

Factors Affecting Career Choice Decisions of Selected Junior High School Students in Calamba City, Philippines: Input to a Localized Career Guidance Program

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Abstract

High school education is the doorstep towards the future of students, whether they will pursue further education or enter the world of work. The study aimed to determine the factors affecting the career choice decisions of selected junior high school students in Calamba City, Philippines. Using case study as a research design, the study utilized a survey questionnaire to gather responses of 234 junior high school students where data gathered were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Results of the study showed that economic factors, such as financial stability and returns received strong agreement from students, while social factors got the most disagreement. Meanwhile, more than half of the respondents are inclined towards STEM-related degree programs and majority of them eye state university and colleges (SUCs) as prospective schools after graduation. The findings became the basis of the proposed localized career guidance program to further guide these students. Recommendations include revisiting existing policies on career guidance and empowerment of SUCs.

Keywords: Career guidance, decision-making, factors

1. Introduction

The passage of Republic Act No. 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 mandates the State to “broaden the goals of high school education for college preparation, vocational and technical career opportunities as well as creative arts, sports and entrepreneurial employment in a rapidly changing and increasingly globalized environment” [1]. Under Section 5 of the said law, the Department of Education (DepEd) must work with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to ensure college readiness and to harmonize basic and tertiary education curricula for the global competitiveness of Filipino graduates.

To fulfill these requirements, DepEd administers the National Career Assessment Examination (NCAE) to students during each academic year in order to ascertain their aptitude and occupational interest in any of the Senior High School (SHS) programs. By providing direction on career guidance at the classroom level, this assessment ensures that students acquire the necessary skills and competencies for the workplace and their future career decisions. The career assessment comprises three domains—Aptitude for SHS programs, Occupational Interest Inventory (OII), and General Scholastic Aptitude (GSA).

Occupational interest refers to the inclination of the learner towards vocations and career classifications [2].

Likewise, DepEd conducts the annual Career Guidance Program (CGP) on a recurring basis to aid incoming senior high school students in making well-informed decisions concerning their selection of a SHS track. The program also raises awareness about the significance of selecting a track that aligns with one's interests and abilities, while also considering the resources and demands of society [3].

Guiding students towards their most desired and appropriate careers has its private benefits and education plays a major role in selecting suitable careers for the students. Selecting the appropriate profession enables one to attain economic success, which is crucial for the well-being of humanity [4]. 66% of people with less education think they could have made more money if they had a higher degree, 81% think a higher level of education leads to more job satisfaction, and 42% think it leads to more joyful and fulfilling work experiences [5].

Economic security helps development and growth while also making people happier, more satisfied, and more tolerant. In addition, it says that people in countries where people have a good sense of economic protection are also generally happier [6].

Helping people with their careers is good for everyone, including the business and society. Good career counseling helps the job market work well and makes society fairer. In addition, career guidance helps the economy grow, people learn new skills, and jobs are created by making people better at what they do [7]. Several studies, though, have shown what happens when students do not have job guidance: they find it difficult to make decisions. Filipino college students do not get enough knowledge and help before college which become the big reason why students are not sure about their future careers [8]. This lack of preparation in making career choices leads to misalignment between educational and work goals, which keeps educational and occupational inequality going [9].

When students are knowledgeable about a specific profession, they become motivated and confident to take that path. Students alter their career choice if they receive sufficient information about a specific career like the needed resources, social status, salaries, and professional growth [10].

Students, whose educational and career goals are not aligned, also do not know what steps they need to take to reach their career goals. As a result, they have worse results in the job market, such as lower adult income and higher unemployment rates [9].

Nonetheless, it is important to point out that career guidance is not just the sole factor that will affect the career choice decision-making of students. Various factors, such as social, economic, environmental, personal, and academic, will play at hand to influence the selection process of students after graduating from high school to choose their career preparation in college which will later affect their lives in the real-world stage.

1.1. Role of career guidance and counselling

Career guidance and counselling program is “a comprehensive, developmental program designed to assist individuals in making and implementing informed educational and occupational choices and develops an individual's competencies in self-knowledge, educational and occupational exploration, and career planning”[11].

The agency explained the relevance of career guidance and counselling on students' career choice decisions, particularly that the workplace is constantly changing in the 21st century. This educates the students on the changes in the labor market and workplace complexities by expanding their knowledge and skills. Moreover, it sharpens their ability to come up with decisions by improving their self-confidence

and motivation and interpersonal effectiveness. Also, this program opens the door for students to maximize their career opportunities by enhancing their market employability and effective job placement by investing in employer relations which can all be provided to them with relevant information and education. Based on DepEd's National Career Guidance Program, the program is composed of orientations, learning materials, portfolios, counselling and consultations, and curriculum exit tracking system. The purpose of the orientation is to inform the top-level officials, from the regional supervisors to school heads the implementation of the career guidance program. This will be followed by a division orientation for guidance counselors, guidance designates, career guidance advocates, teachers, and class advisers. This will be further cascaded to schools for the parents and the students. Meanwhile, learning materials for career guidance are also available for kindergarten to junior highs school, with particular emphasis on Grade 10, 11 and 12 students. Also, learners are also encouraged to create their own portfolio compiling their activity sheets, copy of grades, results of assessments, and outputs related to career guidance.

1.2. Factors affecting career choice decisions

Students' decisions were greatly affected by future chances of being employed. They also listed interest as factors for students in choosing their majors that will enable them to hone their own abilities [12]. Other considerations include influencers and financial resources. Students' interest is also viewed as a significant factor [13].

Parents had the most significant influence in the career choice of students, citing their concerns and reservations during the decision-making stage. They also mentioned gender and peers as obstacle and influence on career choice, respectively [14]. Family has a positive role in students' career decisions, including the student's self-efficacy or their personal belief to achieve their goals [15].

In a study among senior high school students, students' choice of track and strand in SHS have strong associations with their target course in college. Moreover, students' personal preferences and influences of their parents are revealed to be important factors as well. However, they found a moderate association between the career choice decisions of students and socio-demographic variables including their age, their sex, and their number of siblings [16]. Other factors influencing students' choice of careers are adaptive to their age, gender or family wealth. More important than these socio-demographic variables are the availability of financial aids, quality of education, affordability of the tuition fees, and culture and environment of the school when enrolling in college [17].

Students in the public schools choose their professions based on the power of finances. On the other hand, students in the private schools were mainly guided by their families in selecting their careers [10].

Thus, there is a necessity to understand the way students choose their career paths because it is a complex process that needs proper evaluation of the different factors influencing their decision-making process [18]. With this problem at hand, the researcher makes it imperative to delve into the different factors that affect the career choice decisions of students, particularly junior high school students who are still not yet picking their SHS tracks and applying for college and university entrance exams. Thus, this study aimed to determine the factors affecting career choice decisions of junior high school students. Specifically, this study aimed to identify which among the social, economic, environmental, personal, and academic factors affect career choice decisions of students; identify students' prospective career choice decisions; and develop a localized career guidance program based on the findings of the study.

2. Framework of Analysis

The issue of various factors affecting career choice decision-making of students can be considered both as an education and a human capital issue. In terms of education, schools play an important role in bringing together different actors to support students in their career choices. This can be achieved by properly guiding students with the help of themselves, peers, families, teachers, community members, and society at-large to enlighten students on the most appropriate and desirable careers for them. Yet at the same time, these career choices of students will provide private and societal returns to them because education can be seen as an investment for better opportunities in the future. Accordingly, the study will use two theories, a learning theory and a development theory to address these issues.

2.1. Ecological systems theory and career decision-making

The first theory where this study is anchored on is the ecological systems theory. This theory posits that an individual's development is influenced by a series of interconnected environmental systems, ranging from the immediate surroundings to broad societal structures [19]. As shown in Figure 1, these systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, each representing different levels of environmental influences on an individual's growth and behavior.

The application of the ecological systems theory can help clearly understand the various factors affecting the career choice decision-making of students. Each level in the system contains these factors which have varying influences on how students come up with their career choices. The microsystem is comprised of the individual, family, friends, and school which reflects personal, social, environmental and social factors. The exosystem still contains parents, friends and mass media pertaining to social and environmental factors. The mesosystem shows the interaction between the two prior systems. The macrosystem contains the social norms, economic system, and culture that can be found on economic, social, and environmental factors. And the outermost level, the chronosystem depicts time which encompasses all factors mentioned. Career interventions based on these systems are being pushed because they were found at both the individual and systemic levels of what makes young people choose a job [20].

2.2. Human capital theory and career decision-making

Another theory to support the significance of proper career decision-making is the Human Capital Theory. From this point of view, training and education were tools that could make people more productive. Education became a more and more important part of the job market. The amount of human capital someone has can be raised by getting more schooling or learning new skills [21].

With the prevalence of various factors (social, economic, environmental, personal, and academic) affecting individuals, students may have varied takes on education investment and its economic returns on the individual and societal level. Students who have more money and friends who are there for them might have better access to educational tools, networks, and connections, which in turn affects the careers they choose. Access to good schools, scholarships, and other forms of financial aid can help students get the information and skills they need and allow them to go to college, which can lead to better job opportunities. And from an economic point of view, this investment in education will almost certainly lead students to choose fields with high wages and job security.

Students' private rates of return have a significant consideration on their higher education choices affirming the human capital theory proposition that individuals regard higher education as an investment [22].

3. Methodology

This section discusses the methodology utilized in the study, including the research design, the respondents of the study, the sampling method used, the locale of the study, the research instrument used, and the procedures conducted in data collection and data analysis.

3.1. Research Design

This research is a case study. The case study approach “allows in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings.” The primary objective of the study is to describe factors affecting career choice decisions of junior high school students. The design is appropriate since the study focuses only in one particular locale to serve as the case in describing these factors and prospective career decisions of students towards the development of a localized career guidance program.

3.2. Research Locale, Respondents and Sampling

The respondents of the study were 234 junior high school students of a science high school in Calamba City, Philippines. The total population of the school is 594 students. The researcher used the online calculator Rausoft to determine the sample size. With a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the researcher came up with 234 sample size. In selecting students who would serve as respondents, the researcher utilized purposive sample method, a non-probability sampling procedure. The primary consideration of the researcher in using this sampling technique is that respondents are not yet senior high school students, who have not yet enrolled according to the tracks and strands of senior high school, and who have not yet prepared for college entrance examinations.

3.3. Research Instrument

The researcher adopted a survey instrument from a study that also aimed at analyzing the factors affecting career choice decisions of senior high school students in Central Luzon [23]. To determine which factors influence their career choice decisions, questions can be answered using a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 4 where 1 signifies “Strongly Disagree” and 4 means “Strongly Agree”. The question for their preferred degree program is open-ended to allow respondents to input their answer without being limited to a pre-selected degree programs.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

Since the data collection procedure only began after the last day of face-to-face classes of students, the researcher opted to use Google Forms to gather the responses of the students. After acquiring permission to conduct the survey from school authorities, the researcher sent the link of the Google Forms to all the class advisers of the junior high school department of the research locale. The researcher opened the Forms until the 234 respondents were met; then, the Forms was eventually closed. The data from the Google Forms was converted to Google Sheets and downloaded to be opened in an Excel spreadsheet for the data analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher employed descriptive statistics in analyzing the data. The mean and the standard deviation were computed to determine which factor greatly influences career choice decisions of students. Meanwhile, the researcher categorized the responses of students for their preferred degree programs and target schools after graduation based on the similarities of their responses. Each category is then converted to percentage to provide a description of their career choice decisions.

4. Discussion

This section provides the discussion of the findings based on the research questions of the study:

4.1. Factors affecting career choice of junior high school students.

The first objective of the study is to determine which factors affect the career choice decisions of junior high school students. The factors considered for this objective include social, economic, environmental, personal, and academic factors.

4.1.1. Social factors

Table 1 presents the level of agreement of junior high school students on social factors affecting their career choice. This factor covers different social influences, such as peers, parents, family, and teachers, among others.

Table 1. Social factors affecting career choice of students

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. My friend’s preference of career affects my career choice.	2.03	0.82	Disagree
2. My parents are the one who are choosing my career.	2.11	0.83	Disagree
3. I consider the dominant profession of my family in choosing my career.	2.19	0.87	Disagree
4. I consider the influence of my teacher in choosing my career.	2.25	0.81	Disagree
5. I consider the choice of my sponsor in choosing my career.	2.29	0.88	Disagree
6. My friend’s choice of school affects my career choice.	2.00	0.82	Disagree
Overall	2.15	0.84	Disagree

Legend: (1.00-1.44 = Strongly Disagree, 1.45-2.44=Disagree, 2.45-3.44=Agree, 3.45-4.00=Strongly Agree)

For the indicator regarding the preference of their friends affecting their career choice, the mean score is 2.03 with a standard deviation of 0.82 which can be interpreted as “Disagree”. Likewise, the indicator on parents choosing the career choice of their children got a mean of 2.11 with a standard deviation of 0.83 which can be interpreted as “Disagree”. This shows that students do not view their parents and peers as influencers in their career decisions.

Meanwhile, for the indicator on the dominant profession prevailing in the family as a potential influence on students’ career choice, the mean score is 2.19 with a standard deviation of 0.87 which can be interpreted as “Disagree”. Similarly, for the indicator on the influence of teachers in their career choice, the mean score is 2.29 with a standard deviation of 0.88 which can be interpreted as “Disagree”. This also shows that teachers and family members’ professions have minimal influence on students’ career choice decisions.

In terms of the effect of sponsors on students’ career choice, students also generally disagreed on this as evident in the mean score of 2.29 with a standard deviation of 0.88 which can be interpreted as “Disagree”. Lastly, the indicator on the choice of schools of their friends affecting their career choice, the mean score is 2.00 with a standard deviation of 0.82 which can be interpreted as “Disagree”. This shows that sponsors and friends’ school choice also do not affect students’ carer choice decisions.

Combining these indicators, social factors garnered an overall mean of 2.15 with a standard deviation of 0.84 which can be interpreted as “Disagree”. This implies that junior high school students are not influenced much by their friends, parents, family profession, sponsors, and friends’ preferred school in choosing their careers in the future. Parents’ profession was of least influence on their career choice, including minimal influence of family business and inspiration from their relatives [14].

4.1.2. Economic factors

Table 2 details the level of agreement of junior high school students on economic factors which affect their career choice decisions. These economic factors encompass financial status, potential earnings and employment, and costs to be incurred on their part.

Table 2. Economic factors affecting career choice of students

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I consider the financial status of my family.	3.62	0.54	Strongly Agree
2. I consider my supposed future earnings.	3.72	0.50	Strongly Agree
3. I consider my future employment in choosing my track.	3.68	0.54	Strongly Agree
4. I consider my preferred track for I could already earn an income while studying.	3.30	0.77	Agree
5. I consider the costs/expenses in choosing a course.	3.65	0.58	Strongly Agree
6. I consider the fees that the career entails.	3.60	0.58	Strongly Agree
Overall	3.59	0.59	Strongly Agree

Legend: (1.00-1.44 = Strongly Disagree, 1.45-2.44=Disagree, 2.45-3.44=Agree, 3.45-4.00=Strongly Agree)

Of all the indicators, the indicator on the chances of earning an income while studying got a mean score of 3.30 with a standard deviation of 0.77 which can be interpreted as “Agree”. This means that students generally agreed but not to a strong extent that they consider working part-time while doing their studies. The remaining indicators received strong agreement from the students. The indicator considering the financial status of their family received a mean of 3.62 with a standard deviation of 0.54, while the indicator on supposed future earnings garnered the highest mean score of 3.72 with a standard deviation of 0.50 which can both be interpreted as “Strongly Agree”. This means that students consider the capacity of their parents to finance them and the financial returns of their future careers in selecting their careers. Likewise, the indicator on potential future employment got the mean score of 3.68 with a standard deviation of 0.54 which can be interpreted as “Strongly Agree”. This emphasizes the aim of students to get job opportunities after choosing their careers. Meanwhile, students are also considering the costs or expenses selecting their preferred career may incur on them as evident on the mean score of 3.65 with a standard deviation of 0.58 which can be interpreted as Strongly Agree. This is also echoed in their strong

agreement with the indicator on fees their career choice will entail which got a mean score of 3.60 with a standard deviation of 0.58.

As a whole, these economic factors achieved an overall mean of 3.59 with a standard deviation of 0.59 which can be interpreted as “Strongly Agree”. This puts emphasis on the effect of these economic factors on career choice decisions of junior high school students, particularly on likely employment in the future that can give them a source of income. Future employability had the most positive impact on students’ decisions [12].

4.1.3. Environmental factors

Table 3 encapsulates the level of agreement of junior high school students on environmental factors affecting their career choice decisions. These environmental factors are composed of school proximity and quality, conduciveness of learning environment, and location of future workplace.

Table 3. Environmental factors affecting career choice of students

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I consider the place of my future work in choosing my course.	3.43	0.70	Agree
2. I consider the proximity of my residence to the desired school.	3.16	0.75	Agree
3. I consider the conducive learning environment of the school.	3.54	0.56	Strongly Agree
4. I consider the school uniform of the school in choosing a course.	2.32	0.95	Disagree
5. I consider the quality of school, where the course is being offered.	3.77	0.47	Strongly Agree
Overall	3.24	0.69	Agree

Legend: (1.00-1.44 = Strongly Disagree, 1.45-2.44=Disagree, 2.45-3.44=Agree, 3.45-4.00=Strongly Agree)

The indicator on the quality of school where the course is being offered received the highest mean score of 3.77 with a standard deviation of 0/47 which can be interpreted as “Strongly Agree”. Likewise, the indicator on the conduciveness of the school’s learning environment got a mean score of 3.54 with a standard deviation of 0.56 which can be interpreted as “Strongly Agree” as well. This shows that students put premium on the school’s ability to give them quality education which is also related to a conducive place to learn.

Meanwhile, the indicator on the place of their future workplace got a mean score of 3.34 with a standard deviation of 0.70 which can be interpreted as “Agree”. Similarly, the indicator on the proximity of the students’ residence to their desired school received a mean score of 3.16 with a standard deviation of 0.75 which can be interpreted as “Agree”. These findings show that students generally agreed but not to a strong extent the location of their school and workplace in selecting from their career options, especially that these students are eyeing colleges or universities outside their hometown of residence.

However, the indicator on school uniform received a low mean score 2.34 with a standard deviation of 0.95 which can be interpreted as “Disagree”. This clearly shows that school uniform has minimal effect on students choosing a particular degree program or school.

In general, these environmental factors garnered an overall mean score of 3.24 with a standard deviation of 0.69 which can be interpreted as “Agree”. This implies that junior high school students are affected by the environment of their prospective school and workplace in deciding for their careers. School environment directly influences students’ choice of career [24].

4.1.4. Personal factors

Table 4 shows the level of agreement of junior high school students on personal factors affecting their career choice decisions. These factors encompass their personal preferences, talents, and views.

Table 4. Personal factors affecting career choice of students

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. My choice of school affects my choice of course.	3.22	0.80	Agree
2. My preferred course is suited to my talent.	3.21	0.74	Agree
3. My preferred course is my personal choice.	3.54	0.65	Strongly Agree
4. My preferred course is my ‘childhood dream’.	2.77	1.00	Agree
5. My preferred course is connected to my favorite subject.	2.89	0.93	Agree
6. My preferred course is an in-demand course.	3.09	0.77	Agree
Overall	3.12	0.81	Agree

Legend: (1.00-1.44 = Strongly Disagree, 1.45-2.44=Disagree, 2.45-3.44=Agree, 3.45-4.00=Strongly Agree)

Among the indicators under personal factors, the indicator on personal choice received the highest mean score of 3.54 with a standard deviation of 0.65 which can be interpreted as “Strongly Agree”. This clearly shows that students’ career choice decision is a result of their own personal volition. Meanwhile, the rest of the indicators were generally agreed by the students.

The indicator on school and course selection got a mean score of 3.22 with a standard deviation of 0.80 which can be interpreted as “Agree”. Likewise, the indicator on suitability of their course to their talents got a mean score of 3.21 with a standard deviation of 0.74 which can be interpreted as “Agree” as well. This implies that student’s personal choice of school and talents has a bearing on the selection of their careers.

Similarly, the indicator on their personal preferences on in-demand courses and favorite subject got a mean score of 3.09 with a standard deviation of 0.77 and 2.89 with a standard deviation of 0.93, respectively which can both be interpreted as “Agree”. Though still interpreted as “Agree”, the indicator on their course being a childhood dream received the lowest mean score of 2.77 with a standard deviation of 1.00 shows that students preferred course changed over time as they grew older.

Combining these indicators altogether, the personal factors got an overall mean score of 3.12 with a standard deviation of 0.81 which can be interpreted as “Agree”. This exemplifies the effect of personal

preferences on the career decisions of junior high school students. Personal interest exercised big influence on the career choice of students [25].

4.1.5. Academic factors

Table 5 outlines the level of agreement of junior high school students on the academic factors affecting their career choice decisions. These academic factors cover internship opportunities, scholarships, previous grades, academic achievements, and skills of students.

Table 5. Academic factors affecting career choice of students

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I consider the academic program based on the internship opportunities and hands-on experiences.	3.51	0.55	Strongly Agree
2. I consider my present scholarship for it is an automatic qualification to enroll in my choice of course.	3.33	0.72	Agree
3. I consider my previous grades in choosing my preferred course.	3.28	0.79	Agree
4. I consider my preferred course based on my academic achievements.	3.06	0.80	Agree
5. I consider my preferred course based on my skills.	3.53	0.59	Strongly Agree
6. I consider my preferred course because of the scholarship and subsidies being offered.	3.25	0.74	Agree
Overall	3.33	0.70	Agree

Legend: (1.00-1.44 = Strongly Disagree, 1.45-2.44=Disagree, 2.45-3.44=Agree, 3.45-4.00=Strongly Agree)

Two indicators under academic factors received strong agreement from students. The indicator on choosing academic program based on internship opportunities and hands-on experiences got a mean of 3.51 with a standard deviation of 0.55 which can be interpreted as “Strongly Agree”. Likewise, the indicator on skills as basis for preferred course has a mean score of 3.53 with a standard deviation of 0.59 which is interpreted also as “Strongly Agree”. This shows that students value the importance of practical learning experiences and real-world applications, as well as the contribution of their skills in choosing their careers.

Meanwhile, the indicator on the present scholarship got a mean score of 3.33 with a standard deviation of 0.72 which can be interpreted as “Agree”. Similarly, the indicators on students’ previous grades and academic achievements received a mean score of 3.28 and 3.06 which can both be interpreted as “Agree”, respectively. Another indicator can also be viewed as “Agree” and this is the offering of scholarships and subsidies with a mean score of 3.25. This implies that students take into consideration their individual academic abilities which are also a factor in obtaining scholarships as determinants of their chosen careers. As a whole, the academic factors have an aggregated mean of 3.33 and standard deviation of 0.70 which can be interpreted as “Agree”. This shows that junior high school students viewed their academic

performance and scholarships as influences in deciding for the careers. Career choices of students were influenced by their academic performance [26].

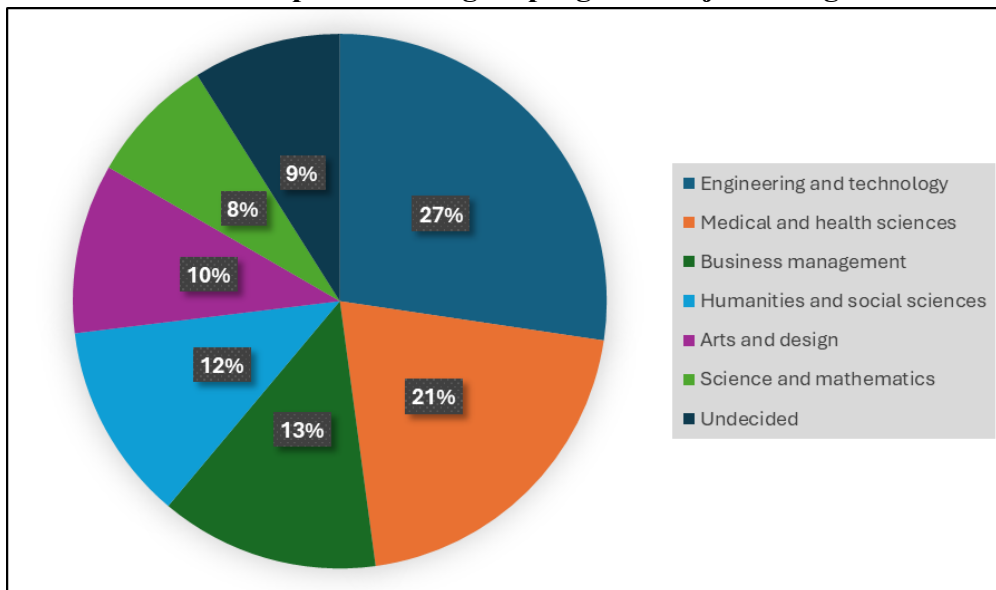
4.2. Career choice of junior high school students

The second objective of the study is to describe the prospective career choice decisions of junior high school students in terms of their preferred degree programs and their target schools after graduating from high school.

4.2.1. Preferred degree programs

Figure 1 illustrates the prospective career choice decisions of junior high school students in terms of their preferred degree programs. This clearly shows that students have a strong inclination towards Engineering and Technology wherein 64 respondents, accounting for 27%, selected degree programs which can be categorized under this. Next in rank is the area of Medical and Health Sciences where 48 students answered degree programs under this umbrella, taking up 21% of the total number of respondents. Meanwhile, 8% of respondents or 18 students are eyeing degree programs under Science and Mathematics.

Figure 1. Pie chart of the preferred degree programs of junior high school students



It can be deduced that more than 50% of students prefer degree programs that can further generalized under Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). One of the primary factors for this selection is the fact that the respondents are science high school students who are studying under a special science education program and are expected to venture to STEM strand when they step put on senior high school.

Students who were more confident in their math skills and knew more about STEM careers were more likely to choose one. Students who were more interested in technical and scientific skills were also more likely to think about a job in STEM fields than students who wanted to do something useful, concrete, and practical [27].

Meanwhile, 31 students prefer programs under the Business and Management cluster, accounting for 13% of the respondents. This shows that some students are inclined towards accounting, entrepreneurial, and managerial careers in the future. Under the Humanities and Social Sciences category, 28 students or 12%

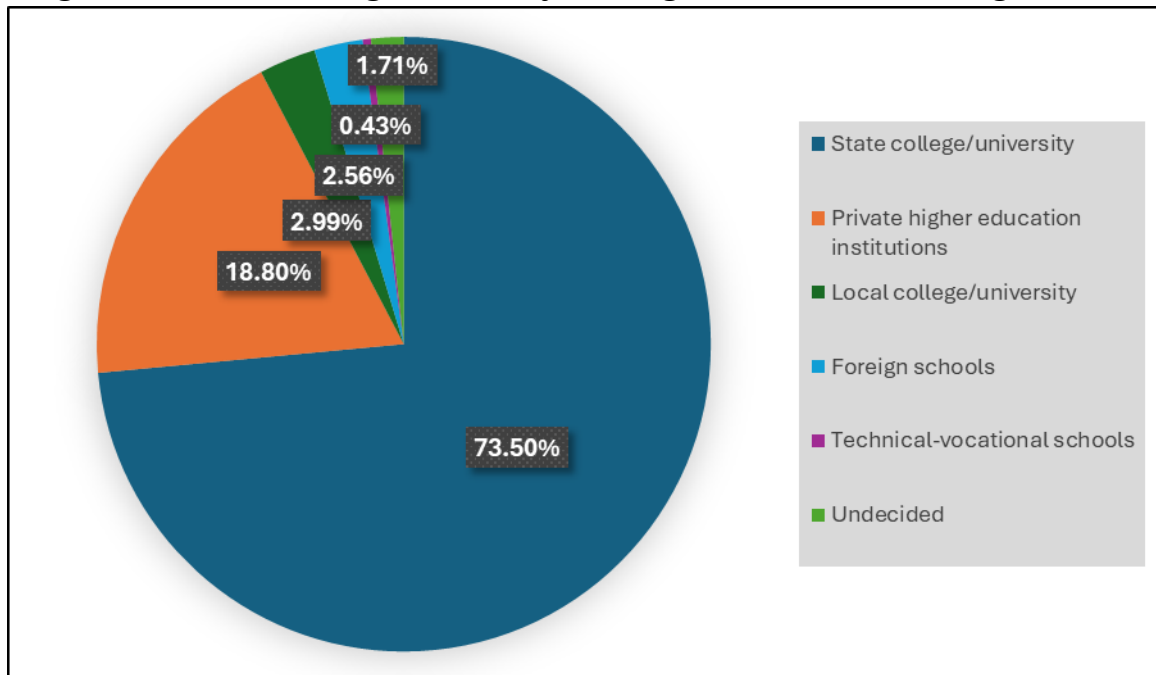
opt for these degree programs, while 24 students or 10% of the respondents answered degree programs under Arts and Design. Though these are few numbers compared to students who selected STEM-related programs, some of them still eyed other areas of study even though these students are science high school students.

However, 21 students or 9% of the respondents are still undecided on which degree programs to choose. Some of the respondents answered two or more degree programs signifying uncertainty on which degree program to choose as their careers in the future. This shows that these students still need further guidance in making informed decisions on their careers considering the various factors as well which influence it. Students who are not sure about their career are just as ready to make a choice as students who are sure about their career, but they may not have enough information about careers or be getting information that is not constant. Implications for academic advice include ways to better help these groups [28].

4.2.2. Target school after graduation

Figure 2 illustrates the prospective career choice decisions of junior high school students in terms of their target schools after graduation. Majority of the respondents are eyeing to go to State Colleges and Universities composed of 172 students, accounting for 73.50% of the total respondents. Moreover, 7 students or 2.99% are considering Local Colleges and Universities. Particularly, students are setting their eyes on the University of the Philippines Systems as their target school after graduation. Belmonte, et al. (2022) found that students are prone to being deterred by courses that have higher tuition prices due to the increased disutility they will encounter. Free tuition enables students to follow their career aspirations without financial constraints, hence facilitating higher education for more Filipinos. This is why it is widely favored.

Figure 2. Pie chart of target school of junior high school students after graduation



Meanwhile, 44 students or 18.80% of respondents are opting for Private Higher Education Institutions and 2.56% or 6 students are planning to go to Foreign Universities. Despite the high tuition fee imposed in

these institutions, the opportunities of quality facilities and networking make these a career option for students.

Unfortunately, only 1 respondent listed Technical-Vocational Schools as a prospective school after graduation. Negative community attitudes and a poor image of vocational education were identified as factors contributing to low enrollment levels [29].

Lastly, 4 students or 1.71% remain undecided on which school to go after graduation. This highlights the need for further career guidance and information to help these undecided students make informed decisions for their future career. Undecided students see the outcome of their major decision as being life-framing [30].

4.3. Proposed localized career guidance program

Table 6 outlines the proposed localized career guidance program based on the factors that have greater influence on junior high school students’ career choice decisions, their preferred degree programs, and their target school after graduation. This proposed localized career guidance program is composed of different strategies, such as introducing students to the concept and processes in career planning and the importance of making informed decisions; understanding the market and its opportunities; assessing the self and looking into personal growth; leveraging academic strengths towards success, exploring the path towards their preferred degree program; exploring options and decisions; navigating schools beyond high school; and evaluating and gathering of feedback.

Table 6. Proposed localized career guidance program

A Guide to Proper Career Choice Decision-Making				
Terminal Objective: To guide junior high school students in making informed decisions for their career choices				
Strategy	Objective	Activities	Persons Responsible	Timeline
Introduction to career planning and decision-making	Introduce the concept and process in career planning and discuss the relevance of informed decision-making	Symposium: “Success Stories in the Field of Stem from the Eyes of an Alumnus”	School alumnus, guidance advocates, class advisers, students	August 2024
		Interactive workshop: “How to Understand Career Choices”	Registered guidance counselor, guidance advocate, class advisers, students	September 2024
Understanding the market and its opportunities	Discuss the importance of aligning career choices with the	Seminar: “The Futures in STEM: Jobs and Returns”	Industry expert, guidance advocates, class advisers, students	October 2024

	demands of the market	Field Trip: “Journey to the World of STEM”	Industry partners, guidance advocates, parent association, class advisers, students	November 2024
Assessing the self and looking into personal growth	Understand how personal strengths, interests and values lead to career choices	Self-Assessment Tests: “Get to Know Yourself v.2.0”	Registered guidance counselor, guidance advocates, students	February 2025
		Counselling Sessions: “Let’s Talk One-on-One”	Registered guidance counselor, guidance advocates, students	August 2024 to April 2025
Leveraging academic strengths towards success	Discuss ways students’ academics lead to career choices	Performance Reviews: “A Peek into Your Academic Performance”	Class advisers, students	November 2024
		Peer Discussions: “Share, Aspire, Inspire”	Class advisers, subject teachers, students	December 2024
Exploring the path towards one’s degree program	Provide detailed information and guidance on various degree programs in colleges and universities	Liaison Program: “Schools Going to the School”	Admission officers/staff of colleges and universities, career guidance advocates, students	January 2025 to March 2025
		Symposium: “Alumni Talks”	School alumni, career guidance advocates, students	August 2024
Exploring options and decisions	Assist undecided students in	Workshop: “Let’s Career Explore”	Career guidance advocates, class advisers, students	February 2025

	making informed career choice decisions	Seminar: “Future Silhouette: A Job Shadowing”	Professionals, career guidance advocates, students	February 2025
Navigating schools beyond high school	Provide guidance in choosing a prospective school after graduation	College Fair	Admission officers/staff of colleges and universities, career guidance advocates, students	January to March 2025
		Campus Tours	Admission officers/staff of colleges and universities, career guidance advocates, students	January to March 2025
Evaluating and gathering feedback	Conduct evaluation and collect feedback for the improvement of career guidance program	Surveys	Career guidance advocates, students	End of every activity
		Exit surveys	Career guidance advocates, students	April 2025

Each strategy has its own specific objective that will enable the accomplishment of the terminal objective which is to guide junior high school students in making informed decisions for their career choices. Moreover, each strategy has its set of activities to enable students to explore their career prospects through the help of a registered guidance counselor, career guidance advocates, class advisers, subject teachers, parents, alumni members, and private industry partners. The localized career guidance program is expected to run for the whole duration of School Year 2024 to 2025 if given the opportunity to be adopted and implemented by the school.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The primary aim of the study is to determine the factors that affect career choice of students. These factors encompass social, economic, environmental, personal, and academic factors analyzed through the level of agreement of junior high school students in each factor. Meanwhile, their career choice decisions were determined based on their preferred degree programs and prospective schools after graduation.

For the first objective, students gave varying levels of agreement on the various factors affecting their career choice decisions. Economic factors received strong agreement emphasizing the significance of financial stability and returns when students select their desired careers. Meanwhile, students disagreed that social factors have a profound influence on their decision-making implying their unlikeliness to be swayed by other people around. The rest of the factors obtained agreement from students considering their environment, personal choices, and academic abilities.

Looking into their career choice decisions, more than half of the respondents are inclined on STEM-related degree programs, with engineering and technology taking the lead in students' preferences. In terms of their prospective schools, majority of the respondents eye state universities and colleges (SUCs) to receive tertiary education for no tuition fee at all.

The findings of the study give significant input on policy recommendations to better guide junior high school students in making informed decisions when it comes to their careers. Since economic factors have the greatest effect on students' career decisions, policymakers should increase financial support to students in need by providing scholarships, subsidies, and stipends, especially students who also consider private higher education institutions, such as budget increases to provide more slots for DOST-SEI scholarships due to the huge number of students setting their eyes on STEM-related disciplines.

Another policy consideration is to improve admission to state universities and colleges since many students view its free tuition as a stepping stone to access quality education. Unfortunately, many SUCs fall prey to budget cuts from the government compromising their ability to accept more students and provide quality education to its students. With growing demand from high school graduates, it's appropriate to reverse these budget cuts and increase allocations to these SUCs to finance infrastructure development, instructional training, research and development, and curriculum revisions to meet the demands of the fast-changing world.

To guide students in making informed decisions in terms of their careers, empowering career guidance and counselling is a major stepping stone to realize this. Since there are numerous factors which affect students' decision-making, they must be properly guided on how to take these factors into consideration without being left undecided on which degree program or prospective school to choose. The existing NCAE and CGP must be revisited and restructured to reflect the demands of the real-world labor market and specific needs of students. Moreover, NCAE results must be funneled to CGP to tailor programs and activities where students can further explore their career prospects in partnership with various stakeholders, including their parents, community organizations, private companies, and other career advocates. This will enable a good mix of the ecological systems and human capital theories to recognize the role of different levels of environment in shaping career decisions of students which will ensure that they receive quality education enhancing their economic prospects and career satisfaction.

Areas for future research includes investigation of other factors, such as technological, political, and legal factors that might have profound implications to career choice decisions of students. Moreover, if resources permit, a comprehensive study tracking the performance and success of students with their chosen careers can be done to clearly understand how these students' preferences and decisions manifest in actual career paths that they take, giving us a more concrete data to adjust existing policies on career guidance to make it more future proof. Likewise, a thorough analysis of the research locale's implementation of the proposed localized career guidance program can be conducted as well to determine the effectiveness of this program in guiding its students in career choice decision-making.

5.1. Limitations of the Study

The study is bound by limitations which hinders its ability to be generalized in a larger scope. The data is limited to one school only, which serve as the case; therefore, any conclusion derived from the study may not be applicable to other schools. Moreover, the study did not conduct any correlation or regression analysis between the different factors and career choice decisions of students. This study only aims to describe the factors which the students think affect their career choice decision-making. Furthermore, the study did not investigate the family background, gender, or age of the students since some studies mentioned moderate association between these variables and career choice decisions of students. Lastly, the proposed localized career guidance program must undergo validation by registered guidance counselors, career guidance coordinators, and career guidance supervisors of the Department of Education in Calamba City before it is implemented to ensure that its objectives, strategies and activities align with the National Career Guidance Program of DepEd.

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