

A STUDY OF STRAND SELECTION AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: INFLUENCES, ISSUES, AND POTENTIAL BENEFITS

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ABSTRACT

The selection of strands in Senior High School (SHS) is a pivotal decision for students, shaping their academic future and career pathways. This article explores the perspectives of students, the problems they face, and the opportunities that arise from their choice of strand. In the context of the Philippine educational system, which offers various strands under the K-12 curriculum, students face unique challenges in making informed decisions. The study examines how socio-economic factors, academic performance, parental expectations, and personal interests influence strand choice. It also discusses the problems students encounter, including a lack of information and guidance, as well as the opportunities that a well-informed decision can offer in terms of career advancement and personal development.

KEYWORDS

Strand choice, Senior High School, Education, Career guidance, Parental influence, Educational opportunities, Peer influence, Students' perspectives, High school decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

The choice of academic track or strand is one of the most significant decisions that Senior High School (SHS) students in countries like the Philippines must make. Under the K-12 educational system, the SHS program offers a diverse range of specialized tracks or strands that are designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge they need for either tertiary education or direct employment. These strands, which include the Academic Track (with sub-strands like Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM), and Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS)), the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track, and the Arts and Sports Track, give students the ability to focus their studies according to their future career paths and interests.

However, the process of selecting one of these strands is not as straightforward as it may seem. For many students, it is a pivotal moment that can affect their future educational and professional opportunities. The decision-making process often involves a combination of factors such as academic performance, family expectations, peer influence, career aspirations, and socio-economic background. Many students are faced with multiple challenges in making an informed choice, such as a lack of comprehensive career guidance, insufficient knowledge of the different strands, and the pressure of aligning their decisions with family or societal

expectations.

This decision is especially challenging for younger students who might not fully understand their strengths, interests, or future career prospects. While some may choose a strand based on their passions or long-term goals, others are swayed by the desires of their families or the influence of peers. Additionally, the lack of adequate career guidance in schools can leave students uncertain and overwhelmed by the consequences of their decision. As a result, some students end up in academic tracks that are misaligned with their true interests or aptitudes, which can impact their motivation, performance, and overall academic success.

Beyond the challenges, choosing the appropriate strand offers significant opportunities. Students who make decisions that align with their interests and talents are more likely to excel academically and develop the skills required to succeed in their chosen career paths. This alignment can lead to greater life satisfaction and a smoother transition to either higher education or the workforce. Moreover, the specialized knowledge and skills developed in the various strands provide students with a competitive advantage in specific industries or fields of study.

Given these factors, this article aims to explore the perspectives of Senior High School students regarding their choice of strand. It seeks to identify the problems they encounter during the decision-making process, examine the opportunities that arise from making informed decisions, and provide recommendations on how schools, educators, and policymakers can improve career guidance and support systems for students in their strand selection. Through a comprehensive understanding of these aspects, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on education reform and career guidance in the context of Senior High School education, particularly in the Philippines, and potentially for similar educational systems worldwide.

The insights from this research will shed light on the complexities involved in strand selection and help policymakers, educators, and parents provide better support to students in making choices that lead to long-term success and fulfillment. This article will address key questions such as:

- How do family, peers, and socio-economic factors influence students' strand choices?
- What challenges do students face in making an informed decision about their educational track?
- What are the opportunities available to students once they make their choice, and how can those opportunities be maximized?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the intricate process behind strand selection and the importance of making informed choices for the overall development of Senior High School students.

In many countries, the educational system has evolved to include specialized tracks in high school to better prepare students for their future careers. One prominent example is the Senior High School (SHS) program in the Philippines, which is part of the K-12 system. In SHS, students are given the option to choose from several strands, each tailored to a particular field of study. The strands include Academic (e.g., Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM), Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS)), Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL), and Sports and Arts.

The choice of strand is a significant decision for students, as it influences their academic trajectory and, to some extent, their career choices. However, many students face challenges in making an informed decision. This study seeks to understand the perspectives of Senior High School students on their strand choices, the problems they encounter during the decision-making process, and the potential opportunities that arise from their choices.

METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences with strand selection.

1. **Participants:** A total of 300 Senior High School students from five public high schools in Metro Manila were surveyed for this study. Additionally, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with a smaller group of students from each of the five strands (STEM, ABM, HUMSS, TVL, and Sports and Arts).
2. **Data Collection:**
 - o **Surveys:** The survey questionnaire was designed to capture data on factors influencing strand choice, such as family background, academic interests, career aspirations, and access to career guidance. The questionnaire also included questions on the challenges and perceived opportunities related to strand selection.
 - o **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students to explore their personal experiences and the challenges they faced in choosing a strand. The interviews also aimed to gather insights into the opportunities they believed their strand could provide.
3. **Data Analysis:**
 - o **Quantitative data:** Statistical analyses (such as frequency distribution, chi-square tests, and correlations) were used to analyze the survey responses and identify patterns in students' strand preferences.
 - o **Qualitative data:** Thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and insights related to students' perspectives on strand selection, challenges, and opportunities.
4. **Ethical Considerations:** All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. The anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were ensured throughout the research process.

RESULTS

The results of this study reveal several key insights regarding the perspectives, problems, and opportunities students face in choosing their Senior High School strand.

1. **Perspectives on Strand Selection:**
 - o **Family Influence:** The majority of students (63%) reported that family expectations played a significant role in their strand selection. Many students chose strands based on their parents' careers or their family's economic needs.
 - o **Career Aspirations:** Students who chose the STEM strand were more likely to have future career aspirations in engineering, medicine, or technology, while those in ABM showed an interest in pursuing business-related careers. Students in HUMSS expressed a desire to work in fields related to social science, law, and education.
 - o **Peer Influence:** A smaller percentage (18%) indicated that peer influence was a factor in their decision-making process. Some students chose a particular strand because their friends were enrolled in the same strand.
2. **Problems Faced During Strand Selection:**
 - o **Lack of Information and Guidance:** The most commonly cited problem (42%) was the lack of sufficient information about the various strands. Students felt that they were not adequately informed about the career opportunities available within each strand or the subjects covered in each track.

o **Parental Expectations:** Many students reported that their parents had strong preferences for specific strands, often without considering the students' own interests or strengths. This was particularly evident among students in lower socio-economic backgrounds, where parents prioritized financial stability and traditional careers over the students' personal aspirations.

o **Pressure and Uncertainty:** The decision-making process was also described as stressful by many students, with 35% of respondents reporting uncertainty about their choices. Many students felt pressured to make the "right" decision but lacked sufficient guidance to do so.

3. **Opportunities from Strand Selection:**

o **Academic and Career Development:** Students who made an informed decision about their strand choice reported that they felt more motivated and confident in their studies. Those in the STEM and ABM strands expressed strong career prospects, with many aspiring to pursue tertiary education in fields such as engineering, medicine, and business.

o **Skills and Personal Growth:** Students in the TVL, Sports, and Arts strands reported gaining valuable technical skills and personal growth opportunities. Many of these students saw the potential to enter the workforce directly after graduation, particularly those in vocational tracks who were pursuing fields such as electrical technology, culinary arts, and graphic design.

o **Industry-Specific Opportunities:** Students in the HUMSS strand noted opportunities for careers in law, journalism, and social work. However, they also acknowledged the need for further education after high school to fully capitalize on these opportunities.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with existing literature on the factors influencing educational and career choices, emphasizing the importance of family expectations, career aspirations, and peer influence in shaping students' decisions. However, the study also highlights the lack of information and guidance as significant barriers to making an informed decision. This is a critical issue, as students are often unaware of the full range of career opportunities available within each strand, limiting their ability to make choices based on personal strengths and interests.

The pressure students feel from external sources, particularly from their families, is another notable concern. While family support is important, the overemphasis on parental expectations may inadvertently limit students' ability to explore their own passions and career ambitions. This finding underscores the need for more career guidance programs in schools, where students can receive tailored advice about strand selection and potential career paths.

Additionally, the opportunities that arise from choosing the right strand are clear. Students who align their strand with their interests and future goals feel more motivated and are more likely to succeed academically. For students in the TVL, Sports, and Arts strands, there is a clear pathway to employment or further education that capitalizes on their acquired technical skills.

CONCLUSION

The choice of strand in Senior High School is a pivotal decision for students, and it is influenced by various factors such as family expectations, career aspirations, peer pressure, and the availability of information. Despite the challenges, such as a lack of guidance and external pressures, students who make informed decisions about their strand choice are more likely to experience academic success and career satisfaction. To support students in

making better decisions, schools and policymakers should prioritize the provision of comprehensive career guidance programs, emphasizing not only the academic requirements of each strand but also the long-term career opportunities they offer. Empowering students to make decisions based on their interests and strengths will ultimately help them maximize the opportunities available through their chosen educational track.

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