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Career Track and Course Preference of Freshmen Students of MSU Main Campus: Its Influence to Student Monitoring System

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Abstract

The noteworthy development in the Philippine Education system making Filipinos ready for the 21st century skills is the emergence of K-12 Program. It made students nowadays essentially set to select a specialization as early as in their senior high school. This study was undertaken to determine the factors that influenced the choice of career track as well as college course preference and examine its level of influence to student monitoring system. Three hundred thirty-seven (337) freshmen students who belonged to the pioneering K-12 graduates enrolled during the first semester of school year 2018-2019 participated in the study, which made use of cross-sectional survey research design using quantitative - descriptive approach in its data interpretation. Results implied that a typical freshman student is female, nineteen (19) years of age coming from a family earning below Php10, 000 per month. This student came from the Academic Track particularly in the Accountancy and Business Management (ABM) strand. This was inspired by their own personal choice and subsequently pursued a college course in line with it. This highly influenced the school monitoring in terms of student retention in the program and program completion on time while it moderately influenced on the Scholarship maintenance.

Keywords: Career Track, College Course, Senior High School, School Monitoring, Program Completion

1. Introduction

The process of making educational and career choices is complex and influenced by multiple factors. The introduction of the K-12 Program in the Philippines requires students to select a career track as early as senior high school, aiming to align education more closely with industry demands and address skill mismatches, which are often linked to higher unemployment rates. Early decision-making in educational pathways aims to equip students with market-relevant skills, ultimately supporting employment prospects [1].

In selecting a college course, students face various influences, including familial expectations, peer guidance, teacher input, and socio-economic considerations. Additionally, factors such as entrance exams and the specific track chosen in high school further impact these decisions. Understanding these influences can help enhance student monitoring systems, aiding the support students receive during their transition to higher education [2].

The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) underpins this study by illustrating the interplay of personal beliefs, observational learning, and environmental factors in educational decisions. SCT posits that self-

efficacy—students' confidence in their abilities—significantly impacts their decision-making, with role models and peer influence further guiding their career track choices [3].

During the 2018-2019 academic year, the MSU Main Campus welcomed a notable intake of freshmen from the initial K-12 cohort. Statistics from the Office of Admissions report that 68.6% of freshmen were College Bound Program (CBP) entrants, with others qualifying via the System and Admission Scholarship Examination (SASE) or College Entrance Test (CET). The observed enrollment shifts underscore the impact of K-12 reforms alongside regional challenges [4].

This study addresses course mismatches that may arise from various high school tracks and their impact on college course choices. The K-12 curriculum, which includes kindergarten and 12 years of basic education, aligns Philippine education with international standards, enhancing graduates' competitiveness globally and supporting national development [5].

As a college adviser, I have observed the challenges students face when selecting tracks or specializations misaligned with their college courses. This research investigates the factors that influence students' track and course choices, examining their effects on student monitoring systems, particularly concerning scholarship maintenance, on-time program completion, and retention rates.

1.1 Objectives

1. To identify the demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of sex, age, parental income, number of siblings, senior high school background, preferred college course, and enrolled program.
2. To determine the senior high school tracks taken by respondents.
3. To investigate the underlying reasons for students' selection of tracks, focusing on personal preferences, parental guidance, peer influences, and financial factors.
4. To analyze the factors that influence the choice of college courses, considering the relationship with senior high school tracks, teaching methods, peer influence, financial aspects, and SASE scores.
5. To evaluate the influence of students' chosen tracks on critical aspects of the student monitoring system, including scholarship maintenance, program completion rates, and student retention within the program.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will significantly benefit various stakeholders in the diverse areas of education. School administrators will be able to implement early career guidance programs starting in Grades 9 and 10, integrating career planning into the curriculum to better prepare students for appropriate track choices as they enter Grade 11. Chairpersons may reconsider admission criteria for students who fall short of cut-off scores, allowing for acceptable adjustments while maintaining quality standards, potentially including reduced costs for courses with laboratory fees.

Additionally, college advisers will gain awareness of the factors influencing course selection, enabling them to develop tailored monitoring schemes for freshmen. They can also create initiatives to attract prospective students to their respective courses and establish career offices to assist with information gathering and self-exploration. Senior high school teachers will play a crucial role in motivating and guiding students toward informed decisions regarding college courses by engaging with those exploring tracks they haven't initially chosen and helping them consider other options based on a deeper understanding of their backgrounds and interests.

Furthermore, the study will provide parents with insights to support their children's career choices through informed discussions about potential courses, especially costly ones. Parents can collaborate with their children to explore options, clarify values and goals, and develop a strategic action plan for

career exploration. For students, the findings will assist them in making career choices that align with their personalities, interests, abilities, and financial considerations, ultimately supporting their skill development and future employment prospects. Lastly, future researchers can utilize the study's findings as a foundational reference for further studies related to career choice, educational tracks, and student monitoring systems. By addressing the needs of these diverse stakeholders, this study aims to enhance the educational experience and outcomes for freshmen students at MSU Main Campus.

1.3 Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as they apply both conceptually and operationally within this study.

Bridging Courses: Programs designed to equip incoming college students with essential academic skills for success in higher education [6]. In this study, "bridging courses" refer to prerequisite subjects that students may need to complete if their senior high school strand does not align with their chosen college program, thereby facilitating their preparation for advanced coursework.

Career Track: Commonly defined as a progression through life or a specific phase of life [7]. In this study, "career track" aligns with the K-12 curriculum's senior high school tracks, including Academic (e.g., STEM, HumSS, ABM, GAS), Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL), Sports, and Arts and Design. Here, it refers to a student's specialized field of study prior to entering college.

Choice: The act of selecting or deciding among alternatives [8]. In this study, "choice" pertains to a student's selection of career track or college course.

College Bound Program (CBP): A preparatory summer program at MSU Main Campus for top participants from the MINSUPALA area's cultural communities [9]. In this study, "College Bound Program" denotes a group of first-year students who completed summer classes before college entry.

College Course: Defined as a series of classes or lectures in a particular subject leading to a degree [10]. Here, "college course" refers to the specific degree program a student pursues at MSU Main Campus.

College Entrance Test (CET): A biannual MSU System entrance exam offering tertiary-level admission opportunities [11]. Within this study, "CET score" is one of the factors influencing students' college course choices.

Program Completion: Refers to finishing a specific degree program, where "program" indicates a structured series of courses aimed at achieving academic qualifications [12]. In this study, "program completion" denotes a student's successful graduation from their enrolled degree program.

System and Admission Scholarship Examination (SASE): An MSU-wide entrance examination providing scholarship opportunities to high-achieving students Within this study, the "SASE score" is also a factor influencing students' choice of college course [9].

Senior High School (SHS): Grades 11 and 12 in the K-12 curriculum, during which students explore subjects related to their preferred career path [13]. This study refers to SHS as the educational background of the first batch of K-12 graduates entering college.

Scholarship: Financial aid granted to students based on various criteria, typically reflecting the values of the award's donor or founder [14]. Here, "scholarship" includes MSU grants aimed at encouraging academic excellence and supporting less-privileged students from cultural communities, encompassing Full and Partial Scholarships, the College Bound Program Grant, Indigenous People Grant, Special Study Grants, and cultural awards.

Student Monitoring: A systematic, ongoing data collection method to assess progress toward goals. In this study, "student monitoring" involves tracking academic performance, scholarship maintenance, retention, and program completion for college students, considering their career track and course prefer-

ences.

2. Methods

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in the study, describing the research design, setting, participants, data collection instruments, procedures, and the statistical methods used for analysis.

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design with a quantitative-descriptive approach to examine the level of influence on the student monitoring system among freshmen students at MSU Main Campus for the first semester of School Year 2018-2019. The survey utilized a researcher-made questionnaire to capture respondent views, allowing for accurate interpretation of results aligned with the study's objectives.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The research was conducted at Mindanao State University (MSU) Main Campus in Marawi City. Marawi, originally known as Dansalan, has a rich history dating back to its founding in 1639. Over the years, the city evolved and became the capital of Lanao province until its designation as Marawi City in 1940. In recent history, the city endured significant turmoil following the 2017 Marawi Siege. MSU, formally established under Republic Act 1387 in 1961, serves as an educational cornerstone in this culturally vibrant yet historically tumultuous region.

2.3 Research Respondents

The study included 337 freshmen students from MSU Main Campus, enrolled during the first semester of the 2018-2019 school year. These students were among the first cohort of K-12 graduates, and data was gathered in the second semester, assuming students had a clearer understanding of their college preferences by then.

2.4 Sampling Procedure

The sample size was calculated using Slovin's formula, yielding 337 respondents from a population of 2,167 freshmen. Stratified random sampling determined the respondent count per college, followed by simple random sampling to select individuals within each college. Students were assigned numbers, which were randomized, and their class schedules were tracked to ensure uniform questionnaire distribution.

2.5 Research Instrument and Its Validity

A researcher-developed questionnaire was used to gather descriptive responses. Content validity was assessed by an expert panel of four members who rated each of the 120 statements for retention, improvement, or deletion. The ratings were scored on a scale where scores above 2.5 indicated retention, 1.5–2.4 required improvement, and scores below 1.4 warranted deletion [15]. The questionnaire achieved a weighted mean of 2.77 with a standard deviation of 0.459, suggesting that most items met the validity requirements. Based on the expert feedback, adjustments were made to ensure the questionnaire accurately measured the perceptions and influences relevant to the study.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections:

Part I: Personal and academic profile of the respondents, including demographic information and academic background.

Part II: Senior High School track, covering Academic and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood tracks.

Part III: Factors influencing career track selection, such as personal choice, parental influence, peer infl-

uence, and financial considerations.

Part IV: Reasons for college course selection, including alignment with senior high track, influence of teachers, peer input, financial concerns, and SASE score.

Part V: Influence of career track choice on the student monitoring system, measured through indicators such as scholarship maintenance, program retention, and timely program completion.

Parts III, IV, and V used a three-point rubric scale, measuring agreement levels as "Agree" (3), "Disagree" (2), and "Undecided" (1) for Parts III and IV, and as "High" (3), "Moderate" (2), and "Low" (1) for Part V.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Primary data was collected using the validated questionnaire. The researcher obtained permission from college authorities to distribute the questionnaires and received consent from faculty members whose students participated in the study. Students were located using their class schedules, and research assistants aided in distributing and collecting the questionnaires. Once collected, responses were checked for completeness and accuracy, and data were organized and tabulated for analysis.

2.7 Statistical Treatment of Data

Statistical tools were applied to interpret the data and draw conclusions based on the study's objectives. Specifically, frequency distribution, weighted mean, and standard deviation were utilized to interpret the data comprehensively.

3. Results and Findings

This chapter presents an analysis of data collected to explore how students perceive the influence of their chosen career tracks and college programs on the monitoring process for freshmen at the university.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	132	39.17
	Female	205	60.83
Age	17	35	10.39
	18	64	18.99
	19	117	34.72
	20	75	22.26
	21	46	23.65
Parent’s Income	Above 15,000	108	32.05
	10,000 – 15,000	92	27.03
	Below 10,000	137	40.65
No. of Siblings	0-1	52	15.43
	2-3	92	27.30
	4-5	146	43.32
	6+	47	13.95

The gender distribution among respondents in this study, with 60.83% female and 39.17% male, reflects a pattern observed in higher education. This aligns with demographic data from the 2020 Philippine Census, which reported that around 51% of the population is female [16].

This distribution implies a higher enrollment of female students at MSU Marawi campus which supports broader observations about the Filipino demographic landscape, where females often constitute a slightly higher proportion of the population.

The age distribution of respondents, primarily between 17 and 21 years, indicates a strong concentration in the typical college-entry age range, particularly with 34.72% being 19 years old and 22.26% at 20 years old. This clustering reflects a common pattern of immediate enrollment in college following high school graduation, which is often linked to majority of the senior high school graduating students were geared towards pursuing their studies to higher education programs [17]. Such age dynamics suggest that most students are entering college during a pivotal developmental stage, where educational attainment is closely tied to their age group.

In terms of economic background, a significant portion (40.65%) of respondents come from families earning below PHP 10,000 monthly, while only 32.05% report a parental income above PHP 15,000. This demographic factor is notable, as family income can influence access to resources, which may impact academic engagement and persistence. In the study of Baker and Robnett (2019), it indicates that students from lower-income households may experience unique challenges in their academic journeys due to limited financial resources, which can affect retention and program completion [18]. Saysay (2011) cited that for practicality reasons, parents usually encourage careers that will not cost much money, but at the same time, are stable sources of income [19].

The distribution of the number of siblings, with 43.32% having 4-5 siblings, may also suggest that family size could be a factor in students' resource allocation for education, as larger families often face higher financial demands. Furthermore, this implies that having four (4) siblings is most common among respondents. Be it noted that Filipino wanted to have more children because they looked at children as blessings or wealth given by God. In fact, as observed, Meranaw, subscribe to the idea of having an average of 5-7 children as an average dial family size. The finding was corroborated by the Philippines Average Household Size of 2018, which shows the average of 4.4 people per household size in a multiscale map [20].

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Respondents According to College Course Preference

College Course Preference	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture (COA)	20	5.93
Business Administration & Accountancy (CBAA)	64	18.99
Education (CED)	30	8.90
Engineering (COE)	40	11.87
Fisheries & Aquatic Sciences (CFAS)	5	1.48
Forestry & Environmental Studies (CFES)	10	2.97
Health Sciences (CHS)	46	13.65
Hospitality & Tourism Management (CHTM)	9	2.67
Information & Computing Sciences (CICS)	15	4.45
Natural Science and Mathematics (CNSM)	26	7.72
Public Affairs (CPA)	45	13.35
Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH)	10	2.97
Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (CSPEAR)	2	0.59
King Faisal Center for Islamic, Arabic & Asian	15	4.45

Studies (KFCIAAS)		
TOTAL	337	100.00

The table reveals that the MSU Main campus has the following top three colleges most preferred by the freshmen students. Colleges such as CBAA got the highest frequency with sixty-four (64) or 18.99 %. It is followed by the CHS with forty-six (46) or 13.65 %. Next is the CPA with forty-five or 13.35 %. The last three is composed of CHTM with nine (9) or 2.67 %, then Fisheries with five (5) or 1.48% and last is the CSPEAR with two or .2%. The findings indicates that the respondents are mostly inclined on courses relating to degrees which ensure employment in the future.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Respondents According to Senior High School Track

College Course Preference	Frequency	Percentage
Academic Track	211	62.61
Technical – Vocational Track	88	26.11
Arts	20	5.93
Sports	18	5.34
TOTAL	337	100.00

This table showed that two hundred eleven (211) or 62.1 % belonged to the Academic Track during senior high school. Eighty-eight (88) or 26.11% from the TVL Track. Twenty (20) or 5.93 % from the Arts tack and eighteen (18) or 5.34% came from the Sports Track. The finding connotes that majority (62.61 %) of the respondents took the Academic Strand during their senior high school. It implies that respondents wanted to pursue into higher education after they graduate in senior high school. With the four different strands under the Academic Track namely Accountancy Business and Management (ABM), General Academic Strand (GAS), Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS), and the Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) strands - ABM is chosen on top to be pursued. Be it noted that ABM will ensure students to enter the Colleges of Business Administration and Accountancy. This also validates the listing of Enriquez (2018) of the top college courses in the Philippines based on popularity. Among senior high school, business related track stand top on the list [21].

Table 4: Respondents' Reasons for Choosing Career Track

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating	Rank
Personal Choice	2.39	0.7114	Agree	1
Parent’s Choice	2.36	0.6632	Agree	2
Financial Reasons	2.35	0.7369	Agree	3
Influence from Peers	2.34	0.7314	Agree	4
AVERAGE	2.36	0.7107	Agree	

The table presents a summary of the factors influencing students’ career track choices, highlighting four main indicators, each with general agreement among respondents (M=2.36, SD=0.7107). Ranked first is Personal Choice (M=2.39, SD=0.7114), followed by Parent's Choice (M=2.36, SD=0.6632), Financial Reasons (M=2.35, SD=0.7369), and lastly, Peer Influence (M=2.34, SD=0.7314).

The findings suggest these factors all contribute significantly to career decision-making, reflecting students' confidence in their chosen paths. Students believe the track they selected has equipped them with skills necessary for college and potential national certification, enhancing their global competitiveness and aligning with their abilities and talents. This independence is consistent with Miralao's (2004) research, which observed Filipino youth's resilience and personal stability [22].

Moreover, parental influence also emerged as a critical factor, particularly related to parents' occupations. The role of the father as a primary financial provider appears to shape students' focus on job stability post-graduation. Information shared by parents significantly informs students' choices, underscoring the close-knit family culture in the Philippines, as Miralao (2004) noted [22].

Peer influence also plays a substantial role; students often select tracks similar to those of friends, with peers providing camaraderie and emotional support, which continues to shape Filipino youth decisions as it did in previous generations.

Table 5: Respondents' Reason in Choosing College Course

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating	Rank
Pursue Senior High School Track	2.40	0.6966	Agree	1
Influence from Peers	2.37	0.7497	Agree	2
Financial Reasons	2.35	0.6863	Agree	3
Teaching Strategies of Teachers	2.13	0.7419	Undecided	4
SASE Score	2.21	0.7864	Undecided	5
AVERAGE	2.29	0.7322	Undecided	

The study's findings suggest that most respondents intend to continue their senior high school track in college, feeling well-prepared with the foundational knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for higher education. Their senior high track not only eases the transition into major subjects but also prepares them for future employment, both domestically and abroad. This aligns with the Official Gazette's (2013) goal for senior high school to provide students with essential skills and competencies, setting them up for post-secondary success [4].

While a significant number of students follow a college course aligned with their senior high track, peer influence also plays a role, showing that friends' preferences impact students' choices. Financial considerations are key, as students often choose less expensive courses with family support, reflecting a strong awareness of household finances.

Teachers also influence course choices, though some respondents noted dissatisfaction with certain teaching attitudes and lecture methods. Meanwhile, the SASE score remains an important criterion for admission to certain programs, particularly those requiring higher scores. However, some colleges focus less on high SASE scores, provided the student meets the minimum passing rate, due to program enrollment needs. Despite this, many students aim to pursue their senior high track in college, aligning with their personal interests and academic strengths. Notably, students scoring high in SASE—especially those from the STEM or ABM strands—tend to follow their track into college, suggesting confidence in their preparation and alignment with their long-term goals.

Table 6: Impact of Track Choice on Student Monitoring

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating	Rank
Retention of Students in the Program	2.36	0.7605	High	1
Program Completion on Time	2.34	0.7370	High	2
Scholarship Maintenance	2.29	0.7835	Moderate	3
AVERAGE	2.33	0.7603	Moderate	

Table 6 illustrates the impact of track choice on student monitoring, highlighting three key indicators. The retention of students in the program has the highest mean score of 2.36, indicating a strong positive influence, which is reflected in its high rating and top ranking. Following closely, the program completion on time has a mean score of 2.34, also rated as high, showing that students are generally able to finish their programs within the expected timeframe. The scholarship maintenance indicator has a mean score of 2.29, rated as moderate, suggesting that while track choice does help students maintain their scholarships, its impact is less pronounced compared to retention and timely completion. Overall, the average score of 2.33 indicates a moderate overall effect of track choice on student monitoring, with a clear positive influence on retention and completion rates. The data implies that the highest-ranked influence on student retention in the program is students' belief that their chosen course has positive implications for the community, which is a significant motivator in commitment to the program. In the study of Tinto (2000), it showed that students are more likely to persist when they feel their studies connect with real-world applications, future employment, and community impact [23]. Additionally, the influence of advisors, as highlighted by Tight (2020), is critical in supporting students' continued engagement and helping them navigate challenges. Advisors' consistent guidance and motivation foster resilience and commitment, which can lower dropout rates and strengthen program retention by creating an environment that aligns with students' academic and personal goals [24].

Students' perception that their course aligns with their dream job and is appropriate across genders also contributes to this sense of belonging and purpose within the program. Crosling et al. (2009) highlight that retention rates increase when students perceive a clear link between their academic work and career aspirations, underscoring the importance of relevant curriculum and supportive faculty interaction. This suggests that the degree to which a course meets students' aspirations and the perceived ease of coursework play a substantial role in their choice to remain in a program [25].

4. Recommendations

In line with the findings and implications, the following recommendations were suggested.

4.1 School administrators should initiate career guidance programs as early as Grades 9 and 10. By providing robust counseling and carer pathway information, institutions can help students select programs that match their abilities and aspirations, reducing the risk of mismatches.

4.2 College chairpersons should consider accommodating students who may not meet the initial cut-off scores through acceptable adjustments while ensuring quality standards are maintained. For courses with laboratory fees, exploring cost reductions and potential partnerships with institutions that can supply necessary resources will help minimize student expenses. Additionally, for under-enrolled courses, implementing programs such as career orientations and career-specific scholarships can attract future students.

4.3 College advisers must understand the factors influencing students' course choices and implement re-

gular consultations and a monitoring system, particularly for freshmen. Establishing a career office to help students access information about degree programs and support self-exploration would be beneficial. Advisers should track the progress of students in non-aligned tracks through individual interactions, providing regular feedback and guidance to boost motivation and retention.

4.4 Senior high school teachers play a crucial role in helping students make informed decisions about college courses by motivating those in tracks they did not initially choose and encouraging exploration of other options. Engaging with students to understand their interests and backgrounds will enable teachers to guide them toward suitable tracks.

4.5 Parents should support their children's career choices with positive guidance, assisting in evaluating the pros and cons of chosen courses, especially for costly programs. Developing a plan of action with students for career exploration, utilizing campus resources, can help clarify their values and goals.

4.6 Students are encouraged to choose a career path that aligns with their personal interests, strengths, and abilities, while considering financial factors, skill development, and future employment opportunities. Participating in career orientation programs will broaden their knowledge and enhance their competitiveness.

4.7 Future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies focused on MSU Senior High School and its specialized tracks, possibly examining scholarship status and tracking the success of K-12 graduates. Additionally, exploring other potential factors influencing student choices beyond those considered in this study would provide valuable insights for improving educational outcomes. Future research could also investigate the correlation between various factors, such as parental income, peer influence, and teaching methods, and how these variables interact to affect students' career track and college course choices.

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