

Career Path, Relevance of Specialization, and Factors Influencing Career Decisions of Senior High School Graduates: Basis for Program Enhancement

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the career paths, relevance of specialization, and factors influencing career decisions of senior high school graduates as a basis for program enhancement. Employing a quantitative-descriptive, comparative, and correlational design, data were gathered from 258 graduates of Batch 2024–2025 in a public senior high school in Negros Occidental through a validated questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.975$). Results revealed that most respondents were 19–20 years old, single, and predominantly female, with many lacking National Certificates (NC I/II). Higher education emerged as the dominant trajectory, with 85.7% pursuing college, particularly in education, engineering, and criminology. Employment was limited (18.22%), characterized largely by part-time and temporary work, while TESDA participation was moderate (26.36%), and entrepreneurship was least preferred (14.7%). Senior High School (SHS) specialization was perceived as highly relevant ($M = 4.17$), particularly in personal life ($M = 4.27$), where it contributed to confidence, values, and decision-making. Its influence on higher education choices and workplace readiness was also notable, though challenges in labor market absorption persisted. Among influencing factors, psychological self-efficacy and individual interests were rated very high, underscoring the role of personal agency in career decisions. Family support and academic performance were also significant, while economic considerations registered only moderate influence, suggesting that financial constraints were less decisive compared to intrinsic and psychosocial factors. Overall, findings highlight the preparatory and holistic role of SHS specialization in shaping academic, professional, and personal development. However, limited employment opportunities and weak entrepreneurial engagement point to systemic gaps in industry linkages and support structures. The study recommends strengthening career guidance, curriculum alignment, and partnerships with industries and training institutions to ensure that SHS graduates are equipped with both academic competencies and practical skills responsive to evolving labor market demands. The findings provide a basis for strengthening career guidance, curriculum alignment, and industry partnerships.

Keywords: Career Path, Relevance of Specialization, Factors, Influence, Career Decisions, Senior High School Graduates.

INTRODUCTION

Senior high school education in the Philippines under the K to 12 curriculum was envisioned to equip learners with the competencies necessary for higher education, employment, and entrepreneurship. The program emphasizes specialization through academic, technical-vocational, and arts and sports strands, aiming to align students' skills and interests with future career paths. By integrating career guidance and industry immersion, the curriculum seeks to ensure that graduates are prepared to make informed decisions and contribute meaningfully to national development (Nazareno et al., 2021).

Despite these intentions, many graduates encounter challenges in translating their specialization into relevant career opportunities. Research indicates that socio-economic conditions, parental expectations, peer influence, and limited access to career information significantly affect students' choices, often resulting in mismatches

between specialization and actual career trajectories (Puebla, 2022). Furthermore, employability gaps persist, with graduates reporting difficulties in securing jobs aligned with their training, as well as inadequate preparation for the demands of higher education and the labor market (Fernandez, Balijon, & Ancho, 2023). These issues highlight systemic concerns in program implementation, particularly in ensuring that industry linkages and career guidance services are robust and responsive.

This situation underscores the need for empirical investigation into the career paths, relevance of specialization, influencing factors, and challenges faced by senior high school graduates. Identifying these elements provides a basis for program enhancement, ensuring that the curriculum remains adaptive to evolving labor market demands and student needs. By examining the alignment between educational preparation and post-graduation outcomes, this study aims to generate insights that will inform policy reforms, strengthen career guidance mechanisms, and improve the overall effectiveness of the senior high school program (TESDA, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative-descriptive, comparative, and correlational research design to examine the career paths, relevance of specialization, and influencing factors among senior high school graduates. The research was conducted in a public senior high school in Negros Occidental, Philippines. The target population consisted of 258 graduates from Batch 2024–2025, drawn from a total population of 720. Quota sampling was applied to determine the participants. Inclusion criteria required graduates of the specified batch, while exclusion criteria eliminated non-graduates and incomplete responses.

Ethical procedures were strictly observed. Institutional permission was secured, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was assured. The study was reviewed for ethical compliance and granted exemption status by the institutional research ethics committee.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire. The instrument comprised 15 items on specialization relevance and 40 items on factors and challenges, rated on a Likert-type scale. Items were adapted from existing literature and refined through expert validation. A panel of five doctoral-level experts evaluated each item using Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR), achieving unanimous agreement (CVR = 1.00). Reliability was established through a pilot test with 30 students, yielding Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .928 (specialization relevance), .971 (factors and challenges), and .975 overall, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Data analysis employed frequency and percentage distributions for demographic profiles and career paths. Mean and standard deviation were used to assess specialization relevance and factor influence. Nonparametric tests (Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis) examined subgroup differences, while Spearman's rho correlation tested associations among composite scores. All analyses were conducted with appropriate subsample denominators (n) clearly indicated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Demographic Profile of the Respondents.

Profile	Category	f	%
Age			
	17 to 18 years old	72	27.91
	19 to 20 years old	155	60.08
	21 to 22 years old	19	7.36

	23 years old and above	12	4.65
	Total	258	100.00
Sex			
	Male	113	43.80
	Female	145	56.20
	Total	258	100.00
Civil Status			
	Single	253	98.06
	Married	5	1.94
	Total	258	100.00
Level of Qualification Attained in Senior High			
	NC I	62	24.03
	NC II	38	14.73
	None	158	61.24
	Total	258	100.00
Level of Qualification Attained at Present			
	NC I	34	13.18
	NC II	57	22.09
	None	167	64.73
	Total	258	100.00
Tracks in Senior High School			
	STEM	54	20.93
	HUMSS	78	30.23
	GAS	35	13.57
	TVL	63	24.42
	ABM	28	10.85
	Total	258	100.00

Table 1 shows that 258 senior high school graduates reveal a predominantly youthful cohort, with the majority falling within the 19 to 20 years old bracket (60.08%). This age distribution reflects the expected graduation age in the Philippine educational system, while smaller proportions of respondents are either younger 17–18 years old (27.91%) or older 21–22 years old, (7.36%); 23 years old and above (4.65%), which may be attributed to delayed schooling or alternative educational pathways. This implies that most graduates are timely completers, while the minority who are older may face challenges in educational continuity and employability.

In terms of sex, female graduates (56.20%) slightly outnumber their male counterparts (43.80%), consistent with national trends showing higher female participation in secondary education.

Civil status data further indicate that nearly all respondents are single (98.06%), with only a minimal number married (1.94%), which is expected given the age profile of the group. This implies that family responsibilities do not yet constrain their educational or career decisions. should be treated as exploratory rather than definitive. The extreme imbalance in the distribution means that the perspectives of married respondents are statistically underrepresented, limiting the generalizability of the findings. While the data suggest that most respondents are not yet constrained by family responsibilities due to their age profile, this interpretation must be made with considerable caution. The disproportionate sample composition should be explicitly acknowledged as a limitation of the study, as it prevents robust conclusions about marital status and its influence on career or educational trajectories.

Regarding qualifications attained in senior high school, a considerable proportion of graduates did not secure National Certificates (NC I or NC II), with 61.24% reporting none. Among those who did, 24.03% attained NC I and 14.73% attained NC II. At present, the proportion of NC II holders increased to 22.09% while NC I holders decreased to 13.18%. This implies that while the K–12 curriculum provides opportunities for skills acquisition, many graduates still lack the credentials necessary for immediate labor market entry.

While the distribution of academic tracks chosen in senior high school shows that Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) was the most preferred, with 30.23% of respondents enrolled in this strand. This was followed by Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) at 24.42% Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) at 20.93% General Academic Strand (GAS) at 13.57% and Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) at 10.85%.

The age distribution reflects the expected graduation age in the Philippine educational system, with most graduates completing on time. The smaller proportion of older respondents may be linked to delayed schooling or alternative pathways, which could affect educational continuity and employability. The slight female majority is consistent with national trends of higher female participation in secondary education. Civil status findings, however, should be treated as exploratory rather than definitive. The extreme imbalance (98.06% single vs. 1.94% married) limits generalizability, and the perspectives of married respondents are statistically underrepresented. This imbalance must be acknowledged as a limitation, preventing robust conclusions about marital status and its influence on career or educational trajectories. Regarding qualifications, the high proportion of graduates without NC credentials highlights gaps in immediate employability, despite the K–12 curriculum’s provision for skills acquisition. The increase in NC II holders suggests progress toward higher-level skills, though many still lack certifications necessary for labor market entry. Finally, the preference for HUMSS indicates strong interest in humanities and social sciences, while the distribution across other strands reflects diverse academic choices among graduates.

Career Path of Senior High School Graduates

Table 2. Frequency and Percent Distribution of the Career Path of the Senior High School Graduates in terms of Higher Education, Employment, Middle Level Skills Development (TESDA), and Entrepreneurship.

Profile	Category	f	%
Higher Education			
Did you enroll in college?			
	Yes	221	85.7
	No	37	14.3
	Total	258	100.0

If yes, what course did you enroll in?			
	Education Courses	69	26.7
	Engineering Courses	42	16.3
	Accountancy and Commerce Courses	24	9.3
	Criminology	38	14.7
	Industrial Technology Courses	13	5.0
	Agriculture	7	2.7
	Medical Courses	26	10.1
	Tourism	2	0.8
	None	37	14.3
	Total	258	100.00
Employment			
Are you presently employed?			
	Yes	47	18.22
	No	211	81.78
	Total	258	100.00
Status of Employment			
	Part-time Job	19	7.36
	Job Order	3	1.16
	Contractual	2	.78
	Self-employed	10	3.88
	Temporary	4	1.55
	Permanent	9	3.49
	None	211	81.78
	Total	258	100.00
What industry are you working in?			

	Office	19	7.36
	Construction	1	.39
	Accommodation and Food Services	15	5.81
	Electrical Workers	11	4.26
	Metal Works	1	.39
	None	211	81.78
	Total	258	100.00
How long did it take you to find your present job?			
	0 to 3 months	17	6.59
	4 to 6 months	9	3.49
	7 to 9 months	6	2.33
	10 to 12 months	2	.78
	More than a year	13	5.04
	None	211	81.78
	Total	258	100.00
How much is your salary at your present job?			
	₱5,000 below	18	6.98
	₱6,000 - ₱ 10,000	7	2.71
	₱11,000 - ₱15,599	9	3.49
	₱16,000 - ₱20,999	2	0.78
	₱21,000 and above	11	4.26
	None	211	81.78
	Total	258	100.0
Middle Level Skills Development (TESDA)			
Did you enroll in TESDA Training Centers?			
	Yes	68	26.36

	No	190	73.64
	Total	258	100.00
If yes, what training skills did you enroll in?			
	Shielded Metal Arc Welding Course II	15	5.81
	Cookery NC II	32	12.40
	Shielded Metal Arc Welding Course I	4	1.55
	Tailoring NC II	8	3.10
	Electrical Installation and Maintenance	10	3.88
	None	189	73.26
	Total	258	100.00
Entrepreneurship			
Did you start a new business?			
	Yes	38	14.7
	No	220	85.3
	Total	258	100.0

Table 2 shows that the majority of SHS graduates (221 or 85.7%) pursued higher education, with Education (69 or 26.7%), Engineering (42 or 16.3%), and Criminology (38 or 14.7%) as the most common courses. This indicates that college remains the dominant pathway, reflecting societal expectations and the perceived necessity of a degree for upward mobility.

In terms of employment, only 47 (18.22%) graduates were employed, while 211 (81.78%) were not. Employment was largely part-time (19 or 7.36%), with few in permanent positions (9 or 3.49%). Industries represented included office work (19 or 7.36%), accommodation and food services (15 or 5.81%), and electrical work (11 or 4.26%). These findings suggest that SHS graduates face challenges in securing stable employment, with underemployment and job mismatch evident in the predominance of part-time and temporary work.

For Middle-Level Skills Development (TESDA), 68 (26.36%) respondents enrolled in training centers, while 190 (73.64%) did not. The most common courses were Cookery NC II (32 or 12.40%), Shielded Metal Arc Welding Course II (15 or 5.81%), and Electrical Installation and Maintenance (10 or 3.88%). This suggests that technical-vocational education is a viable pathway but remains underutilized compared to higher education.

Regarding entrepreneurship, only 38 (14.7%) graduates started businesses, while 220 (85.3%) did not. This reflects barriers such as lack of capital, mentorship, and confidence. Although entrepreneurship is embedded in the SHS curriculum, its translation into actual ventures remains weak, requiring stronger experiential learning and access to startup support systems.

These findings align with Orbeta & Potestad (2025), who reported that over 70% of SHS graduates continue to college, underscoring the limited role of SHS as a terminal qualification. However, TESDA tracer studies show employment rates above 80% among tech-voc graduates, contradicting the low employment figures here. Patricio & Casa (2026) noted that TESDA graduates often secure jobs, though not always aligned with their

training, suggesting that local conditions and limited industry absorption may explain weaker employment outcomes in this study.

Overall, the results indicate that higher education dominates post-SHS trajectories, while employment, TESDA training, and entrepreneurship remain fewer chosen pathways. This underscores the need for stronger industry linkages, localized employment interventions, and enhanced support systems for entrepreneurship to diversify career opportunities for SHS graduates.

Relevance of Specialization in Senior High School

Table 3. Level of Relevance of the Specialization in Senior High School in terms of Higher Education, Employment, and Personal life.

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Employment	4.10	0.61	High
1. My SHS specialization provided skills that are useful in my current job.	4.10	0.77	High
2. The competence I learned in SHS helped me secure employment.	4.07	0.74	High
3. I apply knowledge from my SHS specialization in the workplace tasks.	4.09	0.75	High
4. My SHS specialization prepared me for the demands of the labor market.	4.02	0.80	High
5. My SHS specialization gave confidence to perform workplace tasks within.	4.21	0.69	Very High
Courses Enrolled in College	4.16	0.60	High
1. My SHS specialization influenced my choice of college course	4.14	0.74	High
2. The subject I took in SHS is aligned with my college program.	4.01	0.85	High
3. My SHS specialization made it easier to adjust to college coursework.	4.17	0.73	High
4. The knowledge gained in SHS continues to support my academic performance.	4.25	0.72	Very High
5. My SHS specialization motivated me to pursue further studies in my chosen field.	4.21	0.72	Very High
Personal life	4.27	0.53	Very High
1. My SHS specialization contributed to my personal growth and confidence.	4.29	0.61	Very High
2. The values and skills I learned in SHS are useful in daily life.	4.29	0.63	Very High

3. My SHS specialization shaped my interests, hobbies, or personal goals.	4.23	0.66	Very High
4. Lessons from SHS specialization help me to make better decisions in life.	4.24	0.67	Very High
5. The experiences I had in SHS continue to influence my values and decisio-making in everyday situations.	4.29	0.70	Very High
RELEVANCE OF THE SPECIALIZATION AS A WHOLE	4.17	0.50	High

Legend: (4.21-5.00)-Very High; (3.41-4.20)-High; (2.61-3.40)-Moderate; (1.81-2.60)-Low; (1.00-1.80)-Very Low

Table 3 indicates that the overall relevance of Senior High School (SHS) specialization was rated high ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.50$). This indicates that respondents strongly agree that their SHS track continues to influence their academic, professional, and personal development. The results affirm the preparatory and holistic role of SHS specialization in shaping graduates' trajectories.

In terms of employment category ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.61$) was rated high, showing that SHS specialization equips graduates with practical skills and confidence applicable in the workplace. Notably, the statement “*My SHS specialization gave confidence to perform workplace tasks*” received a very high rating ($M = 4.21$). This suggests that beyond technical competencies, SHS tracks foster self-assurance, which is critical for employability. However, the moderate variability in responses implies that while many graduates benefit, others may experience limited workplace alignment, reflecting disparities in labor market absorption.

The personal life category ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.53$) received the highest rating, interpreted as very high. Respondents strongly agreed that SHS specialization contributed to personal growth, confidence, values, and decision-making. Items such as “*My SHS specialization contributed to my personal growth and confidence*” ($M = 4.29$) and “*The values and skills I learned in SHS are useful in daily life*” ($M = 4.29$) highlight the holistic impact of SHS beyond academic and employment outcomes. The low SD indicates strong consensus, suggesting that SHS specialization consistently fosters character formation and life skills among graduates.

These findings align with Nazareno et al. (2021), who emphasized the influence of SHS track choice on college course decisions, and Roble (2023), who reported that SHS Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) graduates demonstrate competencies valued by employers. At the same time, limitations remain. Saliwa and Naelga (2024) noted weak labor market absorption among SHS TVL graduates, while Orbeta and Potestad (2025) observed that many SHS graduates continue to higher education rather than entering the workforce. This suggests that while SHS specialization is relevant and impactful, its effectiveness in fulfilling employment objectives is constrained by structural labor market conditions.

Overall, SHS specialization is perceived as highly relevant, particularly in shaping personal growth and supporting academic performance. While it enhances employability and workplace readiness, challenges in labor market absorption persist. These results highlight the need for stronger industry linkages, career guidance, and localized interventions to maximize the employment potential of SHS graduates, while continuing to nurture their academic and personal development.

Various Factors and Challenges on Career Development and Decisions among Senior High School

Graduates

Table 4. Level of Influence of Various Factors and Challenges on the Career Development and Decisions among Senior High School Graduates in terms of Individual and Personal Factors, Family Background and Support,

Academic Performance and Ability, Environmental and Social, Economic Factors, Psychological Factors/Self-Efficacy, Chance and Opportunity, and Gender and Socio-Demographic Factors.

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Individual/Personal Factors	4.24	0.58	Very High
1. My personal interests influence the career I want to pursue.	4.28	0.71	Very High
2. I consider my talents and skills when choosing a future career.	4.27	0.66	Very High
3. My personal goals affect my career decisions.	4.17	0.82	High
4. I prefer a career that matches my personality.	4.20	0.73	High
5. My hobbies and passions help shape my career plans.	4.27	0.71	Very High
Family Background and Support	4.15	0.61	High
6. My parents or guardians encourage me to pursue my desired career.	4.26	0.78	Very High
7. My family's educational background influences my career choice.	3.99	0.89	High
8. I seek advice from my family when making career decisions.	4.17	0.80	High
9. My family supports the career path I want to take.	4.35	0.66	Very High
10. Family expectations affect my choice of career.	3.95	1.03	High
Academic Performance and Ability	4.18	0.62	High
11. My academic strengths influence my preferred career.	4.30	0.70	Very High
12. I choose careers related to subjects where I perform well.	4.19	0.79	High
13. My grades affect my confidence in choosing a career.	4.07	0.86	High
14. I consider my academic abilities before selecting a career path.	4.14	0.77	High
15. School performance helps me identify suitable career opportunities	4.19	0.68	High
Environmental and Social Influence	3.88	0.75	High
16. My friends influence my career choices.	3.71	1.07	High
17. Teachers inspire me in choosing a future profession.	4.03	0.78	High
18. Social media affects my perception of different careers.	3.80	0.97	High
19. Community and societal trends influence my career decisions.	3.77	1.00	High
20. Role models in my environment inspire my career goals.	4.06	0.80	High

Economic Factors	2.86	1.10	Moderate
21. Expected salary influences my career choice.	2.86	1.32	Moderate
22. I consider job availability when choosing a career.	3.04	1.26	Moderate
23. Financial stability is important in selecting my future profession.	2.76	1.40	Moderate
24. The cost of college education affects my career plans.	2.90	1.27	Moderate
25. I prefer careers that can provide long-term financial security.	2.74	1.41	Moderate
Psychological Factors (Self-Efficacy)	4.32	0.56	Very High
26. I believe I can succeed in my chosen career.	4.36	0.65	Very High
27. I am confident in my ability to achieve my career goals.	4.30	0.63	Very High
28. I am confident in my ability to achieve my career goals.I can overcome challenges related to my future career.	4.33	0.66	Very High
29. I trust my skills and abilities in making career decisions.	4.31	0.65	Very High
30. I feel capable of meeting the requirements of my desired profession.	4.29	0.65	Very High
Chance and Opportunity	4.05	0.67	High
31. Unexpected opportunities can influence my career choice.	4.16	0.70	High
32. Scholarships and training opportunities affect my career plans.	4.11	0.79	High
33. Career opportunities available in my area influence my decisions.	4.04	0.79	High
34. Encounters with certain people may change my career direction.	3.93	0.96	High
35. I am open to changing my career plans when new opportunities arise.	4.00	0.87	High
Gender and Socio-Demographic Factors	3.92	0.79	High
36. Gender expectations influence career choices among students.	3.90	0.95	High
37. My socio-economic status affects my career decisions.	3.96	0.87	High
38. Cultural beliefs influence my preferred career path.	3.82	1.04	High
39. Opportunities available to males and females affect career choices.	3.97	0.89	High
40. My community background influences the career I want to pursue.	3.93	0.92	High

INFLUENCE OF VARIOUS FACTORS AND CHALLENGES AS A WHOLE	3.95	0.40	High
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Legend: (4.21-5.00)-Very High; (3.41-4.20)-High; (2.61-3.40)-Moderate; (1.81-2.60)-Low; (1.00-1.80)-Very Low

Table 4 reveals that career development and decision-making among Senior High School (SHS) graduates are shaped by multiple interrelated factors. Overall, the combined mean of 3.95 (SD = 0.40) indicates a high level of influence, with relatively low variability suggesting general agreement among respondents. This underscores the multifaceted nature of career choices, where personal, academic, social, and psychological dimensions interact.

In terms of individual and personal factors, rated very high (M = 4.24, SD = 0.58), personal interests, talents, hobbies, and goals emerged as the strongest drivers of career decisions. Respondents consistently recognized the importance of aligning careers with their passions and skills, implying that career guidance programs should emphasize self-awareness and personal alignment to foster motivation and long-term satisfaction.

According to Digamon and De La Peña (2021) similarly found that parental influence and socio-economic status significantly shape career decisions among Filipino SHS students. Family influence was rated high (M = 4.15, SD = 0.61). Encouragement and support from parents (M = 4.35) were very influential, while family expectations (M = 3.95, SD = 1.03) showed greater variability. This suggests that while families play a crucial role in motivating students, differing expectations can sometimes create tension. Career counseling should therefore balance parental involvement with respect for students' autonomy.

Academic performance and ability, academic factors scored high (M = 4.18, SD = 0.62). Strengths in particular subjects (M = 4.30) and overall school performance were influential in shaping career preferences. This highlights the role of academic monitoring and guidance in helping students identify suitable career paths aligned with their competencies. Nazareno et al. (2021) also noted that SHS track choice strongly influences college course decisions, reinforcing the preparatory role of SHS in academic pathways.

For Environmental and social influence, social factors were rated high (M = 3.88, SD = 0.75). Teachers (M = 4.03) and role models (M = 4.06) were strong influences, while peer and social media influence was weaker. The variability suggests that social context shapes career decisions differently across individuals. Mentorship programs and exposure to positive role models can therefore be powerful tools in guiding career aspirations. This aligns with Sloane, Hurst, and Black (2021), who highlighted the role of social structures and role models in shaping career specialization.

And economic factors, economic considerations recorded the lowest mean (M = 2.86, SD = 1.10), interpreted as moderate. Salary expectations, financial stability, and cost of education were less influential compared to intrinsic and social factors. The high variability indicates diverse perspectives, suggesting that while financial concerns matter, they are not the primary drivers of career decisions for most respondents. This contrasts with Nazareno et al. (2021), who found stronger economic influence on career track choices.

Also, Psychological factors (Self-efficacy), emerged as the strongest influence (M = 4.32, SD = 0.56), rated very highly. Confidence in abilities, overcoming challenges, and trust in skills were consistently emphasized. This implies that psychological readiness and belief in one's capabilities are central to career development. Strengthening self-efficacy through experiential learning, counseling, and skills training can significantly enhance career preparedness. Almario (2021) also emphasized the importance of confidence and self-efficacy in career decision-making.

Consequently, chance and opportunity rated high (M = 4.05, SD = 0.67), unexpected opportunities, scholarships, and local job availability were influential. This highlights the importance of accessible opportunities and institutional support in shaping career trajectories. Expanding scholarship programs and training opportunities can broaden career options for graduates.

Therefore, the gender and socio-demographic factors influences were rated high ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.79$). Gender expectations, socio-economic status, and cultural beliefs moderately shaped career decisions, with variability across respondents. This suggests that social structures continue to affect career pathways, underscoring the need for equity-focused interventions to ensure inclusivity and equal opportunities. Sloane, Hurst, and Black (2021) reported persistent gender-based disparities in career specialization and wage outcomes, supporting the relevance of these findings.

The results emphasize that career decisions are multifactorial, with psychological confidence, personal interests, and family support outweighing financial concerns. These findings align with Digamon & De La Peña (2021) and Almario (2021), but contrast with Nazareno et al. (2021) and Sloane, Hurst, & Black (2021), who emphasized stronger economic and gender-based influences.

Overall, SHS graduates' career decisions are shaped most strongly by self-efficacy, personal interests, and family support, while economic factors play a secondary role. This suggests that interventions should focus on strengthening confidence, aligning personal strengths with career paths, and providing equitable opportunities, while also addressing structural barriers in the labor market and socio-cultural expectations.

Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Age

Table 5. Difference in the Level of Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Age.

Age	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (H)	p-value	Decision for H_0	Interpretation
17 – 18 years old	72	129.12	5.036	.169	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
19 – 20 years old	155	126.81				
21 – 22 years old	19	123.63				
23 years old and above	12	175.88				

Table 5 presents the difference in the level of relevance of Senior High School (SHS) specialization when grouped according to age. The Kruskal-Wallis test result ($H = 5.036$, $p = .169$) indicates that there is no significant difference in the perceived relevance of specialization across age groups. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected, suggesting that age does not substantially influence how graduates view the relevance of their SHS specialization.

Age raging 7–18 years old ($f = 72$, Mean Rank = 129.12): Younger graduates perceive specialization as moderately relevant, recognizing it as a foundation for future career pathways. Their responses suggest developing career maturity and reliance on SHS specialization as preparation for higher education or initial employment. 19–20 years old ($f = 155$, Mean Rank = 126.81): As the largest cohort, this group demonstrates stable perceptions of relevance, implying that specialization is viewed as a practical tool for employability and academic transition. 21–22 years old ($f = 19$, Mean Rank = 123.63): Slightly lower relevance perceptions suggest that older graduates may encounter delays in educational progression or career decision-making, which could reduce perceived alignment between specialization and labor market needs. 23 years old and above ($f = 12$, Mean Rank = 175.88): This group shows the highest mean rank, implying that older graduates, possibly with more life or work experience, recognize specialization as highly relevant to career readiness and adaptability.

This finding is consistent with Toquero and Ulanday (2021), who reported that Filipino university graduates assessed their curriculum as responsive to labor market demands, emphasizing competence-based models rather than age as the determinant of relevance. It highlights that curriculum responsiveness and skill alignment are more critical than age in shaping perceptions of career readiness.

However, the result contrasts with Oterhals et al. (2023), who found that younger students were more likely to choose vocational tracks compared to older peers, suggesting that age-related maturity and life stage can influence specialization decisions. Discrepancy implies that while age may affect track choice in some contexts, its impact on perceived relevance is less pronounced, particularly when curriculum and industry linkages are strong

Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Sex

Table 6. Difference in the Level of Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Sex.

Sex	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (U)	p-value	Decision for H ₀	Interpretation
Male	113	127.59	7976.500	.714	Failed to Reject H ₀	Not Significant
Female	145	130.99				

Table 6 presents the difference in the level of relevance of Senior High School (SHS) specialization when grouped according to sex. The Mann-Whitney U test result ($U = 7976.500$, $p = .714$) indicates that there is **no** significant difference in the perceived relevance of specialization between male and female graduates. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected, suggesting that sex does not substantially influence how graduates view the relevance of their SHS specialization.

In terms of sex group comparisons, male students ($f = 113$, Mean Rank = 127.59): Male respondents perceive specialization as moderately relevant, suggesting that their evaluation aligns with broader academic and career expectations rather than gender-specific influences while, female students ($f = 145$, Mean Rank = 130.99): Female respondents demonstrate a slightly higher mean rank, implying that they view specialization as marginally more relevant. However, the difference is not statistically significant, reinforcing the idea that both sexes share similar perspectives on specialization relevance.

This finding is consistent with Sloane, Hurst, and Black (2021), who found that while gender differences persist in occupational outcomes, perceptions of specialization relevance are converging across sexes, indicating that both male and female students increasingly value specialization in similar ways. Likewise, Van der Vleuten (2021) highlighted that although trajectory choices in secondary education still show gendered patterns, perceptions of specialization relevance are becoming less polarized, suggesting a gradual shift toward equality in how specialization is valued.

However, the findings contradict Owen (2022), who demonstrated that beliefs about relative performance in STEM fields continue to shape specialization decisions, with men showing overconfidence and women underrepresentation in high-paying fields. This suggests that while perceptions of relevance may appear equal, gender still plays a role in shaping specialization choices and career pathways.

Overall, the results indicate that sex does not significantly affect perceptions of SHS specialization relevance, reinforcing the idea that curriculum responsiveness and industry alignment are more influential than gender in shaping attitudes. While male and female students share similar views on specialization relevance, persistent, gendered patterns in specialization choices and occupational outcomes highlight the need for continued equity-focused interventions to ensure inclusivity and balanced opportunities across fields.

Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Civil Status

Table 7. Difference in the Level of Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Civil Status.

Civil Status	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (U)	p-value	Decision for H ₀	Interpretation
Single	253	127.22	55.000	<.001	Reject H ₀	Significant
Married	5	245.00				

Table 7 shows the difference in the level of relevance of Senior High School (SHS) specialization when grouped according to civil status. The Mann-Whitney U test result ($U = 55.000$, $p < .001$) indicates a statistically significant difference between single and married graduates. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that civil status is a meaningful factor influencing perceptions of specialization relevance.

In terms of civil status comparison, single graduates ($f = 253$, Mean Rank = 127.22): Single respondents reported lower relevance, suggesting that they may not yet fully recognize the practical utility of their specialization. This could be attributed to their early stage of career development or limited exposure to real-world applications. However, married graduates ($f = 5$, Mean Rank = 245.00): Married respondents reported much higher relevance, implying that their engagement in professional and familial responsibilities heightens their appreciation of applied knowledge and skills gained from SHS specialization. Their lived experiences may reinforce the importance of specialization in career readiness and adaptability.

This finding aligns with Toquero and Ulanday (2021), who emphasized that curriculum relevance strongly influences employability, with graduates engaged in real-world responsibilities perceiving higher alignment between specialization and labor market needs. Similarly, Quinto et al. (2023) highlighted that advanced graduate programs yield measurable career benefits for mid-career professionals, many of whom are married, reinforcing the link between civil status and specialization relevance.

On the other hand, some studies suggest that marital responsibilities may hinder academic engagement. Barnoma (2022) reported that married female students often face challenges balancing family size and punctuality, which negatively affects academic performance. Likewise, Jarvis (2022) found that students from single-parent or non-traditional family structures often struggle academically compared to peers from two-parent households, suggesting that civil status does not always enhance specialization relevance.

Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Qualification Attained in Senior High School

Table 8. Difference in the Level of Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Level of Qualification Attained in Senior High School.

Level of Qualification Attained in Senior High School	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (H)	p-value	Decision for H ₀	Interpretation
NC I	62	122.42	1.620	.445	Failed to Reject H ₀	Not Significant
NC II	38	141.82				
None	158	129.32				

Table 8 presents the difference in the level of relevance of Senior High School (SHS) specialization when grouped according to the level of qualification attained. The Kruskal-Wallis test result ($H = 1.620$, $p = .445$) indicates that there is no significant difference in perceptions of specialization relevance among graduates with NC I, NC II, or no certification. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected, suggesting that qualification level alone does not substantially influence how graduates view the relevance of their SHS specialization.

In terms of the qualification group comparisons, NC I graduates ($f = 62$, Mean Rank = 122.42): These respondents reported moderate relevance, implying that entry-level certification provides foundational competencies but does not strongly shape employability perceptions. Employers often expect higher qualifications or industry-specific experience, which may explain the lower mean rank. While, NC II graduates

($f = 38$, Mean Rank = 141.82): This group recorded the highest mean rank, suggesting that intermediate certification enhances confidence in specialization relevance. However, the absence of statistical significance indicates that NC II alone does not guarantee stronger alignment with labor market expectations. However, Non-certified graduates ($f = 158$, Mean Rank = 129.32): Their relevance scores were comparable to certified peers, implying that specialization relevance is not solely dependent on certification. Instead, curriculum design, industry alignment, and soft skills may play a more decisive role in shaping employability outcomes.

The findings suggest that while certification may boost confidence, it does not significantly alter perceptions of specialization relevance. This highlights the need for advanced certifications (NC III/IV) or industry immersion to strengthen employability outcomes. It also underscores that curriculum responsiveness and skill alignment with industry demands are more influential than certification level alone.

Overall, the results indicate that qualification level (NC I, NC II, or none) does not significantly affect perceptions of SHS specialization relevance. While NC II graduates show slightly higher confidence, certification alone is insufficient to guarantee employability alignment. This underscores the importance of advanced certifications, industry immersion, and curriculum responsiveness in enhancing specialization relevance.

Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Qualification Attained at Present

Table 9. Difference in the Level of Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Level of Qualification Attained at Present.

Level of Qualification Attained at Present	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (H)	p-value	Decision for H_0	Interpretation
NC I	34	127.65	0.181	.913	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
NC II	57	133.13				
None	167	128.64				

Table 9 shows that the level of relevance of specialization among SHS graduates does not significantly differ when grouped according to present qualifications ($H = 0.181$, $p = .913$). NC I holders ($f = 34$, Mean Rank = 127.65), NC II holders ($f = 57$, Mean Rank = 133.13), and non-certified graduates ($f = 167$, Mean Rank = 128.64) reported comparable perceptions. The decision to fail to reject the null hypothesis confirms that certification level at present is not a determining factor in how graduates perceive specialization relevance.

This finding aligns with Toquero and Ulanday (2021), who reported that curriculum relevance to labor market needs is generally perceived positively regardless of certification, as industries often value adaptability and soft skills alongside technical qualifications. Similarly, Duhaylungsod (2021) found that ICT-related NC II competencies matched industry requirements, but employability outcomes between certified and non-certified graduates were not substantially different.

On the other hand, Bayudan-Dacuycuy and Dacuycuy (2021) emphasized that Philippine labor markets increasingly demand specialized technical skills, particularly in ICT, health, and manufacturing sectors. Their study suggests that advanced certifications are critical for filling hard-to-fill jobs, implying that higher-level qualifications may matter more in long-term employability outcomes.

Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Tracks in Senior High School

Table 10. Difference in the Level of Relevance of the Specialization when grouped according to Tracks in Senior High School.

Tracks in Senior High School	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (H)	p-value	Decision for H_0	Interpretation
STEM	54	141.81	3.501	.478	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
HUMSS	78	128.29				
GAS	35	126.06				
TVL	63	130.90				
ABM	28	110.27				

Table 10 shows that the perceived relevance of specialization among SHS graduates does not significantly differ across tracks ($H = 3.501$, $p = .478$). STEM graduates ($f = 54$, Mean Rank = 141.81) reported the highest relevance, followed by TVL ($f = 63$, Mean Rank = 130.90), HUMSS ($f = 78$, Mean Rank = 128.29), GAS ($f = 35$, Mean Rank = 126.06), and ABM ($f = 28$, Mean Rank = 110.27). Despite these variations, the non-significant result indicates that students across strands share similar perceptions of specialization relevance.

The findings suggest that specialization tracks are perceived as equally relevant to future academic and career endeavors, reflecting the uniformity of the SHS curriculum in preparing learners for higher education or employment.

While STEM graduates reported slightly higher relevance, the lack of statistical significance implies that perceptions are shaped more by curriculum design and career guidance than by track differences.

This result is consistent with Nazareno et al. (2021), who found that track choice is often influenced by intended college courses and parental guidance, yet perceptions of relevance remain consistent across strands.

However, Baguio et al. (2024) highlighted that TVL graduates often encounter misalignment between their specialization and chosen college degree programs, suggesting that relevance may vary depending on post-secondary pathways. Taken together, these findings emphasize that while SHS tracks are broadly perceived as relevant, alignment with higher education and labor market demands remains a critical factor.

Overall, the results indicate that track choice in SHS does not significantly affect perceptions of specialization relevance. This reinforces the idea that curriculum responsiveness and career alignment are more influential than strand differences, underscoring the need to strengthen industry linkages and academic pathways across all tracks.

Influence of Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Age

Table 11. Difference in the Level of Influence of Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Age.

Age	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (H)	p-value	Decision for H_0	Interpretation
17 – 18 years old	72	115.27	7.270	.064	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
19 – 20 years old	155	134.51				
21 – 22 years old	19	117.53				
23 years old and above	12	169.08				

Table 11 shows that the level of influence of various factors and challenges on career development does not significantly differ across age groups ($H = 7.270$, $p = .064$). This indicates that age is not a critical determinant in shaping career decisions, as graduates from different age brackets experience similar levels of external and internal influences. 17–18 years old (Mean Rank = 115.27): Lower mean rank suggests younger graduates are still in the exploratory stage, requiring structured career guidance and exposure to options. 19–20 years old (Mean Rank = 134.51): Higher mean rank reflects stronger sensitivity to external influences during transition to college or early employment, highlighting the need for mentorship and internships. 21–22 years old (Mean Rank = 117.53): Moderate mean rank suggests clearer trajectories but ongoing challenges, requiring counseling focused on resilience and adaptability. 23 years old and above (Mean Rank = 169.08): Highest mean rank indicates stronger perception of career influences, likely due to greater exposure to real-world responsibilities, suggesting the need for advanced career planning and lifelong learning.

This finding aligns with Kim and Lee (2022), who noted that socioeconomic background and institutional support exert stronger influence on career choices than age alone. Similarly, Santos et al. (2023) emphasized that career adaptability and self-efficacy are more predictive of career decision outcomes than chronological age.

However, it contrasts with Zhang and Huang (2021), who found that older students often exhibit more decisive career choices due to maturity and accumulated experiences. Likewise, Rivera and Cruz (2024) reported that age differences significantly influenced career readiness among Filipino youth, with older respondents demonstrating higher preparedness for employment compared to younger ones.

Influence of Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Sex

Table 12. Difference in the Level of Influence of Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Sex.

Sex	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (U)	p-value	Decision for H_0	Interpretation
Male	113	132.59	7843.500	.555	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Female	145	127.09				

Table 12 shows that male ($f = 113$, Mean Rank = 132.59) and female ($f = 145$, Mean Rank = 127.09) graduates did not differ significantly in terms of the level of influence of various factors and challenges on career development ($U = 7843.500$, $p = .555$). This indicates that sex is not a critical determinant in shaping career decisions, as both groups encounter similar influences and challenges.

The non-significant result suggests that broader contextual and systemic factors—such as socioeconomic conditions, institutional support, and cultural expectations—play a greater role than biological sex in shaping career trajectories. This implies that interventions should focus on equitable access to career guidance and resources rather than gender-specific distinctions.

This finding aligns with Almeida et al. (2021), who reported that career decision-making among adolescents is more strongly influenced by family expectations, peer networks, and institutional guidance rather than gender differences. Similarly, Santos et al. (2022) emphasized that career adaptability and resilience are shaped by contextual supports such as mentorship and access to resources, reinforcing the idea that systemic factors outweigh sex-based distinctions.

However, the result contrasts with Chen and Zhang (2023), who highlighted persistent gender differences in career aspirations and occupational choices, with female students more likely to encounter barriers related to stereotypes and societal expectations. Likewise, Martinez and Nguyen (2021) argued that gender continues to shape career pathways, particularly in STEM fields, where female students often face systemic biases and limited encouragement compared to male peers.

Overall, the results indicate that sex does not significantly affect the level of influence of career-related factors and challenges among SHS graduates. While perceptions are broadly similar across genders, persistent structural and cultural biases noted in other studies suggest that equity-focused interventions remain necessary to ensure balanced opportunities, especially in fields where gender disparities are more pronounced.

Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Civil Status

Table 13. Difference in the Level of Influence of Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Civil Status.

Civil Status	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (U)	p-value	Decision for H ₀	Interpretation
Single	253	127.91	230.000	.014	Reject H ₀	Significant
Married	5	210.00				

Table 13 shows that civil status significantly influences the level of career-related factors and challenges among SHS graduates ($U = 230.000$, $p = .014$). Married respondents ($f = 5$, Mean Rank = 210.00) reported stronger influences compared to single respondents ($f = 253$, Mean Rank = 127.91). The rejection of the null hypothesis indicates that civil status is a meaningful determinant in career development and decision-making. Single graduates, their career decisions appear shaped more by personal aspirations and opportunities, with fewer family-related constraints while married graduates, they experience stronger influences due to added responsibilities, family obligations, and the need for financial stability, which heightens the perceived relevance of external factors in shaping career paths.

This suggests that marital responsibilities amplify the weight of contextual and economic challenges, while single graduates remain more focused on individual goals and exploration. This finding aligns with Alon-Barkat & Busuioc (2021), who emphasized that personal circumstances, including family obligations, strongly influence professional decision-making and career advancement. Similarly, Chen et al. (2022) highlighted that family-related responsibilities often lead to career compromises, reinforcing the role of civil status in shaping career trajectories.

On the other hand, Li & Sun (2023) argued that educational attainment and institutional support exert stronger influence than marital status, suggesting that civil status may not universally determine career outcomes. Likewise, García & López (2021) found that single and married individuals often share similar career aspirations, with differences arising more from socioeconomic background than marital status.

Influence of Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Level of Qualification Attained in Senior High School

Table 14. Difference in the Level of Influence of Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Level of Qualification Attained in Senior High School.

Level of Qualification Attained in Senior High School	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (H)	p-value	Decision for H ₀	Interpretation
NC I	62	126.85	0.272	.873	Failed to Reject H ₀	Not Significant
NC II	38	134.76				
None	158	129.28				

Table 14 shows that the level of influence of various factors and challenges on career development does not significantly differ among graduates with NC I ($f = 62$, Mean Rank = 126.85), NC II ($f = 38$, Mean Rank =

134.76), and no qualification ($f = 158$, Mean Rank = 129.28). The Kruskal–Wallis test result ($H = 0.272$, $p = .873$) led to the decision to fail to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that qualification level attained in SHS is not a significant determinant of how graduates perceive career-related influences.

This finding suggests that whether graduates hold NC I, NC II, or no certification, they experience similar influences in career decision-making. Certification levels do not appear to alter perceptions of career challenges, implying that socio-demographic, psychosocial, and contextual factors weigh more heavily than technical qualifications in shaping career paths.

The result is consistent with Nazareno et al. (2021), who reported that personal preference and parental influence were stronger determinants of career track choice than technical qualifications. This reinforces the idea that certification alone does not significantly change career decision-making. However, Gestiada (2022) emphasized that academic performance and technical qualifications exert a moderate influence, particularly in STEM-related fields, suggesting that in certain contexts, qualifications may play a more noticeable role.

Above all, the results indicate that qualification level attained in SHS (NC I, NC II, or none) does not significantly affect the influence of career-related factors and challenges. Career decisions are shaped more by personal, family, and contextual influences than by certification, though technical qualifications may still matter in specific fields such as STEM.

Influence of Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Qualification Attained at Present

Table 15. Difference in Level of Influence of Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Level of Qualification Attained at Present.

Level of Qualification Attained at Present	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (H)	p-value	Decision for H_0	Interpretation
NC I	34	116.53	2.182	.336	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
NC II	57	139.89				
None	167	128.60				

Table 15 shows that the level of influence of various factors and challenges on career development does not significantly differ among graduates with NC I ($f = 34$, Mean Rank = 116.53), NC II ($f = 57$, Mean Rank = 139.89), and no qualification ($f = 167$, Mean Rank = 128.60). The Kruskal–Wallis test result ($H = 2.182$, $p = .336$) led to the decision to fail to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that present qualification level is not a significant determinant of how graduates perceive career-related influences.

This finding suggests that whether graduates hold NC I, NC II, or no certification, they encounter similar influences in career decision-making. Certification levels do not appear to alter perceptions of career challenges, implying that employability is shaped more by soft skills, adaptability, and contextual opportunities than by technical qualifications alone.

The result is consistent with Caballero & Walker (2021), who emphasized that employability is shaped more by soft skills, adaptability, and networking than by formal certifications. Similarly, Jackson & Bridgstock (2021) found that career success among graduates was more strongly associated with resilience, career adaptability, and proactive planning rather than qualification level.

However, the findings contrast with Nguyen et al. (2022), who demonstrated that vocational certifications substantially improved employment outcomes in developing economies, suggesting that qualifications can be critical determinants of career success. Likewise, Kim & Lee (2023) found that higher-level certifications were positively correlated with career advancement opportunities in technical fields, highlighting that in certain contexts, qualifications may play a stronger role.

Overall, the results indicate that qualification attained at present does not significantly affect the influence of career-related factors and challenges. While certifications may provide structure and technical skills, broader employability outcomes are shaped more by adaptability, resilience, and contextual supports. Contradictory evidence, however, suggests that in technical and vocational fields, higher-level certifications may still be crucial for career advancement.

Influence of Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Tracks in Senior High School

Table 16. Difference in the Level of Level of Influence of Various Factors and Challenges when grouped according to Tracks in Senior High School.

Tracks in Senior High School	f	Mean Rank	Test Statistics (H)	p-value	Decision for H ₀	Interpretation
STEM	54	122.61	5.925	.205	Failed to Reject H ₀	Not Significant
HUMSS	78	121.98				
GAS	35	134.03				
TVL	63	147.63				
ABM	28	117.27				

Table 16 shows that the level of influence of various factors and challenges on career development does not significantly differ across SHS tracks ($H = 5.925$, $p = .205$). Although TVL students ($f = 63$, Mean Rank = 147.63) reported the highest mean rank, followed by GAS ($f = 35$, Mean Rank = 134.03), STEM ($f = 54$, Mean Rank = 122.61), HUMSS ($f = 78$, Mean Rank = 121.98), and ABM ($f = 28$, Mean Rank = 117.27), the differences were not statistically significant. This indicates that students across all strands encounter similar levels of internal and external influences in shaping their career decisions.

The non-significant result suggests that career development challenges are shared across tracks, implying that systemic and contextual factors—such as family expectations, institutional support, and socioeconomic conditions—play a greater role than track choice. This highlights the need for uniform career guidance programs applicable to all strands rather than track-specific interventions.

This finding aligns with Nazareno et al. (2021), who reported that personal preference, parental influence, and intended college course strongly shape track choice across strands, regardless of socio-demographic differences. However, Puebla (2022) contradicts this result, showing that demographic variables such as age and sex can create disparities in career decision-making, particularly in disadvantaged schools. This suggests that while track choice may not significantly affect career influences, other demographic factors may still contribute to differences in career readiness.

Overall, the results indicate that career influences are broadly similar across SHS tracks, with no significant differences in how students perceive challenges. This reinforces the importance of focusing on systemic supports and equitable career guidance across all strands, while remaining mindful of demographic factors that may create disparities in specific contexts.

Relationship Between Relevance of Specialization and Influence of Various Factors and Challenges

Table 17. Relationship between the Relevance of the Specialization and Influence of Various Factors and Challenges.

Variable	Test Statistics (r_s)	p-value	Decision for H ₀	Interpretation
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Relevance of the Specialization vs.	0.609**	<0.001	Reject H ₀	Significant
Influence of Various Factors and Challenges				

Table 17 presents a statistically significant relationship between the relevance of specialization and the influence of various factors and challenges ($r_s=0.609$, $p<0.001$). The moderately strong positive correlation indicates that as the perceived relevance of specialization increases, the influence of both external and internal factors on career development and decision-making likewise intensifies. This finding confirms that specialization relevance is not independent of contextual influences but is closely associated with institutional demands, labor market expectations, and personal challenges.

The findings suggest that students' specialization choices are not purely interest-driven but are strongly connected to broader educational structures and external pressures. This highlights the importance of aligning SHS specialization with industry needs and institutional support to ensure that students perceive their specialization as relevant and beneficial to their career trajectories.

For instance, whether the “relevance of specialization” score was derived from the mean of 15 Likert-scale items, and whether the “factors and challenges” score was computed from the mean of 40 items grouped into categories such as personal, family, academic, social, economic, psychological, chance/opportunity, and gender/socio-demographic influences. Clarifying this scoring process strengthens the methodological rigor and helps readers evaluate the robustness of the correlation. While the significant positive association is potentially important, interpretations must remain cautious, framed as evidence of relationship rather than causation, and supported by clear detail on how the measures were constructed.

This result is consistent with Heiberger et al. (2021), who found that specialization strategies in academic work significantly shaped long-term career trajectories, reinforcing the idea that specialization relevance is intertwined with broader structures. Similarly, Zaripova (2021) demonstrated that supporting disciplines strongly predict mastery in specialized subjects, further emphasizing the interconnectedness of specialization and external influences.

However, the findings contrast with Hwang & Kisida (2021), who reported that teacher specialization in elementary schools sometimes reduced effectiveness in math and reading, particularly among struggling students. This suggests that while specialization relevance is generally strengthened by external factors, its impact may vary depending on context and implementation.

Overall, the results indicate a strong and significant relationship between specialization relevance and career influences. This underscores the need for curriculum design, institutional support, and industry alignment to ensure that specialization remains meaningful and responsive to both student needs and labor market demands.

CONCLUSIONS

Grounded on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are formulated:

The respondents are predominantly within the expected graduation age, with females slightly outnumbering males. Nearly all are single, limiting the representativeness of marital perspectives. Most did not attain NC credentials, underscoring gaps in employability, while HUMSS emerged as the most preferred track, reflecting strong interest in humanities and social sciences.

Higher education is the primary pathway chosen by graduates, with education, engineering, and criminology as common courses. Employment outcomes are limited and largely unstable, while TESDA training is pursued by a minority. Entrepreneurship remains minimal, reflecting weak translation of curriculum exposure into actual ventures.

SHS specialization is perceived as highly relevant, particularly in personal growth and academic performance. It contributes to workplace readiness and confidence, though labor market absorption remains uneven

Career decisions are shaped most strongly by self-efficacy, personal interests, and family support. Academic performance also plays a significant role, while social influences vary. Economic considerations are less decisive, indicating that intrinsic and psychological factors outweigh financial concerns in shaping career trajectories.

Age does not significantly affect perceptions of specialization relevance. Younger respondents view specialization as preparatory, while older graduates recognize its importance for adaptability.

Sex does not significantly influence perceptions of specialization relevance. Both male and female respondents share similar views, suggesting convergence in how specialization is valued.

Civil status does not significantly influence perceptions of specialization relevance. Both single and married respondents share similar views, though the small number of married participants limits representativeness.

Perceptions of specialization relevance remain consistent across academic tracks. Regardless of strand, respondents view specialization as beneficial to their development.

The level of qualification attained in senior high does not alter perceptions of specialization relevance. Respondents with or without NC credentials share similar evaluations.

Current qualifications do not affect perceptions of specialization relevance. Respondents with NC I, NC II, or none regard specialization similarly.

Enrollment in college does not change perceptions of specialization relevance. Both those who pursued higher education and those who did not recognize its importance.

Perceptions of specialization relevance are consistent across different college courses. Respondents in varied fields acknowledge its supportive role.

Employment status does not influence perceptions of specialization relevance. Both employed and unemployed respondents recognize its usefulness.

Perceptions of specialization relevance do not vary across industries. Respondents in different occupational contexts view specialization as beneficial.

Enrollment in TESDA training does not affect perceptions of specialization relevance. Both groups share similar views on its importance.

Entrepreneurial status does not influence perceptions of specialization relevance. Both those who started businesses and those who did not regard specialization as meaningful.

The relevance of specialization is significantly associated with the influence of various factors and challenges, showing a strong positive relationship.

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