

# Career Choices of Senior High School Academic Track Graduates in Sorsogon City

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**Abstract**— This study would like to take a step in defining the career tracks and available career choices for SHS students and provide a better understanding of career decision-making that may provide meaningful outcomes for developing the careers of the future graduates of the K-12 Program. The descriptive-evaluative method of research utilizing survey and interview were used to determine the career choices and the factors that influence the choices of 170 academic track graduates in 11 public and 11 private senior high schools in Sorsogon City. Statistical tools used were frequency count, percentage, and rank. Findings showed that the majority of the graduates preferred higher education over employment, entrepreneurship, and middle-level skills development. Academic considerations had the most impact on the graduates who chose higher education exit. Therefore, the career guide was developed to help the students in choosing the right career path.

**Keywords**— Academic Track, Career Choices, Graduates, Senior High School.

## INTRODUCTION

Planning a career path entails a series of interconnected processes that take into account the continual recognition of one's unrealized potential while investigating educational and employment opportunities. One of the most important choices that each person must make while making future plans is this process. This is now regarded as inevitable and necessary in everyday life. It may be the most satisfying or regrettable event of a person's life, depending on how it may impact their present and future standing in both their personal and professional lives.

For some people, finding the ideal professional path can even be a lifetime struggle. Their interests and skills ought to be piqued by this. To put it another way, a person should be aware of their profession decision before starting. In other words, an individual should know one's career choice ahead of time. Nyamwange (2016) emphasized that choosing the right career path ensures that one leads a rewarding life, is motivated at their job, and can execute note-worthy productivity. An individual is certain to achieve future success and sustainability with these factors.

According to the research by Joseph & Ijeoma (2019) in Africa, establishing career development programs is essential to assisting youth in creating a fulfilling career so as to contribute to nation building. The study points out that as the government is at the forefront of nation-building, it should be concerned with youth career issues

and develop capacities that would ensure widespread participation of every individual in the youth career development process. To help them choose a career that will allow them to be valuable to society, sufficient career support and guidance is needed. The Philippines' economy grew at a steady rate in 2010, making it one of the fastest growing economy, according to the World Wealth Report in 2012. Despite this, it is still clear that the population has been increasing quickly over the past ten years, and the unemployment rate has remained high with 7.1% unemployment rate as of 2014 and 16.9% of which were identified as college graduates. The recorded rate at the time was regarded to be the highest among Southeast Asian nations. It has been reported that certain graduates lack the competencies or the necessary skills, which has led to a high percentage of unemployment and underemployment in the country.

In addition, among the countries in the world, the Philippines, during that time, was one of the three remaining which was still implementing a 10-year basic education. The "congested basic education curriculum" was also deemed to have contributed to the high unemployment and underemployment rate among the young. Thus, the K-12 program was primarily implemented in order to lessen the "misfit" graduates and produce lifelong learners who have mastered the necessary concepts and skills in preparation for tertiary education, middle-level skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship (DepEd Order No. 43 s. 2013). But in a study spearheaded by Davao Association of Catholic Schools (2022), it was found out

that pursuing middle skills and entrepreneurship is less a priority among the participants. The study suggests the improvement of basic, technical-vocational, and higher education curricula.

The additional two years from the old educational system is commonly referred to as the Senior High School. During this stage, the learners will take core courses and career pathways. The SHS program consists of different tracks, strands and specializations that learners may choose from depending on their aptitude, interests, and the capability and capacity of the school (Braza & Guillo, Jr., 2015).

Many students attend college without knowing what career path they wish to take. This is clear from the study's findings by Crişan, Pavelea, and Ghimbuluţ (2015), who concluded that students face significant obstacles when choosing a career, lack a clear career strategy, and are inadequately educated about career options. But in the case of the K-12 program, this is one of the most important choices that a graduate SHS student will make in determining one's future plans. This decision is deemed to greatly impact them throughout their lives.

Scholars can also attest that choosing one's career route is not an easy task, regardless of how the educational system is changed. It still takes a lot of time to think because one is afraid they won't get their desired job or preferred career. Career advocacy activities may lessen adolescent stress during career exploration and decision-making in order to avoid such unfortunate circumstances. Prior to the conduct of this advocacy, an analysis that is specific to those needs must be conducted.

Lupus and Farin (2021) highlight the importance of understanding and comprehending the different factors that influence a student's career decision-making process. These include the internal and external factors that contribute to career selection. In addition, students must have a foundation of career awareness and experiences in order to make good career plans. The students need to be oriented on new emerging trends, future opportunities and challenges in the context of career choice options. They need to know the prevalent market trends and practices and job scenario of various sectors (Ahmad et al, 2017).

However, in the case of the Philippines, limited studies discuss the success of career paths used for students. This also includes few studies on the factors that affect the design career choice of Filipino students. As a result, there are few available resources on how to help students identify the proper career options and course choice they can pursue in the future (Pascual, 2014).

In the first two years after the senior high school was implemented, the students had difficulty deciding which course to take in college. Students do not have enough knowledge about the curriculum exits and the tracks and strands in SHS. There were also students who struggled in the courses they selected since the course was not aligned with their strand. Because of this, the students would have to put in a significant amount of time and effort to learn the prerequisites and essential concepts, which were supposed to be covered in senior high school. In order to help students choose the path they want to pursue; the K-12 curriculum's exits should be highlighted.

This study would like to take a step in defining the career tracks and available career choices for SHS students. Hence, this study will determine the career choices of the first batch of academic track graduates and as well as the factors influencing the graduates' career choices. This will also further the career advocates' knowledge and provide a better understanding of career decision-making that may provide meaningful outcomes for developing the careers of the future graduates of the K-12 Program in the industry. Finally, the lack of studies on the career paths taken by SHS graduates, particularly in Sorsogon City and their struggles in choosing a career, prompted the conduct of this study.

## METHODOLOGY

The descriptive-evaluative method of research utilizing survey and interview were used in this study. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2012), employing a descriptive design is a very efficient technique to gather data more cost effectively from a large number of respondents. Another advantage of the design is that, because the responses are anonymous, respondents are more truthful when answering questions about sensitive personal information. However, the main disadvantage with this design is the difficulty of notably low questionnaire returns, which can significantly influence the representativeness of the initially chosen sample. Thus, the researcher made sure that respondents had enough

time to complete the surveys before collecting them to prevent low return rates.

The respondents of the study were graduates who took the academic track in the first year of implementation of

the senior high school program in Academic year 2017-2018. The researcher used a survey questionnaire and interview guide for data collection. The statistical tools used were frequency count, percentage, and rank.

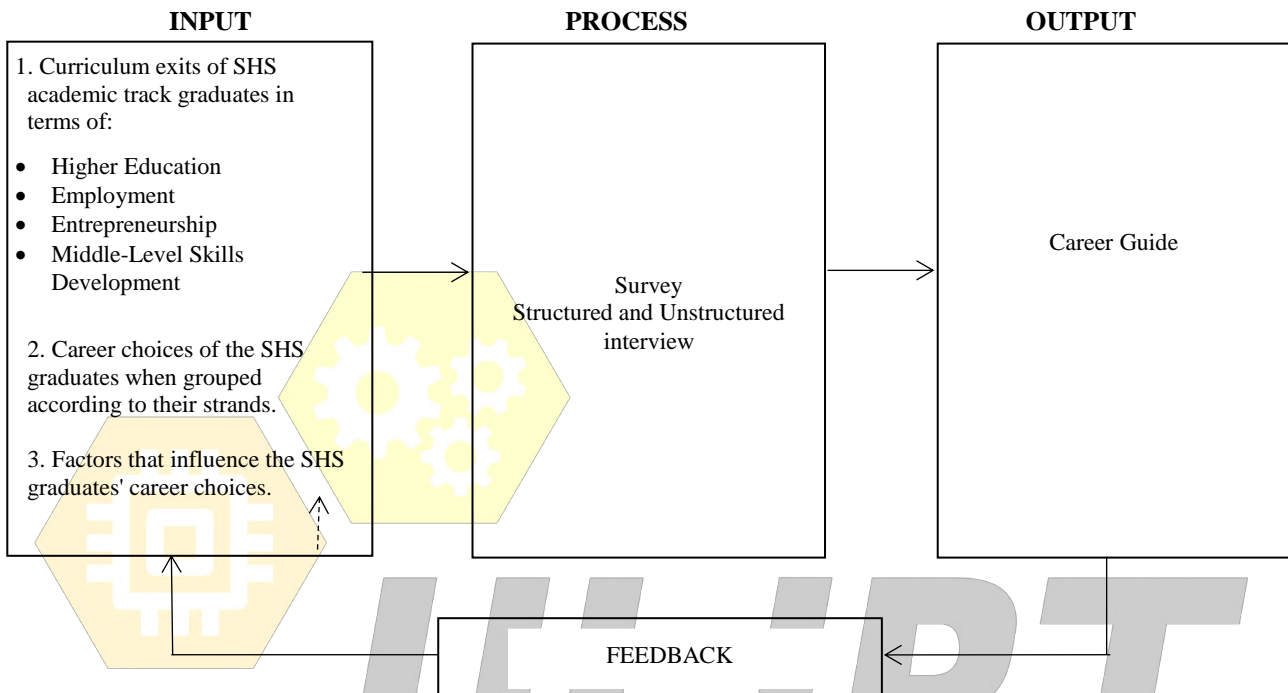


Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**1. Curriculum Exits of SHS Graduates of the Academic Track per Strand**

The decision to specialize in a particular field is crucial both for one's academic career and future personal life because it affects the student's academic progress, career, and employment chances. Students are frequently provided a list of careers to choose from before making their career decisions. However, because

most students don't have access to enough knowledge about various careers, their decisions are often influenced by what they believe to be the ideal job and the subjects they studied in secondary school. Perhaps the only support students get within the school system is from career masters or counselors who are expected to support students in their career choices (Nyamwange, 2016).

Table 1. Curriculum Exits of the Senior High School Graduates

Curriculum Exits	ABM		GAS		HUMSS		STEM
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f
Higher Education	33	94	69	94	12	86	47
Employment	0	0	2	3	1	7	0
Entrepreneurship	2	6	2	3	1	7	1
Middle-level Skills Development	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

It can be summarized from the results that the majority of the graduates of the academic track pursued higher education and only a small percentage of the

respondents were engaged in employment and entrepreneurial activities. The result also shows that none of the respondents engaged in middle-level skills development. Based on the SHS framework, the academic track was geared for senior high school students who choose to pursue a college degree after completing the basic education, and this was corroborated by the study's findings indicating that most graduates regarded pursuing higher education as their way to improve their knowledge and skills needed for their prospect career path and only a few would take on entrepreneurial activities and employment (Padios et al., 2021). These indicate that the stated and realized

inclination of SHS graduates to continue their study rather than entering the job market calls for a review of the employment and entrepreneurial objectives of the SHS.

In addition, a respondent mentioned during the interview that students should be aware of the different k-12 curriculum exits that they can pursue after graduating from senior high school.

The respondent expressed that teachers may invite professionals to discuss career options in class in order to at least enlighten the students and give them the opportunity to make decisions considering the factors that may influence their career choices.

**2. Career Choices of SHS Graduates When Grouped According to Strands**

The transition to the K–12 program from the 10-year basic education curriculum had a significant impact on the educational system. The K–12 Program's last two years are designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need for further education, and future employment. This reform offered different paths to the graduates of the K-12 program. The four career paths that this program offers, such as higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, and middle skills development, give senior high school graduates a clear path to pursue after graduation. Table 3 shows the career choices of the graduates of academic track in terms of the higher education curriculum exit.

**Table 2. Career Choices of SHS Graduates in Higher Education Exit**

Higher Education	ABM		GAS		HUMSS		STEM		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	n	%
Agriculture	1	3	1	1	0	0	1	2	3	2
Business	24	73	11	16	1	8	5	11	41	25
Engineering	1	3	2	3	0	0	18	38	21	13
IT, Computer Science & Programming	0	0	2	3	1	8	1	2	4	2
Maritime	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1
Medical & Healthcare	0	0	1	1	1	8	4	9	6	4
Science	0	0	2	3	1	8	7	15	10	6
Social Science	0	0	4	6	1	8	2	4	7	4
Teacher Education	5	15	30	43	5	42	2	4	42	26
Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary	1	3	5	7	1	8	0	0	7	4
Architecture	1	3	1	1	0	0	5	11	7	4
Professional & Technical Courses	0	0	10	14	0	0	0	0	10	6
Humanities	0	0	0	0	1	8	1	2	2	1

In general, teacher education was the most prioritized course of academic track graduates. The choice of pursuing this path may be associated with the large number of institutions offering this program. Students' preference for this college course may also be related to academic considerations such as the quality of course content and the institution's reputation, and it is regarded as one of the priority courses of scholarship programs as revealed in the factors that influence their career choices.

The graduates have also considered the future prospect considerations, particularly career development. This process is a significant part of the teaching profession in order to deliver quality service to students. This is consistent with Celik's findings (2017), which claim that

teachers have always been at the core of education and their career development has always been the primary issue in the education system.

Due to career opportunities and course interest, the respondents to this study also considered taking business-related courses after graduating from senior high school. A graduate of the academic track who participated in the interview revealed that she enrolled in the course to gain employability and entrepreneurial skills. This will enable the graduates to secure future jobs because of the career alternatives. This is comparable to the study of Buenviaje, del Mundo, Aonuevo, and Martinez (2015), which found that the majority of graduates were locally employed in their field of specialization with high employment rating.

**Table 3. Career Choices of SHS Graduates in Employment Exit**

Nature of Work	GAS	HUMSS	f	%
Technicians and associate professionals	0	1	1	33
Clerical support workers	1	0	1	33
Craft and related trades workers	1	0	1	33

Table 3 presents the nature of work of graduates who chose employment as their SHS curriculum exit. This was classified according to the 2012 Philippine Standard Occupational Classification of Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The table reveals that a small percentage of the respondents chose to work rather than study. One (1) of the three (3) graduates with jobs is a clerical support worker who chose to work in the healthcare sector, and the other graduate (one respondent, or 33%) worked in the craft and related trades, primarily as a machine operator. Only 1 graduate sought employment as an administrative supervisor among technicians and associate professionals.

It can be inferred that although few graduates engaged in employment, the SHS graduates are employable regardless of the strands taken in senior high school. Whether their job is a mismatch to their SHS strand, this study shows that the graduates are still equipped with skills or might have learned the required skills during their employment, which makes them trainable and become productive members of society (Awi, Calasin, & de Guzman, 2022). One student remarked that since she is a single parent, she preferred to work after graduation to support her child's needs. This is clear from Stack and Meredith's (2017) study on the effects of financial hardship on single parents, which mentions the need to make sacrifices in order to meet the basic needs of children.

**Table 4. Career Choices of SHS Graduates in Entrepreneurship Exit**

Nature of Business	ABM	GAS	HUMSS	STEM	f	%
financial institution	1	0	0	0	1	17
manufacturing	1	0	0	1	2	33
services	0	0	1	0	1	17
wholesale/retail	0	2	0	0	2	33

The results for the graduates' chosen career path in entrepreneurship are displayed in Table 4. The businesses established by graduates were classified into sub-categories based on the 2019 Philippine Standard Industrial Classification of PSA. The table shows that there were respondents who pursued this curriculum exit across all strands of the academic track. It is worth noting that 6 out of 170 graduates (4%) chose to start a business over pursuing further studies. 1 out of 2 ABM graduates (50%) who pursued entrepreneurship put up a business related to financial institutions and the same percentage of graduates are found in the manufacturing sector.

2 GAS graduates also started a wholesale/retail business. In addition, the graduate of HUMSS who opted to launch a business engaged in photography services. Finally, a STEM graduate ventured into manufacturing business. It indicates that further tracer studies are still necessary to assess how the senior high

school program has been doing in relation to its expected exits, including higher education, entrepreneurship, employment, and middle-level skills development. This outcome is in line with research conducted by Padios, Lejano, Gorospe, and De Asis (2021), who found that only a small number of graduates engaged in entrepreneurial activities. A respondent shared his reason for engaging in this exit due to his family's financial situation. He decided against going to college and instead opened a small business to help provide for his family's needs.

### 3. Factors Influencing SHS Graduates' Career Choices

Career choice is a complex decision for students since it determines the kind of profession that they intend to pursue in the future. Numerous research has revealed that various factors affect the student's decision making. Hence, it is important to recognize the important variables that affect students' career choice.

*Table 5. Factors Influencing SHS Graduates' Career Choices*

Factors	Higher Education		Employment		Entrepreneurship		Total	
	f	Rank	f	Rank	f	Rank	f	Rank
Academic Considerations	160	1	3	3.5	3	6	166	3
Personal Considerations	158	3	3	3.5	6	2.5	167	1.5
Social Considerations	156	4	3	3.5	6	2.5	165	4
Cultural Considerations	136	6	3	3.5	6	2.5	145	6
Economic Considerations	155	5	3	3.5	6	2.5	164	5
Future Prospect Considerations	159	2	3	3.5	5	5	167	1.5

Higher Education. Table 5 shows the factors that influence the SHS graduates' career choices. In terms of higher education exit, academic considerations received the highest rank and response frequency of 160, as these were considered to be the most influential in the career choices of the SHS graduates under academic track. One hundred sixty one (161) out of 170, or 95% of the respondents chose to pursue higher education. A high number of students under this key factor regarded course content quality with a frequency of 132, making it the first in rank as the primary determinant of their career choice.

Employment. The factors that influenced the SHS graduates' career choices of the curriculum exit under employment were placed on the same rank at 3.5 as shown in Table 5. They were the graduates who chose to work rather than continue their higher education. There were 3 out of 170 who settled on working, which is 2% of the overall respondents. The summary of factors that influenced their choice to work considered their academic, personal, social, cultural, economic and future prospects in choosing their field of work.

Entrepreneurship. The major factors that influenced the SHS graduates' career choices for the curriculum exit under entrepreneurship were personal, social, cultural, and economic considerations, placing them on the same top rank as shown in Table 5. They were the students who engaged in the business world instead of continuing in higher education. 6 out of 170 respondents (about 4% of the total respondents) said they have started their own business.

In terms of personal consideration, students highly considered their goals and ambitions in choosing the type of business that ranked first in the survey

conducted. Similar to the result under employment, their goals and ambitions are their driving force in conceptualizing their own business. At a very early stage of their life, their decision of creating business rather than continuing education is part of pursuing their career. This is followed by skills, which ranked second, and lastly, poverty and work experience.

Under social consideration, family influence is also the biggest part of students' decision making in choosing to venture into business. Similar to the result of underemployment, their families have always been part of their social lives. Other factors were influenced by peers and teachers.

With reference to the cultural considerations, customs and traditions ranked first, gender ranked second, and third is religion. These diverse cultural factors have been a good point of consideration for the students since business accommodates diverse kinds of people. A study conducted by the Strategy Institute for Thought Leadership produced findings that suggest core values and culture directly correlate with business performance.

The graduates have also regarded the economic considerations such as family income and educational expenses. The low family income and the large family size was one of the issues, according to a student who started a retail business. Due to his parents' unstable jobs, he needs to contribute with household expenses. He consequently made the decision not to pursue tertiary education and put up a business.

It can be summarized that personal and future prospect considerations had the most impact on the career choices of the SHS academic track graduates. Students value the

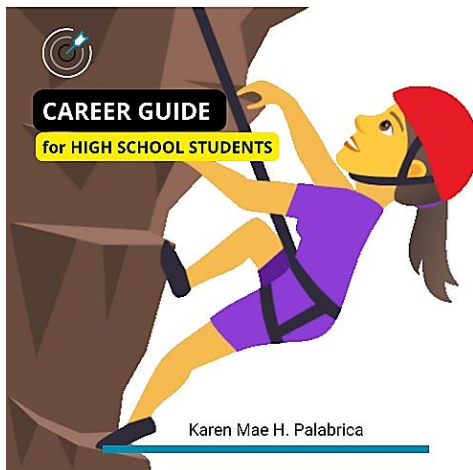
different factors such as interests in the course, abilities, aspirations, market demand, job availability, career development, employment opportunities, compensation, and occupational prestige. The study by Ouano, Torre, Japitan, and Moneva (2019) found that the top five factors motivating senior high school graduates were interest in a career related to their major, favorable employment prospects, aptitude, a desire to own their own business in the future, and expected earnings in the related field.

#### 4. Career Guide for High School Students

A career guide was developed based on the findings of the study and highlights the guidance for career planning and achieving the expected outcomes.

Proper career guidance is essential for students in order to succeed in their chosen career path. The result of the study shows that the majority of the senior high school academic track graduates proceeded to higher education after graduating from senior high school. Their preference for higher education over employment and entrepreneurship necessitates the establishment of career planning through a collaborative effort of school administrators, guidance counselors, parents, and teachers in order to guide the students in career pathing.

The developed career guide seeks to assist students in developing their career plans. Specifically, it will help the students determine the appropriate strand for them to take in senior high school and the career path they will select after graduating. This will also provide a range of career opportunities for students to take into account while creating a career plan and to identify students' career development goals considering their values, interests, and capabilities in order to provide a clear career direction.



#### CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the majority of the SHS graduates preferred higher education over employment and entrepreneurship as their curriculum exits. The majority of SHS graduates who chose higher education curriculum exit enrolled in teacher education courses. Moreover, graduates pursued courses unrelated to their SHS strand. Varied factors were considered by SHS graduates in selecting their career choice. A career guide was developed based on the result of this study to help the students in choosing the right career path.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

An appropriate orientation on the various curriculum exits, such as higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, and middle-level skills development, as envisioned for SHS graduates, must be conducted.

Intensify career advocacy efforts, especially at the secondary level, which focuses on the alignment of senior high school strands and curriculum exits prior to the development of a student's career plan is highly encouraged.

A collaborative effort of school administrators, guidance counselors, parents, and teachers should be established to assist the students in choosing the career path.

The developed career guide may be submitted for review and evaluation to the concerned authority prior to its implementation.

Further research on the alignment of curriculum exits to SHS strands of senior high school graduates may be conducted as well as the factors influencing their career choices. It is also suggested to continuously track graduates to gather more detailed information regarding the effectiveness of the K-12 curriculums in attaining its objectives.

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