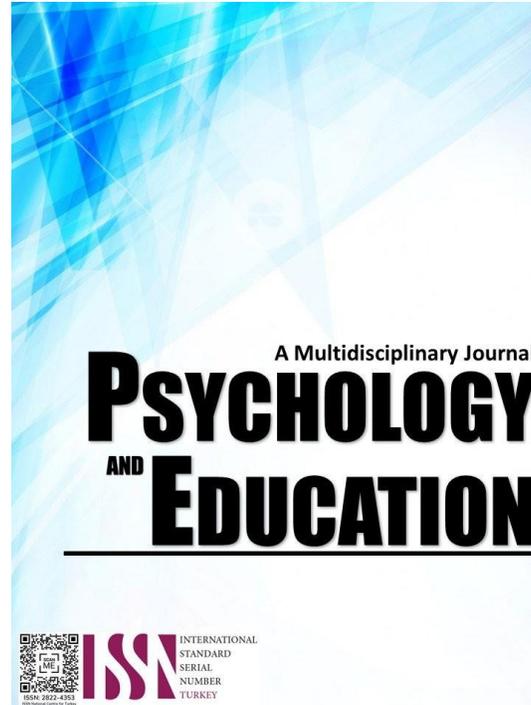


FROM SCHOOL TO LABOR: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES



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From School to Labor: A Phenomenology of Senior High School Graduates

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Abstract

One of the anticipated benefits for senior high school graduates is employment upon completion of their studies. Transitioning from school to work is challenging for senior high school graduates due to difficulties entering the labor market with only their credentials. Despite this, there is limited research on their specific employment challenges. This study explored the challenges and identified the strategic interventions employed by graduates to overcome them. Utilizing a qualitative research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews. The results revealed three themes for existing challenges, and they are: lack of experience to meet job qualifications, lack of backer to speed up qualifications, and experienced discrimination from companies applied. Regarding the strategic interventions employed by graduates, three themes emerged which are: increasing qualifications and skills, building connections, and seeking companies that accept senior high school graduates. Additionally, graduates proposed recommendations to improve the senior high school curriculum and instruction to better align with labor market demands. These include providing laboratories and facilities, improving work immersion, and hiring skilled SHS teachers. This study can serve as a model for other researchers and educational institutions aiming to improve senior high school curricula to better prepare graduates for the workforce.

Keywords: *education, senior high school graduates, challenges, phenomenology, Philippines*

Introduction

In today's globalized and competitive labor market, the employability of senior high school graduates is a topic that is becoming more and more important. Senior high school graduates frequently struggle to find employment that matches their skills and knowledge in many countries, including the Philippines. Senior high school graduates are having a hard time and being discriminated against while applying for a job in the labor market because of their lack of credentials, skills, and experiences.

The employability of senior high school graduates is a global issue. The United States, Canada, and United Kingdom have all faced comparable difficulties. High school graduates in the US frequently struggle to obtain well-paying jobs, which contributes to social and economic gaps (Autor, 2014). A Pew Research analysis of economic data from the U.S. Census Bureau, employed young adults with only a high school diploma earn less money each year—about \$17,500 less—than Millennial college graduates between the ages of 25 and 32 who work full time. It's important to note, from this study, that the widening gap between college and high school graduates is a reflection of the rising value of a four-year degree, the even steeper rise in the cost of graduate and professional degrees, and the rising proportion of college graduates who go on to earn higher degrees. This means that a college degree also has the added benefit of allowing for additional expertise. This problem emphasizes the requirement for complete approaches to close the gap between educational attainment and labor market demands. According to a study conducted in Canada by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), graduates of high school who immediately enter the industry frequently lack fundamental abilities including communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. To improve employability, it is advised that high schools incorporate these skills into their curricula (Kapelus, Miyagi & Scovill, 2017). Meanwhile, research from the United Kingdom, a UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) report, a skills gap, notably in digital, reading, and numeracy, has left many businesses believing that recent high school graduates are not ready for the workforce. The report suggests that to give students real-world experience and improve their readiness for the workforce, schools and businesses should collaborate more closely (Campbell, 2016).

The difficulties high school graduates encounter in obtaining employment are a common concern among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand are among the ASEAN nations that frequently experience problems such as a mismatch between the skills taught in high schools and the skills needed by companies. This gap impairs high school graduates' chances of finding steady employment and inhibits their effective transition into the labor market (Asian Development Bank, 2017). Meanwhile, in Vietnam, studies show that the educational system needs reform and change since the current curriculum is focused on the academic work in the preparation for the college entrance examination than on preparing high school graduates for the labor market (Coxhead, Vuong, & Nguyen, 2021; Tran, 2018). However, Singapore is frequently used as an example of employment initiatives in high schools. The country's educational system prioritizes developing students' abilities and preparing them for the workforce (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2019). According to the Comprehensive Labour Force Survey of Singapore (2022), there is an increase in the employment rate aged 15-24 in Singapore. The employment rate for locals who are at least 15 years old kept rising to 67.5% in 2022. This shows that in this country, they are more welcoming to the students in the labor force.

The problems with senior high school employability in the Philippines are complex and persistent. Many graduates still struggle to find meaningful jobs despite the government's efforts to improve senior high school curricula and offer skills training (Ramos, 2019). Even if some strands and programs educate students for real-world careers, employers still hesitate to hire senior high school graduates. The

2018 Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) study indicated that 22 of 26 businesses surveyed believed SHS graduates were unprepared for employment (BusinessWorld Online, 2021). Due to this mismatch, high school graduates must pick jobs that don't use their abilities, resulting in substantial underemployment rates (Tan, 2018). Vice President and Education Secretary Sara Duterte admitted that most senior high school graduates had problems finding work without a college degree in 2016. The Bureau of Curriculum Development (BCD)'s National Senior High School tracer study examined SY 2017-2018 graduates. Only 10.22% found employment, 82.67% went on to higher education, 1.30% became entrepreneurs, 0.42% did not finish a four-year college degree, and 5.39% chose not to.

As the job market becomes increasingly competitive, understanding the challenges faced by senior high school graduates and identifying solutions to enhance their employability is crucial. Examining the experiences and challenges of these graduates in their job search is essential, given the persistent issue of youth unemployment in the Philippines. Moreover, the results of the study may help the next senior high school graduates to be prepared for the challenges and the strategic intervention they employ to overcome them.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges and strategic interventions of senior high school graduate employees in finding jobs in the labor market.

1. What are the challenges faced by senior high school graduates in finding jobs in the labor market?
2. What are the strategic interventions implemented by senior high school graduates to overcome the challenges of finding jobs in the labor market?
3. What recommendations can be offered for the improvement of curriculum and instructions of the senior high school-delivering schools to match the demands of the labor market?

Literature Review

This study discusses the challenges of senior high school graduates in finding a job in the labor market, the strategic interventions implemented to cope with the challenges, and their recommendations to improve the curriculum and instructions of the senior high school delivering institutions.

The introduction of the K-12 program, with its aim of giving students enough time to master skills and concepts, encouraging lifelong learning, and preparing graduates for advanced learning, skill enhancement, entrepreneurship, and employment, is one of the most significant changes in the history of Philippine education (Salape & Cuevas, 2020). Senior high school graduates possess the fundamental academic abilities, critical-thinking abilities, social skills, and personality traits and attitudes necessary for attaining success in the profession (Carada et al., 2022). For grade 12 students in high school, there are work immersion programs to help them become familiar with the workplace and the nature of their future employment and apply what they have learned in school to their future careers (Arturo & Arturo, 2020; Carada et al., 2022).

The ideas of "employability" and "employability skills," which cut across diverse fields of study and career businesses, were born out of this concern for school graduates' ability and readiness for the workplace (Orji, 2013). Only 20% of the top 70 corporations in the nation across all industries were willing to hire senior high school graduates, according to a 2018 report by Philippine Business for Education. Although the majority of senior high school graduates have indicated a desire to continue their education, it was because of concerns about their preparation for jobs. Additionally, if recruiting practices are consistent with it, 1 out of 5 businesses is prepared to hire.

Methodology

This section goes through the following details about how this study operates. It discusses the following: participants, instruments of the study, procedure, and ethical considerations.

Participants

The participants of this study were 17 senior high school graduates throughout Davao Region, who did not pursue higher education or in college but are currently employed in the labor market. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), participants between 10 and 50 are sufficient to conduct qualitative research, therefore, the number of participants in this study was enough to gather quality information. They were chosen based on the following criteria for inclusion: Senior high school graduates who did not pursue college, who graduated from either public and private schools, and senior high school graduates who are currently employed in the labor market. However, the following will be excluded from the study; senior high school graduates who pursued college and are not currently employed.

Instruments

Primary sources were gathered in this study to better understand the phenomenon. Primary sources are information that is factual and

was first gathered by the researcher (Ajayi, 2017). To gather all the information relevant to the study, in-depth interviews (IDI) were utilized. The main goal of the interviewing technique is to understand the underlying causes and motives behind people's opinions, preferences, and behavior. IDI can be conducted in a group setting or one-on-one (Ajayi, 2017). Interviews were carried out through virtual platforms and took between 20-40 minutes about the challenges, strategic interventions, and recommendations to the institutions that are operating senior high school programs among senior high school graduates from the Davao Region. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with the consent of the participants.

Procedure

To gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, data collection was a crucial component of the research process. As a qualitative researcher, systematic procedures were meticulously followed to ensure the study was conducted methodically. Before conducting the research, the paper was subjected to review by the research adviser, and research ethics committee, and after the approval of the Graduate School Office. The research questions were reviewed and analyzed by the experts of qualitative research and education. The data were then collected by one-on-one interviews between the researcher and the participant. The researcher also informed the participants' rights during and after the study. The researcher asked for consent from the participant to use an audio recorder before the interview.

The research process involved various methods including in-depth interviews, document analysis, observation, and the use of audiovisual materials for analysis (Creswell, 2012). A semi-structured interview format was employed to gain a comprehensive view of the participant's perspectives. This format allowed for the inclusion of prepared questions as well as new questions that emerged during the interview. The researcher's active involvement was essential to enrich the interpretation and achieve a clearer understanding of the phenomenon while minimizing biases in data interpretation. To protect participants, all collected data were kept confidential.

Ethical Considerations

In research, ethical considerations are a set of principles that influence the study ideas and procedures. When collecting data from participants, researchers must always follow a set of rules (Bhandari, 2021; UK Statistics Authority, 2022). Consent must be obtained before starting to collect information from the participants to ensure that they are willing and voluntarily joined in the conduct of the study (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent were the areas observed during the research processes to strengthen the ethical considerations.

Results

This study revealed emerging themes, clustered themes, and formulated meanings on the three major research questions. The first table presented is found to be the challenges of senior high school graduates in seeking employment in the labor market using their high school credentials. The second table are the emergent themes that describe the strategic interventions they used to counter their challenges. And finally, the third table is their recommendations to improve the curriculum and instructions of the senior high school-delivering schools.

The challenges faced by senior high school graduates in finding jobs in the labor market

After the interview with the senior high school graduate participants on their challenges in finding jobs in the labor market, three themes were discovered. The themes are lack of experience to meet job qualifications, lack of a backer to speed up application, and they experienced discrimination from companies applied. Table 1 illustrates the formulated meanings of these challenges.

Table 1. *The thematic map on the challenges of senior high school graduates in finding jobs in the labor market*

<i>First Theme Lack of experience to meet job qualifications</i>	
Entry-Level Job Market Challenges	Skills Gap
Difficulty in finding entry-level positions that do not require prior experience	Discrepancies between the skills possessed by job seekers and those required by employers
Requires work experience	Difficulty in applying for jobs that are aligned to their strand in SHS
High competition between job applicants	Doubtful about the work application
<i>Second Theme Lack of backer to speed up qualifications</i>	
Absence of Support Networks	Limited Professional Connections
Lack of connections within influential circles or networks that can expedite processes.	Absence of professional networks that can provide referrals or endorsements.
Limited access to mentors or advisors who can provide guidance and recommendations.	Difficulty in professional networks to gain information on job vacancies
No connection from someone in the company	Limited opportunities to find connections
<i>Third Theme Experienced Discrimination from companies applied</i>	
Bias in Hiring Practices	Employers' Preference for Experienced Candidates
Preference for college graduates over high school graduates	Employers prioritize applicants with practical experience over those with SHS credentials
Discriminatory job postings and recruitment advertisements	Employers' unrealistic expectations for entry-level roles
Preference for applicants who share common traits or	

Lack of experience to meet job qualifications. As senior high school graduates find jobs in the labor market, many of them experience rejection because they lack prior experiences before the job they have applied for resulting in these challenges, namely: entry-level job market challenges and the skills gap.

A major component evident in the data is the trouble participants encountered when attempting to apply for different employment positions. These days, finding an entry-level job might be really difficult. The increased requirement for prior experience in employment can make it seem like a difficult effort to discover chances. Participants find it challenging to meaningfully sell themselves to future employers. Participant 11 shared the difficulty of applying without experience:

“Sa ako maam, lisud kaayo maam, kay first time paman ko. Lisud man nila dawaton kung wala kay experience.” (Participant 11, Page 14, Lines 474-475)

(In my case, ma'am, it's very difficult because it's my first time. It's hard for them to accept you if you don't have experience.)

Participants 15 and 2 shared that work experience is one of the requirements to get a job:

“Lisud uy, daghan kayo kog gi applyan ato. Kay mangita man sila ug work experience, sa halos akong gi applyan. Sa botika ra gyud ko nadawat.” (Participant 15, Page 20, Lines 707-708)

(It's difficult, I applied to so many places. Almost everywhere I applied, they were looking for work experience. I was only accepted at a pharmacy.)

“...ang mga kompanya pangitaan gyud ka ug experience nila. Tan-aw nila nga kulang ka, dili gyud ka nila dawaton.” (Participant 2, Page 3, Lines 85-86)

(...companies look for experience. If they see that you lack it, they won't hire you.)

Another challenge is the competition between job applicants. Participant 16 said:

“Lisud unya kapoy kay dili raman ako usa, daghan man mi nangapply pud. Kay sa kadaghan namo, gamay ra ug chance nga makasulod, labi na ang uban kay naay kaila sa sulod daan.” (Participant 16, Page 20, Lines 747-749)

(It's difficult and exhausting because I'm not the only one applying; there are many of us. With so many applicants, the chances of getting in are slim, especially since some of the others already have connections inside.)

Obtaining entry-level jobs has grown increasingly challenging, mostly because of increased requirements for previous work experience, which may discourage candidates from even considering certain positions. The inability to have the necessary experience was identified by participants as a major obstacle to their inability to successfully offer themselves to potential employers. This requirement creates an endless cycle in which obtaining experience turns into a barrier to obtaining it.

Senior High School graduates were also challenged during their job application because of the skills gap. Participant 17 shared that:

“Lisud dili lalim mang apply ug trabaho labaw na ug didto ka mo apply sa mga dagko nga company kay gina pangita nila ang mga college graduate with degree so lisud maskin pag high school graduate ka.” (Participant 17, Page 22, Lines 797-799)

(It's hard; it's no joke to apply for a job, especially if you're applying to big companies because they look for college graduates with degrees. It's difficult even if you're a high school graduate.)

There is also difficulty in finding a job that is related to the strand they took in senior high. Participant 12 stated:

“Naglisud jud kay sa sugod nag Uyanguren pa ko unya dili man pareha sa akong gi eskwelahan sa senior high kay electrical man to unya ang naa nga trabaho kay dili electrical.” (Participant 12, Page 15, Lines 525-526)

(It's really hard because at first, I was in Uyanguren, and it's not the same as what I studied in senior high, which was electrical. The available jobs are not related to electrical work.)

Being doubtful was also evident to the applicants since they were fresh graduates with no work experience. Participant 5 shared:

“Well, my experience sa pag pangapply is quite challenging for me kay of course I'm just a fresh senior high school graduate, no job experience jud like first timer jud, newbie sa mga work. So, pag pangapply nako kay lisud siya since naa ang doubts if basin dili ko dawaton kay senior high school graduate lang ko” (Participant 5, Page 6, Lines 187-190)

(Well, my experience in job hunting is quite challenging because, of course, I'm just a fresh senior high school graduate with no job experience—like a first-timer, a newbie to work. So, when I applied, it was difficult because there were doubts about whether I would be accepted since I'm just a senior high school graduate.)

In today's labor market, the skills gap continues to be a serious problem. An obstacle to employment is that many job applicants have

abilities that don't match employers' wants. It can be difficult for senior high school students to apply their studies to job applications, frequently leaving them doubtful about their readiness for the workforce.

Lack of backer to speed up application. The support system or lack of backers topic was the second theme found in the data. This subject centers on the relationship – or lack thereof – between those who may speed up the application process for jobs. This theme is happening in the labor market and some participants testified and experienced such challenges. Clustered themes were identified which are the absence of support networks and limited professional connections. Participant 4 observed that it is easier for others to get a job since they have connections that would help them expedite the process:

“Isa pa sa lisud kay walay kaila nga pwede makatabang nga mapadali ang pagpangapply. Kay akong na observe sa uban nga akong kasabay kay medyo dali ra sila nakuha kay naa man nakatabang nila sa sulod.” (Participant 4, Page 5, Lines 143-146)

(Another difficult part is not having any connections who could help speed up the application process. I observed that some of the others I applied with got hired quickly because they had someone inside to help them.)

Another participant stated that he has limited access to mentors who can provide guidance and recommendation. Participant 7 stated:

“Naa koy naapplanan, akong nabal’an nga pakusugay man diay ug kapit sa sulod. So ako wala nalang ko nipadayon kay wala man gihapon koy kaila para mu recommend nako didto sa sulod.” (Participant 7, Page 9, Lines 292-294)

(I applied somewhere, but I found out that it heavily depends on connections inside. So, I decided not to continue because I didn't have anyone to recommend me from inside.)

Connections with someone inside the company were also a challenge to Participants 3 and 17 to get a job. They shared:

“My challenges and experience in applying is hard if you don't have a backer or anyone you know inside the company” (Participant 3, Page 3, Lines 104-105)

“...so maskin unsaon nako ug push sa akong kaugalingon nga maka trabaho ko unya need ug back up nimo nga naa ana nga company para maoy mo tabang mo recommend sa imo para maka apply ka.” (Participant 17, Page 22, Lines 803-805)

(...so no matter how much I push myself to get a job, you still need someone from that company to back you up and recommend you to be able to apply.)

This presents considerable obstacles due to the absence of support networks. In the absence of mentors or connections, job seekers frequently encounter lengthy procedures and inadequate guidance. Opportunities inside some companies may be further limited by a lack of internal referrals.

The absence of professional networks that can provide referrals or endorsements was also a dilemma for Participant 9 in applying for a job. He stated:

“Actually, meron akong na experience na bias noong pag apply ko sa ibang company. Uso kasi ang pagkakaroon ng backer kapag naghahanap ng trabaho. Kaso wala akong kakilala o pamilya ko na mga worker na nandoon na, so hindi ako nakapasok.” (Participant 9, Page 11, Lines 385-387)

(Actually, I experienced bias when I applied to other companies. It's common to have a backer when looking for a job. But since I didn't have any acquaintances or family members working there, I couldn't get in.)

Participant 17 also stated that there is difficulty in professional networks to gain information on job vacancies.

“Unya lisud pa jud kayo makakita ug backer nga makatabang kay wala man kaayo koy kaila kaayo gud. Akong pung pamilya ug mga friends kay wala pud silay makarecommend nga pwede nako maduolan. Lisud jud siya.” (Participant 17, Page 22, Lines 805-807)

(And it's really difficult to find a backer who can help because I don't have many connections. Even my family and friends don't have anyone they can recommend for me to approach. It's really tough.)

Even though the applicants want to find connections, they only have limited opportunity to get one. Participant 11 stated:

“Unya wala puy maka refer sa akoa kay gamay raman kog kaila nga naa diri sa city unya mga studyante pa pud sila, so limited ra pud ang opportunity nga makakita ug kaila nga pwede mahimong backer.” (Participant 11, Page 14, Lines 475-477)

(And there's no one to refer me because I know only a few people in the city, and they're students too. So, the opportunity to find someone who could be a backer is very limited.)

Having few professional relationships poses significant challenges. Without networks for recommendations or endorsements, it becomes difficult to find possible positions and important information. These challenges are made worse by the lack of possibilities for networking, which emphasizes the significance of active networking initiatives.

Experienced discrimination from companies applied. The third theme has the most sentiments among the participants where they

are discriminated against for having senior high school credentials only. Clustered themes were identified which are the bias in hiring practices and employers' preference for experienced candidates. The participants' experiences with limited educational attainment in getting jobs, especially in the companies and industries that seek or prioritize college graduates or applicants at the college level. This challenge was most evident to the participants in landing a job.

Bias in recruiting procedures keeps undermining unbiased employment possibilities. College graduates are frequently strongly preferred, which disadvantages people who have not pursued formal education. Hiring managers and recruiters have preferences in the hiring process. Participant 11 experienced such discrimination during his job application. He stated:

"Naa jud kay pagtan-aw nila sa akong biodata, ana sila nga "Hala senior high ra diay ka? Ang makasulod ra ba kay college graduate ra". (Participant 11, Page 14, Lines 480-481)

(When they looked at my biodata, they said, "Oh, you're only a senior high school graduate? Only college graduates can get in.")

Participant 4 experienced discriminatory job postings and recruitment advertisements. She said:

"Ang akong experience kay lisud jud. Kay ang ilang requirement kay need nga naka graduate ug college or at least 2 years sa college na, daghan pa to nga qualifications jud." (Participant 4, Page 5, Lines 142-143)

(My experience was really difficult. They required that you have graduated from college or at least completed 2 years of college, and there were many other qualifications as well.)

Hiring managers and recruiters also prefer applicants who share common traits or experience as theirs as observed by Participant 1.

"Isa pa pud sa akong giapplyan sa una, kay kaila man to niya ang nangapply unya same pud sila ug naagian sa una, siya gyud ang nakuha compare sa ubang nangapply." (Participant 1, Page 1, Lines 19-20)

(Another one of the places I applied to before, someone he knew applied there, and they had similar backgrounds, but he was the one who got selected compared to the others who applied.)

By preferring particular qualities, discriminatory job posts and recruiting ads serve to further establish existing biases. This preference for applicants who are familiar with one another restricts diversity and ignores potential and important abilities.

Another challenge for senior high school graduates is the prioritizing of employers to the applicants with practical experience over those with SHS credentials. Participant 7 shared:

"Actually, naay pagduhaduha kay first timer basin mangayo ug experience ang mga company, ana baya na. Kulba unya hard time masyado when it comes to interview. Unya kay need man gyud diay ug experience para madawat." (Participant 7, Page 8, Lines 287-289)

(Actually, there's some doubt because as a first-timer, companies might ask for experience. It's nerve-racking and a hard time especially when it comes to interviews. It seems that experience is needed to be accepted.)

Participants also reported encountering employers that had unrealistic expectations, even for entry-level positions in the labor market. These included requests for a high level of education or specialized skills that were above and beyond what one could reasonably expect from someone just starting in the workforce. Participant 14 said:

"Naka try pud ko before sa SM dili sila, especially sa mga jeans gud nga promodiser, dili daw sila nagadawat ug senior high graduate. Ang ilahang gipangita is at least 2 years na sa college level so sa ako need nako mangita ug work na mudawat ug senior high school lang jud." (Participant 14, Page 18, Lines 650-653)

(I also tried before with SM, but they didn't accept me, especially for the jeans promodiser position. They said they don't accept senior high school graduates. They were looking for at least two years of college education, so I need to find work that accepts senior high school graduates only.)

Even though senior high school graduates were promised a job after senior high, the labor market is still looking for high credentials. Participant 15 said,

"Oo, kasagaran sa gipangita nila kay college graduate na or at least 2 years sa college." (Participant 15, Page 20, Line 711)

(Yes, most of the time they're looking for college graduates or at least those who have completed two years of college.)

The preference of employers for experienced applicants presents a major challenge for job seekers, especially those graduates from senior high school only. In favor of practical experience, this emphasis frequently ignores the potential and fundamental competencies of SHS graduates.

Senior high school graduates have a tough time when they are to work with a lack of experience, their academic strand is not in line with the job requirements and due to competition. This has led to situations where many of these fresh graduates do not secure jobs



because they lack any previous working experiences; this creates an enormous barrier preventing them from getting into entry level positions. The situation is further worsened by the fact that there exists a gap between what learners learn at schools and what employers require. In addition, participants' experiences confirm how hard it is for one to convince others that they can do something without having done it before which signifies the challenge of trying to move directly from schooling into employment. There is also intense rivalry among huge numbers of applicants some of who have links or prior connections; this consequently reduces chances for recent graduates as well.

Seeking job process for senior high school graduates is significantly hampered by the absence of support networks and professional connections. Without any supporters' help or those who can easily give references, a lot of graduates have not been lucky enough. It is shown in participants' experiences therefore that this backing may have played a vital part in finding a job with their company affiliations. The chance to form these networks is hard which limits opportunities as well as prolongs the time searching for employment. This point emphasizes that networking is crucial for individuals graduating from modest backgrounds, without professional contacts.

Another significant challenge is the discrimination against senior high school graduates. According to the result, job postings and recruiting practices were reported as being biased where SHS certificates were considered inadequate. This creates an unfair playing ground by prioritizing higher qualifications and practical experience rather than possible future potentials and fundamentals. In addition, unrealistic demands desired by employers for beginner jobs further complicate the situation for young employees seeking employment opportunities.

Strategic interventions implemented by senior high school graduates to overcome the challenges of finding jobs in the labor market

After analyzing the strategic interventions participants implemented to overcome the challenges of finding jobs in the labor market, three themes emerged in thematic map number two (2): Increase qualifications and skills, building connections, and seeking companies that accept senior high school graduates.

Table 2. *The thematic map on the strategic interventions they implemented to overcome the challenges of finding jobs in the labor market*

<i>First Theme Increase qualifications and skills</i>	
Pursuing Higher Education Enrolling in college to gain deeper knowledge and expertise. Attending colleges known for specialized programs that enhance career prospects. Pursuing college courses related to their strand	Workshops and Seminars Attending workshops to learn about the latest trends and technologies. Engaging in hands-on learning experiences to build practical skills. Watch tutorials and any information platforms to gain understanding
Professional Certifications Obtaining industry-recognized certifications to validate expertise and enhance employability. Continuous pursuit of certifications to stay current with industry standards and advancements. Collecting certifications that increase credentials	
<i>Second Theme Building Connections</i>	
Networking Events and Job Fairs Attending industry-specific networking events to meet potential employers and industry professionals. Participating in job fairs to interact directly with recruiters and hiring managers Engaging in small meetings and gatherings of employed acquaintances	Building Relationships with Professors and Instructors Staying in touch with former professors and mentors who can provide job leads and references Seeking advice and recommendations from academic mentors who have industry connections Connecting to potential employers and job openings
<i>Third Theme Seeking Companies that accept Senior High School Graduates</i>	
Industry-Specific Opportunities Identifying sectors with a high demand for entry-level positions that SHS graduates can fill Looking for a job that connects to the field or strand in SHS Applying to many companies at the same time	Internships and Apprenticeships Looking for companies offering internships, apprenticeships, or trainee programs designed to provide practical experience and skill development for SHS graduates. Connecting to small companies that could give work experience to SHS graduates Accepting opportunities for possible training and workshops by companies

Increase qualifications and skills. To cope with the challenges faced by senior high school graduates in finding jobs in the labor market, participants find ways to land a job despite having senior high school credentials only. These were the following they see fit in finding opportunities to gain experience: pursuing higher education, professional certifications, and workshops and seminars.

Since the participants struggled to land a job, one of their strategies is to continue their studies in college to gain deeper knowledge and expertise. Participant 14 stated:

"...ingon ko "once madawat ko ani nga work, mag-ipon ko for, like, starting sa akong college na enrolment". (Participant 14, Page 19, Line 669-670)

(...I said, 'Once I get this job, I'll start saving for my college enrollment.')

Attending colleges known for specialized programs that enhance career prospects was also the strategy of Participant 9. He stated,

"Para sa akin, mas mabuti talaga na tapusin ang pag-aaral (college) para mas madaling makahanap ng trabaho na mas malaki yung salary at tsaka makapag-ipon ng maayos, mas maganda sa mga kilalang universities." (Participant 9, Page 12, Line 398-400)

(For me, it's better to finish college so it's easier to find a job with a higher salary and to save properly, especially from reputable universities.)

To find better jobs in the future, participants would like to pursue college courses related to their strand. Participant 14 said,

"Unya ang akong kuhaon pud is of course linya pud sa akong strand atong senior high para ma continue ang nasugdan na." (Participant 14, Page 19, Line 670-672)

(And what I'll pursue will of course be in line with my strand from senior high to continue what I've started.)

Higher education offers valuable opportunities to broaden one's knowledge, take up specialized skills from highly regarded programs, and match courses to one's job goals. All of which helps one become more prepared for future tasks in the workplace.

Professional Certifications also helped the participants to land a job in the labor market. Participant 8 obtained industry-recognized certifications to validate expertise and enhance employability. He said,

"Nagkuha pud ug TESDA para mas mahasa pa gyud ang skills ug para naa pud certificate nga mapakita gani." (Participant 8, Page 10, Line 352-353)

(I also took TESDA courses to further hone my skills and to have a certificate to show.)

The continuous pursuit of certifications to stay current with industry standards and advancements was also the strategy of Participant 15. She said,

"Unya nag gather pud ko ug mga certificates nga pwede nako madugang sa akong resume para daghan sila makita nga naa gyud pud koy maambag sa trabaho, especially sa unsay standards karong panahona." (Participant 15, Page 20, Line 721-723)

(And I also gathered certificates that I can add to my resume to show that I have valuable skills to contribute to the job, especially given the current standards.)

They also collect certifications that increase credentials. Participant 16 said,

"Mangita pud ang mga tig hire ug mga certificates pud kung unsa ang skills sa trabahante, so ako ato, nag earn ko ug mga certificates pareha anang TESDA kay okay man sa ila kung naay NC II." (Participant 16, Page 21, Line 761-762)

(Employers also look for certificates to gauge a worker's skills, so I earned certificates like those from TESDA, which employers appreciate, especially if they include NC II qualifications.)

In today's competitive labor market, professional certificates are essential for proving expertise and improving employability. Continually obtaining these certificates improves credentials and shows an effort to stay current with changes in the industry, which attracts employers to professionals.

Furthermore, workshops and seminars attended by the participants helped them learn and gain work experience. Workshops about the latest trends and technologies helped them. Participant 1 said,

"Unya kay akong gi applyan kay sa costumer service man unya wala pa koy experience, nakaapil ko ug workshop sa among lugar ra pud para sa mga batan.on about sa technology ug unsay current trends karon. Pasalamat ra pud ko ato nga workshop gyud." (Participant 1, Page 1, Line 27-30)

(And since I applied for customer service and didn't have experience, I joined a workshop in our area focused on educating young people about technology and current trends. I'm grateful for that workshop.)

Engaging in hands-on learning experiences to build practical skills was also the strategy of Participants 1 and 8. They shared,

"Dapat makabalo jud during training para maingon sa mga employer nga pwede ka sa trabaho." (Participant 1, Page 1, Line 34-35)

(It's important to learn during training so that employers can see that you're capable of the job.)

“Nagtuon ko ug skills jud kay kung naay skills, dali ra dawaton sa trabaho kay mao man ang need pareha anang sa mga fast food ug mga malls.” (Participant 8, Page 10, Line 351-352)

(I focused on learning skills because having skills makes it easier to get accepted for jobs, like in fast food chains and malls.)

Watching tutorials and any information platforms to gain an understanding was also implemented by Participant 5. She said,

“For me, since BPO man akong industry nga gisudlan, before ko nisulod ani kay nag tan-aw ko ug youtube ana.” (Participant 5, Page 6, Line 212-213)

(For me, since I entered the BPO industry before I started, I watched YouTube videos about it.)

Attending workshops and seminars is essential for those who want to stay current with emerging technology and trends in the field. In addition to developing practical skills, these experiential learning activities offer beneficial networking prospects.

Building Connections. As senior high school graduates face challenges in landing a job in the labor market, attending networking events and job fairs and building relationships with professors and instructors would be a great help for them to expedite the application process. Making connections helped the participants to land a job.

Attending networking events such as industry-specific networking to meet potential employers and industry professionals was implemented by the participants. Participant 2 said,

“Dako pud ug tabang kung makattend or makaila ka ug mga tao nga daghan pud ug connections kay ma refer man ka nila sa ilang mga kaila pud nga dagkong tao.” (Participant 2, Page 3, Line 75-76)

(It's really helpful if you can attend events or meet people who have a lot of connections because they can refer you to their influential contacts.)

Job fairs also helped the participants to find available jobs in the labor market. Participant 3 said,

“Participate in job fairs because it is helpful to find more available positions to different companies.” (Participant 3, Page 4, Line 120)

Small meetings and gatherings of employed acquaintances attended by the participants also helped them connect to possible employers. Participant 11 said,

“Pagka after ato, nangapply napud ko sa NCCC kay nakakita naman ko ug backer nga naa pud didto, tungod ra pud atong nagkakita mi sa isa ka gathering sa friends nakakita na ko ug way.” (Participant 11, Page 14, Line 496-497)

(After that, I applied to NCCC because I found a backer who also works there. It was because we met at a gathering with friends that I found a way in.)

Making meaningful interactions with experts in the business and prospective employers through participation in industry-specific networking events creates prospects for mentorship and collaboration. Attending job fairs provides an opportunity to speak with recruiters and hiring managers face-to-face and opens up new avenues for job progress.

Another way of building connections was establishing relationships with the former professors, instructors, and mentors. Participant 10 shared that staying in touch with former professors and mentors can provide job leads and references. He uttered,

“Wala ra ko nag expect nga maglisud kay kaila naman sila sa akua kay na mentor man nako sila sa una pud.” (Participant 10, Page 13, Line 436-437)

(I didn't expect to have a hard time because they know me well, as they were my mentors in the past.)

Participants also seek advice and recommendations from their mentors who have industry connections. Participant 12 stated,

“...pagkahuman ato, nakatrabaho man dayon mi sa Doreco kay gi recommend man dayon mi sa among maestro ato unya dako kaayo tog tabang sa amo kay another pud to siya nakahatag financial sa amoa ato nga time.” (Participant 12, Page 16, Line 559-561)

(...after that, we immediately got a job at Doreco because our teacher recommended us right away, and it was a huge help to us because he also provided financial assistance to us at that time.)

Connecting to potential employers and job openings was also implemented by the participants. Participants 3 and 4 shared,

“Find a trustworthy backer/reference that has a high position in a company.” (Participant 3, Page 4, Line 118)

“Nangapply lang ko sa akong kaila. Nagpakilooy para makuha lang ko niya.” (Participant 4, Page 5, Line 164)

(I just applied through my friend. I pleaded with them to help me get the job.)

Developing a connection with academics and instructors is a strategic step toward career development. Keeping in touch with old mentors and instructors might provide important career leads and references. Developing these connections is essential to converting

educational experiences into career prospects.

Seeking Companies that accept Senior High School Graduates. Other companies were hesitant to accept applicants because of the lack of requirements. These were the following they see fit in seeking companies that would accept them: identifying industry-specific opportunities and looking for internships and apprenticeships available. This strategy was implemented by some participants and eventually helped them get a job.

Participants identify sectors with a high demand for entry-level positions that SHS graduates can fill. Participant 4 said,

“Pero nangita pud ko ug mga kaapplyan nga pwede ra senior high graduate pareha anang manindera, kanang kahera sa mga dagko dagko napud nga tindahan.” (Participant 4, Page 5, Line 158-160)

(But I also looked for job opportunities where senior high school graduates are accepted, like being a salesperson or cashier in big stores.)

Since they graduated in senior high, they looked for a job that connected to the field or strand they took in senior high school. Participant 6 said,

“Also, it was easier for me to learn the job because the available position is somewhat in line with my strand in senior high.” (Participant 6, Page 8, Line 256-258)

While it is difficult for them to land a job, one of their strategies is to apply to many companies at the same time. Participant 5 said,

“Ang pamaagi nga akong gibuhat is, of course, after nako nag graduate ug senior high, dili lang man jud isa ka company ang akong gisudlan. Of course, nag apply pud ko sa lahilahi at the same time, kumbaga more chances of winning. Gi sabay-sabay gyud nako like isa ka adlaw, lahi napud nga company then lahi napud nga company, ana.” (Participant 5, Page 6, Line 203-206)

(The approach I took was, of course, after graduating from senior high, I didn't limit myself to just one company. I applied to different companies at the same time, increasing my chances of success. I applied to multiple companies simultaneously, like one day applying to one company, then another day to a different company, like that.)

Another participant did the same. Participant 15 said,

“Nangapply ug daghan nga katrabahuan para naa puy chance nga madawat sa trabaho.” (Participant 15, Page 20, Line 720)

(I applied to many jobs to increase my chances of getting hired.)

Opportunities related to a given industry may be crucial for recent senior high school graduates breaking into the workforce. Applying to several companies at once increases the chances of getting hired and increases the likelihood that to find a suitable job.

Attending apprenticeships and internships offered by the companies also helped the participants land a job. Participants looked for companies offering internships, apprenticeships, or trainee programs designed to provide practical experience and skill development for senior high school graduates. Participant 7 shared,

“Timingang pud sa among lugar nga naay tag-iya ug business nga nag offer ug training para sa mga batan.on diri sa amo. Kay murag nangita man pud sila ug mga trabahante para sa ilang itukuray nga business diri sa amo so naa koy natun.an ato.” (Participant 7, Page 9, Line 302-304)

(Sometimes, owners of businesses in our area also offer training for young people like us. They seem to be looking for workers for their expanding businesses here, so I took advantage of that opportunity to learn.)

Small companies also offered work experiences to the participants. Participant 8 stated,

“Aside ana, nag part time pud ko sa akong kaila kay para naa lang gyuy experience ba.” (Participant 8, Page 10, Line 350-351)

(Besides that, I also worked part-time for my friend just to gain some work experience.)

Participants grabbed any opportunities for training and workshops. Participant 7 said,

“Gi grab gyud nako ang opportunity nga naay training kay mayo nalang naay matun.an usa magsugod ug trabaho.” (Participant 7, Page 10, Line 353-354)

(I grabbed the opportunity to undergo training because it's good to learn something before starting work.)

For senior high school graduates looking to acquire real-world experience and improve critical skills, internships, and apprenticeships are excellent options. Accepting the chance to participate in company-sponsored training and workshops improves skill sets and professional development and opens doors for future career success.

Participants have been able to enhance their qualifications and skills in a variety of ways by taking courses, getting certificates and attending workshops. To improve their prospects for employment, individuals take courses at higher educational institutions, obtain

professional certifications or participate in workshops. For Participant 14 and Participant 9 among others college education means deepening knowledge as well as more possibilities of earning bigger salaries which they usually try to relate with the class direction offered in high school classes. Industry-recognized certificates like those highlighted by Participant 8 and Participant 16 are also helpful since they testify of a person's mastery in this field hence raising their demand on the labor market. This is according to Participant 1 who adds that such trainings allow one to gain experience directly related to what is happening now including networking opportunities.

Senior high school graduates boost their job qualifications by building connections and looking for companies that would hire them. Job fairs and networking events become their ground just as Participant 2 and Participant 11. As revealed by Participants 5 and 15, applying to several companies at once improves their chances of getting hired. Furthermore, as Participant 7 and Participant 8 experienced, participating in apprenticeships and internships provides real-world experience and skill development – two things that are vital for young job searchers. When combined, these strategies assist recent senior high school graduates in strengthening their resumes, gaining relevant work experience, and increasing their chances of landing a job in a tight labor market.

Recommendations can be offered for the improvement of the curriculum and instructions of the senior high school-delivering schools to match the demands of the labor market.

After all the experiences and challenges that the participants encountered and the strategic interventions they applied, they came up with three themes for the recommendations for improving the curriculum and instructions of the senior high school-delivering schools to match the demands of the labor market. The themes are the provision of laboratories and facilities, improved work immersion, and hiring skilled SHS teachers.

Table 3. *The thematic map on the recommendations that can be offered for the improvement of the curriculum and instructions of the senior high school-delivering schools to match the demands of the labor market.*

First Theme Provide Laboratories and Facilities

Provide training and teach skills	Provide complete facilities to each strand
Expose SHS students to more experiences and training	Supply schools with efficient facilities for meaningful experience
Mold students according to their strand to be work-ready	Improve facilities in the school so students won't purchase their tools
Provide experience before work immersion	Add facilities and tools, especially in the technology field

Second Theme Improve Work Immersion

Structured Work Immersion	Alignment of Work Immersion
Extend work immersion time for better work exploration	Ensure work immersion opportunities align with students' strands or fields
Define learning objectives and competencies	Secure high-quality work immersion placements that offer meaningful learning experiences
Make comprehensive training and orientation sessions	Integrate work immersion experiences with classroom learning
Provide supportive supervision and guidance throughout the immersion period.	

Third Theme Hire Skilled SHS Teachers

Need of Expert Teachers	Adequate Class Hours
Employ teachers who are capable of teaching skills and knowledge	Meet the students during their scheduled class hours.
Hire Expert teachers to teach in the classroom	Create effective class schedules for effective learning
Appoint teachers who are committed to teaching lessons to the students	Teach needed information and skills during the allotted class hours.

Provide laboratories and facilities. The first theme has two clustered themes which are: provide training and teach skills, and provide complete facilities to each strand. This recommendation is to give training and teach skills to deliver better instructions in the teaching-learning process.

Senior high school students need training and skills for them to be ready for the field that they have chosen. As Participant 15 shared her thoughts about exposing the students to more experiences and training, she shared:

"...experience pa para ma enhance ang skills sa mga estudyante ug mu improve." (Participant 15, Page 21, Line 734)

(...and gain experience to enhance students' skills and improve them.)

Participant 1 also stated,

"Kanang kulang jud sa experience, need pa jud ug more experience ... para sa akoa dili jud tanan subject ma apply sa panarbaho unya more training pa jud." (Participant 1, Page 2, Line 40-41)

(When lacking experience, more experience is needed... for me, not all subjects can be applied to work, and more training is still needed.)

Participants also recommended to mold students according to their strand to be work-ready. Participant 13 said,

"Siguro sa akoa, TVL man gud akong gikuha. Dapat gitudlo ang skills sa pagluto ug pan ug kinahanglan kanang naa pud bagong gamit sa eskwelahan para makaluto ug pan, naa man gud kulang sa amoa." (Participant 13, Page 18, Line 631-633)

(Maybe for me, I chose TVL. The skills of cooking and sewing need to be taught, and school equipment must be new for cooking and

sewing.)

Participant 4 also shared the same sentiment,

“Dapat hasaon nila ang mga studyante especially sa ilang strand nga gikuha para ma ready pud sila inig trabaho.” (Participant 4, Page 5, Line 173-174)

(They should train students, especially in the strand they have taken, so they can be ready for work.)

Schools should provide experience before work immersion was also suggested by the participants. Participant 12 said,

“Dapat pud before mi maka work immersion, naa pud mi murag actual na sa eskwelahan. Limited ra pud kaayo among skills kay kasagaran gamay ra nga balay among tauran pero kung kanang building dili mi ka kuan kay kulang mi ug experience nga ing-ana.” (Participant 12, Page 16, Line 580-582)

(Before our work immersion, we should also have something like an experience in school. Our skills are also limited because we mostly only have small houses in our place, but if it's a building, we don't know because we lack the experience of such.)

Senior high school students must receive training and teaching skills to ensure their preparation for work. Giving them a variety of experiences and training opportunities increases their adaptability and practical knowledge. Students are further given the competence and confidence necessary to succeed in their future occupations as a result.

Aside from the experiences and training, participants also suggested the provision of complete facilities to each strand. Participant 10 suggested to supply schools with efficient facilities for meaningful experience. She uttered,

“Kuan kaning, ang ilaha lang gyung iimprove kay kanang mga gamit sa strand gani. Ihatag gyud nila sa mga estudyante ang ilang mga gamit para mas daghan gyud ug matun-an. Dili lang kay ingon nga isa ra ang makagamit ana. Dapat kinahanglan, tanang estudyante makagamit gyud.” (Participant 10, Page 13, Line 455-457)

(They should improve on the equipment related to the strand. They should provide students with their equipment so that everyone can learn more. It shouldn't be like only one person can use it. Every student should be able to use it.)

Participants were also told to purchase their tools during their senior high school years. That is why participants suggested to improve facilities in the school to they won't purchase their tools. Participant 12 suggested,

“Mga gamit, kay dapat iprovide jud kay lisud baya sa estudyante, sama nako nga walay nagasuporta unya dili pud tanan maka afford. Mao ganing naa sa eskwelahan sa vocational kay tanan pobre pud unya mao puy muprovide sa gamit maong lisud kayo. Daghan mi classmate, 37 man ata mi, pero kadugayan ato namalhin, 18 nalang ata mi. Kay sa mga tools palang daan perting mahala na, di makaya, di maka provide ang ginikanan ba.” (Participant 12, Page 16, Line 575-579)

(Equipment should really be provided because it's difficult for students, like me, who lack support and not everyone can afford it. That's why in the vocational school, we're all poor, and that's why we provide the equipment. It's very difficult. Many of my classmates, 37 of them, have already moved away, and we're down to 18 now. The parents can't afford the tools and the cost of the old ones.)

Adding facilities and tools, especially in the technology field was also suggested. Participant 5 said,

“So, I think mas marecommend nako if daghan ug computer, daghan ug station nga kanang dili makulangkulangan ang mga students na under sa ICT.” (Participant 5, Page 7, Line 228-229)

(So, I think I can recommend it if there are many computers, many stations that students can use in ICT.)

Ensuring that every strand has all the facilities it needs is essential to improving senior high school students' educational experience. Providing effective facilities to schools guarantees that students receive valuable, practical experience right in their classrooms.

Improve work immersion. With this theme, two main clustered themes are created: structured work immersion and alignment of work immersion.

For senior high school graduates, work immersion is one of the requirements that they need to accomplish. Structured work immersion programs are essential for fostering successful student growth. Participants pointed out that having a structured work immersion is important for them to learn skills and experience real-world scenarios in their chosen field or strand. They suggested extending time for work immersion to have better work exploration. Participant 12 said,

“Ang time pud sa work immersion kay kulang jud kung sa akua lang kay pag-abot nako sa Doreco kay daghan pa ko wala natun-an ato. Para sa akua, gwapo gyud untag maabot ug 1 month kay para inig abot sa trabaho dili na daghan pangutana kay kabalo naman ka kay kadto kay limitado kayo to.” (Participant 12, Page 16, Line 562-565)

(The time for work immersion is really lacking for me because when I arrived at Doreco, there were still many things I hadn't learned yet. For me, it would have been better to have at least one month because when I start working, there wouldn't be many questions as

you already know that because it's so limited.)

This statement was also supported by Participant 1,

“Dapat maghatag sila ug taas nga time for work immersion kay more training jud para ready na ang senior high school graduates nga maka work.” (Participant 1, Page 2, Line 46-47)

(They should provide a longer period for work immersion because more training is needed to prepare senior high school graduates for work.)

Defining the work immersion learning objectives and competencies were also lacking. Participant 7 stated,

“At least gi orient tana mi ug tarung sa among objectives ug kailangan abuton kay murag wala man gud kayo to naklaro sa amoa kay murag dinalian man gud to. Basta kay nahuman lang mi work immersion, mao ra to.” (Participant 7, Page 9, Line 317-319)

(At least they properly orient us about our objectives and what needs to be achieved because it seems like it wasn't very clear to us, it was really quickly. Because after the work immersion, that was it.)

Making comprehensive training and orientation sessions was suggested because the participants experienced confusions during their work immersion. Participant 9 shared,

“Tapos dapat may training talaga kahit konti lang sa school kung anong gagawin naming sa site before ang work immersion para hindi kami masyadong kabahan at orientation talaga.” (Participant 9, Page 12, Line 411-413)

(And there should be some training, even just a little at school, on what we'll do on the site before the work immersion so we won't be too nervous and have a real orientation.)

There is also a lack of supervision and guidance from the supervisors during their work immersion especially the vocational courses. Participant 8 suggested,

“Tutukan gyud ang mga vocational course. Kanang tudluan gyud ug skills kay dili man gyud ta makaingon nga makahuman ta ug college. At least lang ba nga nay skills aron panginabuhian sa mga senior high graduates.” (Participant 8, Page 11, Line 363-365)

(Vocational courses should really be focused on. They should teach practical skills because not everyone can say they will finish college. At the very least, having skills can provide a livelihood for senior high graduates.)

Extending the period of work immersion facilitates a more comprehensive understanding and comprehension of work scenarios. Training and orientation workshops set students up for success in the industry, and during the immersion period, helpful supervision and mentoring foster learning opportunities and professional development.

For work immersion opportunities to have the greatest educational benefit, they must be aligned with students' strands or fields. By bridging theory and practice, integrating these work immersion experiences with classroom instruction promotes a more seamless and inclusive educational journey. Participants also suggested aligning work immersion with their strands or fields. Participant 16 suggested,

“Mas nindot ug taas-taas ang work immersion unya didto pud tana sa daghan mi matun-an about sa among field.” (Participant 16, Page 22, Line 783-784)

(It would be better to have a longer work immersion period and be placed in the field so that we can learn more about our strand.)

They also suggested providing quality work immersion placements to have meaningful learning experiences since they gained less experience from their work immersion areas. Participant 11 said,

“Unya kung mag OJT, didto gyud sa mga government kay daghan ang matun-an sa government. Kay sa among gi OJThan kay sige rag katawa, gamay ra among natun-an.” (Participant 11, Page 15, Line 510-512)

(And when it comes to OJT, it's best to do it in government offices because there's a lot to learn there. In the place where we did our OJT, it was mostly just laughter; we learned very little.)

Applying the skills learned in the classroom would help the graduates, however, they experienced not in the same way. Participant 9 shared,

“Sa work immersion, medyo nabitin lang din kasi na rush, nahirapan kami gumawa ng reflection. Tapos nasa 40% lang yung naapply ko kasi hindi masyado nagagamit yung tinuro nila.” (Participant 9, Page 12, Line 405-407)

(In work immersion, it felt a bit rushed, so we struggled with the reflection. Also, I only applied about 40% of what they taught us because it wasn't used much.)

This alignment creates a seamless learning experience, improving the educational journey by bridging the gap between theoretical

knowledge and practical application. In order to further their understanding within their selected strands, participants underlined the necessity of longer and more intensive work immersion times. While obstacles like tight deadlines and few application opportunities were acknowledged, it was also highlighted how important to integrate classroom-taught skills into real-world settings. This highlights the need for improved integration and support throughout work immersion programs in order to maximize student learning outcomes.

Hire Skilled SHS Teachers. This theme has two clustered themes: the need for expert teachers and the adequate class hours.

Expert teachers are essential to the learning process of the students. Participants reiterated the need of the trained senior high school teachers to teach in the senior high school. One of the participants shared that it is better to have teachers who are capable of teaching the skills and knowledge. Participant 6 suggested,

“It would be better if the teachers were capable of teaching the necessary skills and information because it would be a big help, especially for students who want to learn more and to be more skilled and ready when things come in the future. They will no longer have difficulties when it comes to the courses they've been chosen for because SHS is here to fulfill their knowledge and to enhance their skills.” (Participant 6, Page 8, Line 268-272)

Hiring expert teachers would also help the students learn more in the classroom as Participant 12 shared,

“*Dapat more teachers kay usahay kapuyon na among teacher pag-abot sa amo ipa study ra sa amo ang lesson, walay mu explain namo. Kay iyang gitudluan naa pay Grade 10 ug Grade 11, unya naa pa pud mi, isa ra kabook teacher. Muingon man siya nga “Kabalo naman mo ani kay niagi naman mo ug Grade 10 so among nabal-an gikan sa Grade 10 hangtod sa Grade 12 kay mao ra gihapon, wala nag level up kay mao raman among teacher.”* (Participant 12, Page 16, Line 583-587)

(There should be more teachers because sometimes our teacher would arrive at our class and just assign us to study the lesson on our own without explaining it to us. He teaches Grade 10 and Grade 11, and we as well, just one teacher. He says, 'You know this because you went through Grade 10, so what we learned from Grade 10 to Grade 12 hasn't leveled up because we only have one teacher.)

Teachers who are committed to teaching lessons to the students is one of their recommendations. Participant 10 shared,

“*Ang kuan pud diay, ang oras sa pagtudlo pud. Kay pareha sa amoa, TVL, ang ubang mga maestro kay dili na maka focus sa amoa, makulangan sila ug time sa amoa sa pagtudlo ba. Dili nila ihatag ang saktong oras sa pagtudlo sa mga estudyante kay dili sila naa permi musulod sa amoa kay busy.*” (Participant 10, Page 13, Line 448-451)

(Another thing is the teaching hours. In our case, in TVL, some teachers can't focus on us. They lack time to teach us. They can't give us the right time. They're not always in our classroom because they're busy.)

Having knowledgeable teachers is essential to delivering high-quality instruction. Hiring educators who can impart both knowledge and skills guarantees that students get a well-rounded education.

Giving adequate class hours to the students was also lacking based on the experiences shared by the participants. They suggested to meet the students during their scheduled class hours. Participant 10 said,

“*Dapat musulod pud ang mga maestro para ma maximize among time sa ila.*” (Participant 10, Page 13, Line 460-461)

(The teachers should also come into our class hours to maximize our time with them.)

To avoid wasting class hours, creating effective class schedules for effective learning was also suggested. Participant 12 stated,

“*Kasagaran pud sa senior high wa may klase tungod sa ka busy sa mga teachers. Planuhon gyud ang mga schedule sa klase para masudlan gyud mi sa among maestro kay usahay daghan kaayog nahitabo sa skwelahan halos di na mag klase.*” (Participant 12, Page 17, Line 588-590)

(Most of the time in senior high, there are no classes because the teachers are too busy. The class schedules should be planned well so that we can have time with our teachers because sometimes a lot of things happen in school, so we almost don't have classes.)

Lastly, the participants wanted to learn the needed information and skills during the allotted class hours, however, teachers lacked the skills to teach. Participant 12 said,

“*Isa pa, nabantayan namo sa amoa kay dili siya mu explain ang gusto lang gyud niya actual lang gyud kanunay kay maglisud man siya ug sabot, dili siya maka explain sa amoa. Ipa hands-on lang dayon without explanation.*” (Participant 12, Page 16, Line 572-574)

(Another thing we noticed in our class is that our teacher doesn't explain much; he always prefers to do hands-on activities without explanation because he finds it hard to understand the topic and can't explain it to us.)

Ensuring adequate class hours is essential to a good education. Having class meetings during the scheduled hours for them offers structure and consistency. Making the most of the time and improving the quality of education is achieved by teaching the required knowledge and skills in the allocated hours.

Appropriate laboratories and facilities for senior high school students are essential for developing their skills and getting ready for the workforce. The necessity for improved tools and instruction was underlined by the participants, who also stressed the importance of practical knowledge and experience. Programs for structured and coordinated work immersion are also essential for student achievement. Participants suggested prolonging the immersion period, pointing out that it is already too short. To close the gap between theory and practice, emphasis was placed on providing clear orientation, well-defined learning objectives, and appropriate supervision. A work immersion program that is tailored to the individual fields of study of each student guarantees the application of classroom information in real-world settings, optimizing educational gains and job readiness.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed that senior high school graduates' application and landing a job in the labor market can be challenging. These challenges may be brought by the lack of experience that the company requires and meeting the qualifications, not having support to speed up the application, and discrimination because of having senior high school credentials only. Meanwhile, senior high school graduates were able to find strategic interventions to cope with these challenges. These senior high school graduates also offered recommendations to improve the curriculum and instructions of the senior high school-delivering schools to match the demands of the labor market.

The Challenges Faced by Senior High School Graduates in Finding Jobs in the Labor Market.

Senior high school graduates do face challenges in finding jobs in the labor market because they lack with experience to meet job qualifications, do not have backers that would expedite their application process, and are being discriminated for having high school credentials only since companies are still looking for college graduates and work experience. These challenges resulted in the unemployment of graduates and discouragement to apply for a job that is aligned to the strand or field they enrolled in senior high school.

Lack of Experience to Meet Job Qualifications. This struggle can indeed be a significant challenge to senior high school graduates. Studies show that many employers, especially in entry-level roles, give preference to individuals with experience. Another difficulty facing SHS graduates is that, although the majority of them have shown a preference for pursuing higher education, many employers are reluctant to hire them because of concerns about their readiness for the workforce (BusinessWorld Online, 2021). A study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (2023) found that employers value work experiences and demonstrate specific abilities of the graduates for employment. Any employment experience that a graduate had along the road, whether it was just a part-time job to pay the bills or an internship in the industry, can also be helpful (Mueller, 2023). Even though vocational high school graduates intend to start working right away, they face difficulties in finding jobs due to job market mismatch, which raises unemployment rates among this group of graduates (Kisno, et al., 2022).

However, in the recent survey conducted by TopResume (2019), almost 200 hiring managers and recruiters nationwide were surveyed as part of the study to find out which of the following qualities they valued most in a candidate; 45% answered "their potential", 37% answered "their experience", 16% said "their personality" and 2% preferred "their education". This means the applicants' potential emerged as the top consideration, surpassing both experience and education for the applicants to succeed in winning the position in the labor market.

Lack of backer to speed up qualifications. It isn't easy to find a job in the Philippines. Even if a person meets all the requirements for the position for which they are seeking, they may still have trouble landing the job. This is the outcome of the pervasive culture of having a "backer" to support one's job application that has crept into every firm in the country (Aguilan, et al., 2022). This indicates that the participants' experiences of having trouble finding employment in the labor market are still evident, especially in the present. A large number of them are turned down since they don't have endorsements from coworkers or business officials. The Padrino system was cited by new candidates as the second most frequent problem they encountered. Some candidates give up on their goals because they lack padrino, even when they are qualified and physically strong (Agaton, 2024). This shows that having a support system helps applicants to secure a job in the labor market. In the Philippines, it is challenging for people to get work since employers prioritize relationships above credentials. Assume, for example, that a candidate knows a prominent or influential person. In these cases, the applicant has a higher chance of getting accepted even though they aren't as deserving as the rest (Aguilan et al., 2022; Pinoy OFW, 2021). However, there has been a "padrino" or backer system since the beginning of time. Nevertheless, candidates – especially the most qualified ones – should not be deterred by the fact that the system is "widely accepted" because hiring managers continue to select the best candidates based on their qualifications and credentials.

Experienced Discrimination from companies applied. The discrimination from the companies that the senior high school graduates applied to is evident based on their experiences. When it comes to employment, recent college graduates and senior high school graduates compete. Nonetheless, the majority of recent high school graduates face discrimination. Many of them were rejected because of their high school credentials and lack of skills. Though the positions that they are applying for are mostly entry-level, companies are still looking for college-level candidates or college graduates. Most entry-level positions require a more diverse combination of formal college and university and excellent work experience (Carnevale, Garcia, & Campbell 2019). Aside from a degree, they are also required to a work experience which the senior high school graduates lack especially those who are newly graduates.

In today's labor market, hiring candidates with a college degree is still common. In February 2022, the Current Population Survey's Labor Force Statistics revealed that the unemployment rate for individuals aged 25 and above who had completed high school but did not hold a college degree was 4.5%. Individuals without a high school graduation had a 4.3% unemployment rate. The unemployment rate for those with an associate's degree or some college education was 3.8%. Those with a bachelor's degree or above had the highest labor force participation rate (72.4%) and employment-population ratio (70.9%) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Employers favor hiring college graduates over candidates with merely a high school degree, as evidenced by this data. Additionally, the evolving character of labor itself is another factor in the credential inflation. The employment market has grown increasingly specialized and sophisticated as a result of globalization and technological advancements. Candidates with a wider range of skills and a greater comprehension of societal challenges are what employers are looking for (Edwards, 2024). Consequently, those with specialized certificates and advanced degrees are valued more highly in the workforce.

The Strategic Interventions Implemented by Senior High School Graduates to Overcome the Challenges of Finding Jobs in the Labor Market.

For senior high graduates, the transition from senior high school to the workforce comes with a lot of challenges. They frequently encounter strong barriers to employment. As a result, strategic interventions were necessary to overcome the challenges. These strategic interventions include increase qualifications and skills, building connections, and seeking companies that accept senior high school graduates. Through the implementation of these strategic interventions, graduates hope to position themselves competitively in a dynamic and demanding job market, in addition to meeting the demands of potential employers.

Increase qualifications and skills. As the participants experienced rejections from the companies they applied for, they found solutions to solve their problems in landing a job in the labor market. These young people have logically chosen to seek employment alternatives that will make them more appealing college candidates, given the rising value of a college education (Thompson, 2017; Carnevale, Garcia, & Campbell 2019; Carnevale, Fasules, & Campbell, 2020). One of their ways is to pursue college and gain experience from having entry-level positions in the market. Internships, part-time jobs, volunteer work, and apprenticeships are all great ways for graduates to put their classroom information to use, learn industry-specific skills, and get real-world experience. Not all workers need a formal education to acquire in-demand competencies; those without a college degree can still acquire and demonstrate these competencies through work experience (Carnevale, Fasules, & Campbell, 2020; Blair, et al., 2020; Demaria, Fee, & Wardrip, 2020). Because of the increasing educational requirements for jobs, some choose to attend college to increase their qualifications and become more competent individuals.

Given the decline in wages and the availability of high-caliber work experiences, education is a better investment in future earnings than a job (Carnevale, Garcia, & Campbell 2019). This statement highlights the financial benefits and long-term advantages of education, particularly obtaining a college degree. Regardless of color or ethnicity, a worker's pay increases dramatically with a college degree compared to someone who has just completed high school (Carnevale, Garcia, & Campbell 2019).

Building Connections. Having contacts or friends might expedite the application process, as many participants stressed. Making connections is essential when looking for a job. Your chances of landing the job multiply tenfold if you receive the right employee referral (Augustine, 2021). Professional networks can assist candidates by putting them in touch with individuals in the industry they wish to work in or by providing leads for employment opportunities at certain companies.

Backer systems or employee recommendations have long been considered effective hiring practices, making up 30% to 50% of open positions (Schlachter & Pieper, 2019). Employee recommendations can be advantageous because they create a sense of community among employees, who then serve as brand ambassadors for the company, its culture, and its values, according to a study by Aouam and Belmouffeq (2022).

The "Padrino System" is not without its benefits. It can occasionally be used for a noble purpose as well. For a business to succeed, people need to be close to one another, especially when the project requires a lot of cooperation between the employer and the employee. This collaboration is also known as the referral system. The only difference is the source, which is an employer (Aguilan et al., 2022). Employee recommendation programs often benefit the recommender as well as the company. Employee recommendations can be advantageous because they create a sense of community among employees, who then serve as brand ambassadors for the company, its culture, and its values, according to a study by Aouam and Belmouffeq (2022).

Seeking Companies that accept Senior High School Graduates. In addition to a high school diploma, workers need other qualifications to obtain well-paying positions, hold onto those jobs, advance in their careers, and increase their income. These include leadership, problem-solving, sophisticated thinking, teamwork, sales and customer service, and communication (Workplace Basics: The Competencies Employers Want, 2020). This implies that graduates of senior high school may be able to get employment with these sought-after soft talents.

If someone who has graduated from senior high school wishes to work in the field, there are numerous options. Nevertheless, K–12 graduates might work in the manufacturing, BPO, retail, professional services, and machinery and equipment sectors (Ciit.Content.Admin., 2020). By forming partnerships with educational and training institutions that will allow prospective employees to obtain the real-world work experience required to create employable abilities, employers can boost the pool of potential skilled

workers (Carnevale, Fasules, & Campbell, 2020).

The Recommendations can be Offered for the Improvement of the Curriculum and Instructions of the Senior High School-Delivering Schools to Match the Demands of the Labor Market

To better prepare students for successful transitions into the workforce, senior high schools need to adapt their curricula and instructional methodologies to meet the changing demands of the labor market. Senior high schools should equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge by providing laboratories and facilities, improving work immersion, and hiring skilled senior high school teachers were shared by the graduates. To ensure that graduates are suitably prepared and competitive in their chosen fields, recommendations aimed at improving the curriculum and instructions are essential.

Provide Laboratories and Facilities. In school, students build up fundamental knowledge and comprehend real-world problem-solving. Students receive the knowledge and information they need from the school to help them get ready for the workforce. The academic community, students, and partner industries may continue to show strong support by continuing to acknowledge one's responsibilities in the development of student's knowledge, abilities, and attitudes to prepare them for their chosen curriculum exits (Garcia & Yazon, 2020; Orbeta & Potestad, 2020).

Giving students the laboratories and facilities they need to learn also gives them the knowledge they need to comprehend what goes on in the real world. The K–12 system must concurrently provide students with the opportunity to investigate a wide range of prospective career opportunities in order to guarantee that every student has the option of attending college (Carnevale, Garcia, & Campbell 2019). The K–12 system should provide students with a variety of experiences and educational opportunities that will better prepare them for the workforce. This covers learning objectives, career exploration, skill enhancement, and practical experience.

Improve Work Immersion. Work Immersion is an essential part of education because it gives students the chance to get real-world experience in real-world scenarios and because it helps employers by giving them access to applicants who are already knowledgeable in their industry as possible hires (Patino, 2023). Students gain more advanced knowledge and skills, more employment prospects, and higher hiring quality. It is highly recommended that school administrators develop intervention programs and activities to enhance specific aspects of each work value subscale that are beneficial for senior high school students, according to Dimas's (2022) study on the implications of work values in college readiness of senior high school students. These courses could be offered as relevant seminars or as training in work standards. Additionally, Orji (2013) recommended in his study that educational institutions give students greater opportunities to participate in employability-boosting activities such as industrial attachment/placement, part-time work experience, employability courses, visits to industries, interactions with employment agencies, and other infrequent but crucial activities.

Hire Skilled SHS Teachers. One of the recommendations that the participants elaborated on is the need to hire skilled senior high school teachers in the school. This problem occurred because they experienced being left out by the teacher and they lacked skills and knowledge since the teachers were not knowledgeable enough to teach the skills and necessary knowledge in a specific field or strand.

Teachers should continue to pursue professional development to provide students with the sophisticated skills necessary for 21st-century learning and employment. To assist students in acquiring abilities like topic mastery, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and learning autonomy, advanced teaching methods are required. Teachers require quality professional development to acquire and enhance the most effective methods of teaching these abilities (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Since teachers are in charge of imparting the required knowledge and skills to their students—in addition to the textbook and other materials provided—it is imperative that they be taught these skills and information, particularly in senior high school. Throughout the study, these sum up the challenges that senior high school graduates encountered: not hired because of the lack of work experience, there is a need for connections to expedite the application process, and they are discriminated against for having senior high school credentials only. The Human Capital Theory, as put forth by Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz (1960) highlights how education raises economic worth and productivity. Despite their senior high school credentials, graduates have significant jobless rates because of their lack of connections and work experience. This emphasizes the need for improved support networks and education that is in line with the needs of the labor market. Nancy Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981) is applicable when graduates proactively address barriers to the labor market through situational adjustments, credential enhancement, network building, and strategic career path planning. According to Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman's Coping Theory (1984), graduates can effectively manage challenges in the labor market by combining emotion-focused strategies like building connections and seeking assistance with problem-focused methods like obtaining work experience and raising credentials.

Conclusion

The challenges of landing a job with only high school credentials are evident in the labor market. The lack of experience to meet job qualifications and lack of a backer to speed up applications caused the senior high school graduates to be discriminated against and rejected by the companies and firms they applied for.

Senior high school graduates face these challenges, but they strive to find ways to get a job in the labor market. They find opportunities to gain experience such as continuing college while working, learning about the company, and learning more skills to match the demand in the labor market. They attempted to get in touch with their acquaintances in the hopes of finding open opportunities, despite the

difficulty of making many connections and references. To increase their chances of being hired – even for entry-level positions – they applied to numerous organizations. Their goal was to break into the labor market. These strategic interventions helped them deal with the challenges. Even though they had successfully developed and employed various strategic interventions, the researcher believed that the improvement of curriculum and instruction in the senior high school delivering schools would have a positive impact on the employability of the senior high school graduates. These recommendations included the provision of equipment and training in schools, the improvement of work immersion, and the further training of senior high school teachers.

Senior high school graduates with different experiences may have different challenges and strategic interventions to deal with. However, senior high school graduates who have experienced challenges were still able to land a job despite the positions available in the labor market. Inadequate experiences and skills did not hinder them from finding jobs and being able to supply their daily needs. Furthermore, this study stimulates discussion on the importance of the provision of equipment and training, improvement of work immersion, and the professional development of senior high school teachers in teaching and learning.

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