0.96
Family emergency	2	0.96
To achieve dreams	2	0.96
Personal interest	2	0.98
Got sick	1	0.48
To maximize time	1	0.48
To take advantage of available resources	1	0.48
Total	209	100.00

During the FGDs, participants were asked the same question as in the survey regarding the factors that influenced their decision to pursue employment. They were allowed to provide multiple responses. The considerations shared by the participants were categorized into three main groups: financial problems or difficulties, support for their family and future education, and other concerns arising from unexpected life circumstances that they faced as SHS graduates.

Financial Problems/Difficulties

Financial problems and difficulties emerged as a significant factor influencing SHS graduates to opt for employment over pursuing higher education. This aligns with prior research that highlights how financial constraints can deter students from continuing their studies and push them into the workforce (PSA, 2017; Nucum, 2018). Participants indicated that financial limitations compelled them to work as they couldn't afford to attend college. Some needed to earn money to support their educational expenses. The following statements from participants illustrate their desire to pursue higher education but their inability to do so due to financial constraints:

First and foremost, we have a limited budget. So, I need to work hard to have the means to fund my studies. I want to study, but our financial situation is challenging (Franc, Sagay City).

I couldn't go to school because I didn't have the money for college. I had to work as a pedicab driver (Andres, Catbalogan City).

I also wanted to go to college, but it was due to financial problems. I had no choice but to work (Jordan, Ilagan City).

I have financial difficulties as well. I made the decision because my parents are facing financial challenges (Faiza, Lamitan City).

These statements underscore how financial barriers can hinder educational aspirations and push individuals into the workforce as a means of addressing immediate financial needs.

Supporting the Family

Supporting their families emerged as another significant consideration for employment among the participants. This is in line with the findings of Palabrica & Ferolino (2023) which stressed economic-related factors such as family income and educational expenses as considerations of senior high school students in choosing to earn a living right after graduation. They expressed their desire to provide financial and social assistance to their parents and other family members. Some participants mentioned that they work to contribute to their family's daily expenses, while others highlighted their role in financing their siblings' education:

I initially wanted to continue my studies, but I stopped to assist my family. I am financially supporting the education of my two older siblings (Kenneth, Dagupan).

These statements reflect the strong sense of responsibility and family support among SHS graduates. While they may have initially desired to pursue higher education, their immediate priority is to provide assistance to their families, which includes supporting the education of their siblings. This dual commitment illustrates their dedication to both their families and their prospects.

Changes Due to Unexpected Circumstances in the Family

Unexpected family circumstances, such as a sick family member needing support, the passing away of a relative, or starting their own families, were among the reasons why some SHS graduates decided to pursue employment instead of higher education. They shared that the responsibility to help their family members who were ill or in need of support compelled them to work. Additionally, some participants mentioned that they began their own families, which led them to prioritize employment for financial stability.

One participant mentioned the need to work due to starting a family:

I chose to work because I already have my own family, and I had no other source of income, so I prioritized working for now (Greg, Zamboanga Sibugay).

These unexpected family circumstances played a significant role in the participants' decisions to enter the workforce instead of pursuing higher education. It highlights the importance of addressing immediate family needs and responsibilities in their decision-making process.

Grabbing the Opportunity at Present and Saving Up for the Future

For some of the respondents, employment is viewed as a stepping stone toward achieving their future goals. They see their current jobs as a means to an end, whether it's saving up for their education or starting their own businesses. These individuals are hopeful that their employment will eventually lead them to where they want to be in the future.

One participant expressed the intention to save money and use it to establish their own business:

I am working to save money and later on to put up my own business (Sid, Catbalogan City).

Others mentioned that while they would have preferred to pursue higher education, they decided to work first due to financial constraints. They plan to save money from their jobs with the intention of continuing their studies in the future.

I want to study, but I wanted my siblings to finish their studies first. So, I decided to work (Jansen, Surigao City).

I had to work because of financial problems. When I am able to save money, then I will continue my studies (Juanito, Camiguin).

These responses reflect a pragmatic approach among some of the respondents, who are willing to work temporarily to secure their financial stability and pursue their education or entrepreneurial aspirations in the future.

Considerations of SHS Graduates in Pursuing Entrepreneurship/Business

Among the 25 respondents who provided multiple responses (totaling 37 responses), personal interest emerged as their primary reason (20 responses), followed by their desire to assist in their family's business (8 responses).

Table 7 presents the considerations of SHS graduates when it comes to pursuing entrepreneurship or business.

Table 7. Considerations of SHS Graduates in Pursuing Entrepreneurship/Business

Considerations	<i>f</i>	%
Personal interest	20	54.05
To help family business	8	21.62
To acquire real property and savings	4	10.81
Family influence	3	8.11
Peer influence	2	5.41
TOTAL	37	100.00

**Multiple responses are allowed.*

**N=25*

The responses of the participants align with the data presented in Table 7. It is important to note that the decisions of those who pursued entrepreneurship or business were influenced by various factors.

Some participants initially wanted to pursue higher education, but their parents convinced them to assist in their small family business.

Others expressed a genuine interest in business and were motivated by the prospect of generating income or profit. For example, one participant shared that he wanted to earn money to pursue his dream career, Architecture, which required costly materials. As a result, he decided to yield his opportunity to a sibling currently studying. He established a small business and plans to expand it. Once he accumulates enough funds, he intends to enroll in an Architecture program.

Two participants mentioned that their decision to pursue business was influenced by other people. One participant's father-in-law encouraged him to enter the business world by providing them with a computer shop to manage. Seeing it as a promising income source, he accepted the offer. Another participant was inspired by a friend engaged in direct selling of shoes, apparel, accessories, and personal care products.

For some participants, engaging in business was the result of unexpected circumstances. One participant initially enrolled in TESDA to enhance his skills for potential overseas work. However, due to financial constraints, he returned to his hometown and started a billiard business as a temporary solution while he continued to search for a job.

Another participant explained that she needed to care for her younger sibling while her single mother worked. She had previously worked at a convenience store but fell ill. Consequently, she decided to engage in online business, allowing her to earn income while having the flexibility to take care of her younger sibling.

[I have] two reasons - one is to be able to watch over my siblings, the other is to do online selling during my spare time (Jara, Dagupan).

Considerations of SHS Graduates in Pursuing Middle-level Skills Development

Eight respondents who pursued middle-level skills development provided only two reasons for their choice: to acquire additional skills and to obtain a higher level of national certification.

Table 8 summarizes the considerations of SHS graduates when it comes to pursuing middle-level skills development.

Table 8. Considerations of SHS Graduates in Pursuing Middle-level Skills Development

Considerations	<i>f</i>	%
To acquire additional skills	10	58.00
To have higher level of NC	6	42.00
Total	16	100.00

**Multiple responses are allowed*

**N=8*

The participants clarified that they enrolled in short-course training at TESDA because they aimed to enhance their knowledge and skills. They explained that they could only apply for a higher certification, such as National Certificate II, after completing the training course. For them, enrolling in a short-course training represented the initial step toward achieving their future goal of working abroad. Additionally, they opted for these training because they were free of charge. This aligns to the study of Intad (2021) in which they highlighted the importance of availability and accessibility of support such as scholarships to determining and developing career pathways for students.

Considerations of SHS Graduates for Not Pursuing Any of the Four Curriculum Exits

While this study emphasizes the four desired curriculum exits, it is crucial to acknowledge that 104 respondents did not pursue any of these exits. These SHS graduates provided multiple reasons (125 responses) for their decision. Financial reasons were the most frequently cited concern (61). Other considerations included lack of family support (17), pregnancy (17), and lack of interest (14).

Table 9 presents a comprehensive breakdown of the considerations of the SHS graduates for not proceeding with any of the identified curriculum exits.

Table 9. Considerations of SHS Graduates for Not Pursuing Any of the Four Curriculum Exits

Considerations	<i>f</i>	%
Financial reason	61	48.80
Lack of family support	17	13.60
Pregnancy	17	13.60
Lack of personal interest	14	11.20
Others (unspecified)	7	5.60
Safety	5	4.00
Health	4	3.20
Total	37	100.00

**Multiple responses are allowed.*

**N=104*

Financial constraints prevented 61 of the SHS graduates from pursuing any of the desired curriculum exits. Some of them mentioned that their parents lacked the financial means to support their higher education.

Additionally, there were participants who were already pursuing education but faced obstacles due to their own behavior. One participant mentioned that her mother discovered her drinking habit and subsequently forbade her from attending school. Taking risks is a characteristic of post-millennials, as identified by Monaco and Martin (2007).

Like many other adolescents, some of the participants experienced emotional breakdowns due to various events. One participant shared that he became despondent after failing the Philippine Military Academy Entrance Examination (PMAEE). Instead of exploring other opportunities, he became engrossed in playing the multiplayer online game, DOTA.

Lastly, another respondent chose not to pursue any of the four curriculum exits because he was preparing the necessary documents for his application to the military. Initially, he aspired to become a policeman, but his family couldn't afford to send him to college, so he pursued his second choice, which was a career in the military.

The results were somewhat comparable to those of a related study conducted in the province of Isabela (Colobong, 2023), which stated that financial considerations (80%) were the primary reason given by senior high school graduates for not pursuing any of the curriculum exits. This was followed by pregnancy (13%). Others pursued other opportunities, such as church missionary work.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study was to gain a thorough comprehension of how Senior High School (SHS) graduates in the Philippines are distributed and make decisions across different tracks. The study aimed to offer useful perspectives on the many trajectories that these graduates pursue, with a specific focus on three main goals: analyzing the distribution across different Senior High School (SHS) tracks, examining the nature of their curriculum exits, and researching the reasons that influence their choices.

The study's primary objective uncovered a heterogeneous distribution of SHS graduates across different tracks, encompassing Academic, Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL), Sports, Arts and Design (SAD), and the General Academic Strand (GAS). The presence of this variability highlights the importance of providing a range of SHS tracks to accommodate the varying interests and skills of students. Diversification is essential to accommodate the diverse range of abilities and ambitions among pupils.

The second objective entailed conducting a thorough examination of the educational pathways selected by the graduates. The results showed that a substantial majority of individuals pursued further education, indicating a strong dedication to academic advancement. Simultaneously, a significant proportion of graduates joined the labor force directly, underscoring the significance of immediate job prospects. Significantly, graduates have shown a preference for entrepreneurship and the acquisition of intermediate-level skills, indicating a strong desire for self-reliance and continuous improvement of their abilities.

Further investigating, the third objective examined the several aspects that impact graduates' decisions on their program departures. This investigation revealed significant motifs including individual ambitions, financial factors, familial impacts, and societal constraints. Graduates frequently made choices based on their personal passions and interests, as they perceived higher education as a means to access improved work opportunities and financial security. Furthermore, there were clear indications of altruistic incentives, as certain graduates aimed to provide assistance to their families and make valuable contributions to their communities. The influence of the family, encompassing the aspirations and backing of parents, together with the instruction from knowledgeable family members, also played a vital part. Furthermore, the provision of scholarships and accessible education opportunities has been identified as a catalyst for pursuing higher education.

Entrepreneurs and individuals seeking skills development were mostly driven by personal interests and assistance from their family businesses. Certain individuals go for entrepreneurship due to life circumstances or with the practical goal of accumulating funds for future educational or business pursuits.

Ultimately, this study emphasizes the intricate and diverse character of the decisions made by SHS graduates when it comes to their choices for further education or career paths. The diverse allocation of SHS tracks exemplifies the necessity for an educational system that is customized to suit individual interests and abilities. The examination of curriculum exits underscores the significance of higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, and skills enhancement as feasible and crucial routes.

The study highlights the intricate interaction between personal ambitions, financial factors, family relationships, and cultural pressures in influencing these choices. In order to facilitate well-informed and empowered decision-making among secondary school graduates, it is crucial for educational stakeholders and policymakers to adopt measures that encompass financial assistance,

career counseling, parental involvement, entrepreneurship initiatives, and easily accessible educational alternatives.

In conclusion, the research greatly enhances our comprehension of the decision-making procedures of Senior High School (SHS) graduates in the Philippines. This knowledge will assist in the creation of educational policies and programs that are more adaptable and efficient, in line with the changing requirements and ambitions of the nation's young population.

Based on the study's conclusions, there are several concrete recommendations for both policy and further research.

Policy Recommendations

Enhancing Career Guidance. To better enlighten students about their educational and career opportunities, Senior High Schools (SHS) must establish and implement comprehensive career guidance programs. These programs should provide students with exposure to various industries, opportunities for vocational training, and support for entrepreneurship.

Strengthening Regional Education. Addressing regional disparities in educational opportunities should be considered a key priority. One way to achieve this is by allocating funds towards enhancing the resources and infrastructure of SHS in disadvantaged regions, which include improving the availability of higher education and vocational training facilities.

Promoting Entrepreneurship. Encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship initiatives among SHS graduates is crucial. Providing access to financial resources, mentorship programs, and business development training will empower graduates to create their own employment opportunities.

Monitoring Curriculum Relevance. In order to ensure that the SHS curriculum remains aligned with the changing requirements of the labor market, it is imperative to conduct regular reviews and updates. Engaging industry partners in curriculum development can effectively bridge the skills disparity between school and the workforce.

Supporting Lifelong Learning. It is essential to foster a culture of lifelong learning. This can be achieved by providing opportunities for continuous learning and improving skills, such as delivering flexible and readily available adult education programs.

Research Recommendations

Longitudinal Studies. Conducting longitudinal research is crucial for monitoring the extended occupational trajectories of SHS graduates. This will facilitate the understanding of how their initial educational programs impact their long-term career advancement.

Impact of Career Guidance. Examining the effectiveness of SHS career advisory programs is of utmost importance. Examining the consequences of making knowledgeable professional choices at this juncture can provide valuable insights into future performance and job satisfaction.

Regional Disparities. It is crucial to examine the underlying factors that contribute to variations in employment and educational opportunities across different regions. The findings of this study can provide valuable guidance for targeted actions in disadvantaged regions.

Entrepreneurship Ecosystems. To support entrepreneurial endeavors, it is necessary to examine the local ecosystems for entrepreneurship and identify the key factors that influence the success of SHS graduates who choose entrepreneurship as their career path.

Curriculum Evaluation. Regularly evaluating the effectiveness and pertinence of the SHS curriculum is of utmost importance. In order to ensure the currency of the curriculum, it is imperative to collect input from both companies and graduates.

The purpose of these recommendations is to enhance the educational and employment results of SHS graduates in the Philippines by specifically addressing the opportunities and challenges identified in the study.

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