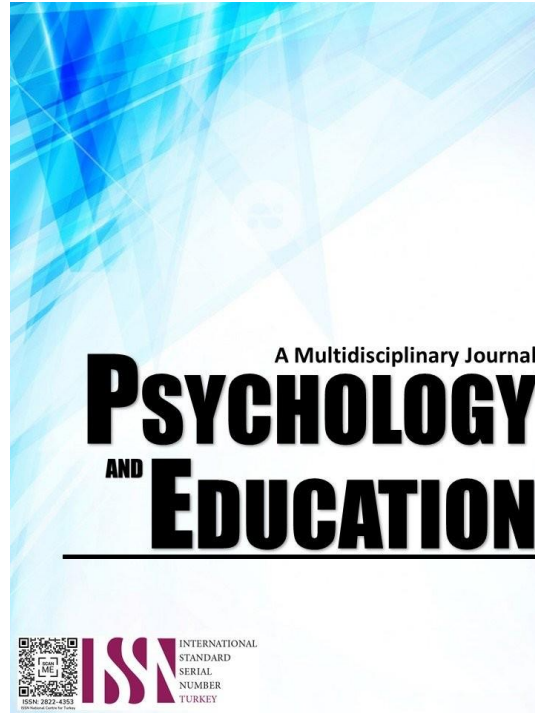


# EXPLORING BETWEEN SHS STRANDS AND COLLEGE COURSES MISMATCH



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## Exploring Between SHS Strands and College Courses Mismatch

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### Abstract

This study investigated the experiences of senior high school graduates enrolled in college courses not aligned to their strands. By the use of phenomenological qualitative approach, data were collected through detailed interviews with 10 participants. These participants were purposively chosen based on the criteria that they must be senior high school graduates from 2020 to 2023, taken college courses not aligned to their senior high school strands, and enrolled in a four-year course. The data were recorded, transcribed, validated, and analyzed according to Creswell's method for examining lived experiences. This analysis identified five main themes, which are: (1) Pathways to Preference: Influences on College Course Selection, with two subthemes, such as (a) Guiding Lights: How Role Models Shape Course Choices, and (b) Choosing with Purpose: Interest, Passion, and Career Advancement Possibilities. (2) Through Trials: Facing and Conquering College Challenges, incorporated with five subthemes as follows (a) Admission Gauntlet: Facing Challenges in College Entry, (b) Foundation Fumbles: Thriving Despite Foundational Knowledge Gap, (c) Skill Shortfall: Surviving College with Missing Skill Set, (d) The Cost of Learning: Battling Financial Hardships in Higher Education, and (e) Catching Up to Survive: Overcoming Pressure from More Prepared Classmates. (3) From Struggles to Strength: Tactics for Overcoming College Barriers, with four subthemes like (a) Study Sprints: Turning Consistent Study Effort into Academic Gold, (b) Relentless Refinement: Mastering Skills Through Practice, (c) Faith-Fueled Inspiration: Trusting the Lord and Embracing Support, and (d) Seeking Allies: Rallying for Expert Help from Classmate and Professors. (4) Practical Prowess: Mastering Practical Skills for Real-World Impact. Lastly, (5) Heartfelt Guidance: Inspiring Others Through Practical Wisdom, accompanied by two subthemes such as (a) Strategic Course Selection: Aligning Studies with SHS Course Ease, and (b) Seize the Study: Embracing Every Learning Opportunity.

**Keywords:** *college courses, course mismatch, senior high school strand*

### Introduction

Research has shown that students who enroll in college courses that are not aligned with the strands they completed in senior high school often experience lower academic performance. In a study by Quintos et al. (2020), it was found that some students may pursue college courses unrelated to their senior high school (SHS) track or strand, leading to noticeable challenges in their academic journeys. This issue is linked to the implementation of Republic Act 10533, which introduced the K-12 program in the Philippines, fundamentally changing the educational system. The program added two years of senior high school, offering various academic strands to provide learners with a solid foundation of skills, competencies, and knowledge necessary for pursuing higher education.

While the SHS curriculum is designed to prepare students for future professional challenges, the process of choosing a college course remains complex due to multiple influencing factors (Sadjail et al., 2022). Although the curriculum aims to align students with their chosen career paths, there are still significant cases where students opt for college courses unrelated to their SHS track or strand. In a previous study, Andrada et al. (2020) found that not all students from the first batch of K-12 senior high school graduates in the Philippines, who completed the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) strand in 2016-2017 and graduated in April 2018, pursued STEM-related courses in college, despite multiple efforts and support encouraging them to do so.

This trend is also evident in the Schools Division of Escalante City, where a considerable number of SHS students have been observed enrolling in college course misaligned with their chosen SHS strands. According to studies of Quintos et al. (2020), the mismatch rate between the SHS strands and college courses is high. Specifically, at Narra National High School, the mismatch rate was 39% for the school year 2017-2018 and 31% for the school year 2018-2019.

Quintos et al. (2020), in their study titled "Exploring Between SHS Strand and College Course Mismatch: Bridging the Gap Through School Policy and Intensified Career Guidance Program", identified several contributing factors to this mismatch. Among the primary reasons were family pressure, the accessibility of certain programs at nearby universities, and peer influence. Although this study recommended solutions such as improved career guidance, policy briefs, and intensified monitoring and evaluation, there remains a lack of in-depth research exploring the experiences of SHS graduates who enrolled in mismatched college courses.

Given these ongoing concerns, this study seeks to fill the research gap by exploring the actual experiences of SHS graduates who pursued college courses misaligned with their SHS strands. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research aims to gain insights into their experiences, challenges, and decision-making processes. Ultimately, the findings from this study may help in formulating interventions to better guide students in choosing college courses that align with their SHS strands, provide more tailored career guidance, and offer a wider range of academic strands to ensure students are equipped with the right opportunities for success in their tertiary education.

## Research Questions

This study aims to explore the experiences of Senior High School (SHS) graduates enrolled in college courses not aligned to their strand.

## Literature Review

A course mismatch occurs when a student's academic program or course in college doesn't always coincide with the student's senior high school strand. A noticeable situation happens when a student enroll in college courses are not associated with their track or strand of senior high school (Quintos et al., 2022). In the study of Malaga, et al (2021) found that the problem arises when the K-12 graduates are to pursue a college degree that is not related to the strand they finished during their senior high school years. They added that the difficulties arise in the sense that the subject taken in senior high school are not aligned to the desired academic program, or the skills and knowledge learned by the students in senior high school might not be enough to compensate to the demands of the chosen college degree. Moreover, in compliance with Republic Act 10931(Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) allows State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in the Philippines to admit students regardless of their senior high school track and strand taken, through CHED Memorandum Orders (CMO) 105, Series of 2017. These would cause future problems because the nature of these graduates' high school studies would be disregarded when evaluating applicants for a certain bachelor's degree in the sense that senior high school strands affect college academic outcomes (Rubas, 2023).

The mismatch rate was high between the strand of the learners during their senior high school and the course they enrolled in college. In the school year 2017-2018 the mismatch rate is at thirty nine percent whilst in SY 2018-2019, it showed a thirty one percent (Quintos et al., 2022). According to Caballes et al. (2023), the senior high school curriculum is said to be the preparation for every student's future career and it will help them to face challenges which they cannot assume. Yet there is a high rate of mismatch, there are many students who took courses that are not inclined with their SHS strand. Many first-year college students find that their college courses differ drastically from their high school courses (Quintos et al., 2020). The right career choice for the students entering into the professional education is critical having a high impact on their professional life and future achievement. It is a crucial moment so it should be dependent on rationality, actuality, and impartial decisions (Afaq Ahmed et al., 2017).

According to Poddar (2020), in order for students to live up to the expectations of other people, parents feel obligated to set the bar too high because they worry excessively about how the outside world will view their children. Rising expectations for students even if they have personal interests are weighing them down. As a result, parents and other people around them continue to push the boundaries without considering a student's feelings or decisions. Also, students who graduate from Senior High School's college course choices are significantly influenced by a variety of variables, including what strand they chose to take up between their eleventh and twelfth grade, as it may lead them to continue following the academic route, they decided to take before college or move to a different academic field of study for their undergraduate. Also, their skills, potential career path, the choice of their parents, peer pressure, and personal preferences are among these variables that will influence the choice of students on what college course they will take apart from their Senior High School strand (Quintos et al., 2020).

Research has shown that students who choose a college course that is not aligned with the strand they completed in senior high school may experience lower academic performance. Several findings that students mismatching with the courses affects their future life chances (Wyness, 2019). During the exploration this phenomenon among former ABM students, Batu (2018) cited in Sidek et al. (2023) found that the most common problem experienced by mismatched students was their inability keeping up with the pace of class during lectures. According to the study of Sidek et al. (2023) students turn to advanced self-studying in order to acquire foundational knowledge about their current course; indulge in food and leisure time as rewards for themselves; and attend bridging programs that could help in catching up in class. Regarding the bridging programs, these additional sessions were reported to expose the K-12 program as a burden to the Filipino people.

Emphasized practical skills over marks nurtures innovators, critical thinkers, and adaptable problem solvers. Their skills acquired from the current course instilled a commitment to lifelong learning, ensuring they thrive in a field of continuous adaptation (Kiran, 2023).

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design. It focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world (Neubauer et al., 2019). Moreover, this approach focuses on exploring the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals, aiming to understand how people make meaning of their experiences and how they interpret the world around them (Eckel, 2024). Furthermore, the appropriateness of this research design for the recent study was to seek reality through individuals' narratives of their experiences and feelings, producing in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon. In-depth interviews with the participants who have first-hand knowledge of an event, circumstance, or experience were conducted. Thus, the participants' stories served as the primary data (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, this design is suitable for this study as it aims to investigate and document the lived experiences of SHS graduates enrolled in college courses that do not align with their senior high school strands.

## Participants

Based on Creswell's (2014) recommendation for sample size in phenomenological research, which ranges from three to ten cases, the ten (10) identified senior high school graduates with mismatched college courses from Tamlang National High School, Brgy. Tamlang, Escalante City, were the participants of this study.

To select the participants, the study employed purposive sampling. The criteria for inclusion were as follows: (a) participants must be Senior High School (SHS) graduates from the years 2020 to 2023, (b) they must have taken college courses that are not aligned with their SHS strand, and (c) they must be enrolled in a four-year degree program.

## Instrument

In-depth interviews were the primary method used in this study, as they allow for a deep exploration of the participant's viewpoints, experiences, feelings, and perspectives. This method is particularly effective for conducting detailed interviews with a small number of participants (Rutledge et al., 2020).

An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was utilized to gather information about the experiences of the ten (10) SHS graduates with mismatched college courses. This instrument provided the researcher with the advantage of collecting rich, detailed information through questioning and probing techniques, fostering a natural dialogue during the interviews (Canos, 2018). The interview guide allowed the interviewer to prepare questions in advance while also encouraging participants to elaborate on their viewpoints. Part I of the instrument included questions about the profile of the participants while Part II focused on probing and open-ended questions about the experiences of SHS graduates whose college courses differed from their SHS strands.

The open-ended questions in the interview guide underwent face validity assessment by evaluators with expertise in the field and significant knowledge of this type of study. To enhance the research instrument, the researcher applied the Lawshe content validity tool. The evaluators' comments, suggestions, and recommendations were carefully considered to improve the quality and effectiveness of the instrument.

## Procedure

The researcher obtained a formal letter addressed to the Schools Division Superintendent to seek permission for conducting the study. This letter inquired about the senior high school graduates' profiles concerning their selection process based on the specified criteria. Communication with identified participants was facilitated through messenger, followed by sending a consent letter to formally document their participation in the study and request permission from their parents. Participants were then scheduled for one-on-one interviews in a conducive and private setting, allowing them to freely share their experiences and insights. For those in remote areas, a virtual interface was utilized, enabling them to provide their backgrounds before the interviews began. Participants were informed that a recorder would be used to ensure accurate data collection. Finally, the data gathered from the interviews were securely stored and audited by the researcher.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis commenced during the transcription of verbatim audio recordings of the interviews. The researcher followed Creswell's (2014) six-step data analysis spiral to effectively interpret the collected data.

The first step involved organizing the data. The researcher carefully listened to the audio recordings of participants' answers multiple times and transcribed them verbatim.

In the second step, the researcher reviewed the transcripts and noted emergent ideas. This process captured initial impressions that guided further analysis, providing an overview of the material and allowing the researcher to consider its significance. General observations were noted in the margins of the transcripts.

The third step focused on describing and categorizing codes into themes. The researcher created detailed descriptions, identified recurring themes, and interpreted participants' answers based on their perspectives. Any overlapping topics were consolidated into broader themes.

The fourth step involved developing and assessing interpretations. This process began with the creation of codes, followed by the formation of themes from those codes, and organizing themes into larger units of meaning. Interpretations were considered within a social science context, incorporating personal views alongside established theories (Creswell, 2014).

In the final phase, the researcher represented and visualized the data by summarizing findings through general themes and sub-themes in various formats, such as tables and diagrams, to effectively communicate the results.

Creswell (2014) stressed the importance of ensuring the trustworthiness of a study, defining validation as strategies researchers use to confirm the accuracy and reliability of their findings. The four (4) aspects of trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this study, all four aspects were carefully observed.

Credibility refers to the accuracy of the findings. The researcher ensured credibility through several triangulation methods: data, theory,

methodological, and external validity triangulation. For data triangulation, ten senior high school graduates from one public secondary school, each enrolled in different college courses not aligned with their high school strands, were selected to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. For theory triangulation, the researcher reflected on the college choice theory of Hossier and Gallagher (1987). Methodological triangulation, on the other hand, included both face-to-face interviews and virtual interface as qualitative sources. Additionally, for external validity triangulation, an external expert was consulted to validate the identified emergent themes.

Member checking, as discussed by Creswell (2014), was also used to confirm the accuracy of the qualitative findings. The final report, along with specific descriptions and themes, was presented to participants to assess its accuracy.

Transferability was another aspect used in this study, and it is defined as the degree to which qualitative research results can be generalized or transferred to other contexts, similar to external validity (Trochim et al., 2016 as cited by Mrabti et al., 2024). Thick descriptions and contextual analysis were employed to enhance transferability. Thick descriptions involved detailed questioning and probing supported by a researcher-made questionnaire. Each identified themes and subthemes were supported with relevant studies to bolster its accuracy. Contextual analysis, on the other hand, acknowledged participants' experiences and how they might influence other contexts. Finally, the findings of this study will be shared with other school divisions for their review once the investigation is concluded.

Dependability was another crucial element of trustworthiness in this study. Two specific methods were adopted: the code-recode procedure and an audit trail. The code-recode procedure involved analyzing the same data multiple times to check for consistency in coding and interpretation of the transcribed data. An audit trail maintained a comprehensive record of all research processes and decisions, preventing fraud and ensuring easy verification. Both the researcher and the research adviser conducted an audit of the research process to account for the evolving context of the research (Trochim et al., 2016, cited in Mrabti et al., 2024).

The last aspect of Creswell's trustworthiness design that was used in this study was conformability. It refers to the extent to which outcomes can be validated or corroborated by others. This was achieved through triangulation, direct quotations, the researcher's acknowledgement of personal beliefs and experiences about the phenomenon under study, and the audit trail (Trochim, et al., 2016 as cited in Mrabti et al., 2024).

By employing these aspects of trustworthiness, the researcher maximized the use of thick descriptions, triangulation, member checking, and audit trails. Thick descriptions provided detailed contextual information about the research setting and participants, enabling others to follow and understand the research process. This level of detail ensured that findings were rooted in participants' actual experiences rather than the researcher's interpretations. Triangulation verified findings through multiple sources, methods, and perspectives, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. Member checking allowed for validation of findings with participants, ensuring results reflected their experiences and minimizing researcher bias. An audit trail provided a transparent record of the research process, reinforcing the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings, while ensuring systematic verification and accountability for methodological decisions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical guidelines for this research were essential principles that protect moral standards and guide researcher in conducting the study. These guidelines hold the researcher accountable and help prevent research misconduct, thereby fostering public trust in the findings (Leslie et al., 2022).

The following ethical considerations were implemented: Participants were provided with a consent form that outlines the study's purpose and details. They were adequately informed of their rights in relation to participation, with a clear emphasis that they can withdraw at any time. Consent was informed and documented in writing. To protect participants' privacy, their names and identities were not disclosed during data collection, ensuring confidentiality throughout the research process. The privacy of the interview environment were also carefully managed.

Participants were not coerced into providing specific response during the interviews; their input were voluntary and freely given. The study reported the results, findings, methodology, and data honestly and transparently. Collaboration with the research adviser or mentor were maintain to ensure sincerity and honesty throughout the research process. Additionally, the use of monetary incentives were avoided to prevent any form of bribery, ensuring the results and findings remain reliable and trustworthy.

By adhering to these ethical considerations, the study aimed to conduct research that is not only scientifically valid but also morally responsible.

### **Results and Discussion**

The participants' insights and documented experiences captured from ten (10) student enrolled in college course not aligned with their senior high school strand were evaluated to formulate emergent themes as shown in figure 1. At the center of the analysis are students who encountered a mismatch between their chosen college courses and their senior high school strands. Surroundings this central experience are various aspects of their educational journeys, represented in the following themes: (1) Pathways to Preference: Influences on College Course Selection: it explores the factors that motivated students' decisions in choosing their college courses and

includes two subthemes which delve into the various influences that shaped decision-making process; (2) Through Trials: Facing and Conquering College Challenges: focuses on the adversities of the participants faced in college and encompasses of five specific subthemes, detailing the challenges they faced; (3) From Struggles to Strength: Tactics for Overcoming College Barriers: illustrates the approaches employed by the participants to overcome obstacles and consists of two subthemes describing the experiences of students whose courses did not match to their strands, as they sought definitive solutions to address these adversities; (4) Practical Prowess: Mastering Practical Skills for Real-World Impact: highlights the practical skills and experiences participants acquired from their current course; and (5) Heartfelt Guidance: Inspiring Others Through Practical Wisdom which composed of two subthemes where participants shared their advice to encourage upcoming senior high school graduates, providing them with guidance and encouragement as a foundation for their future endeavors. To bolster each thematic aspect relevant quotes from interviews were included.

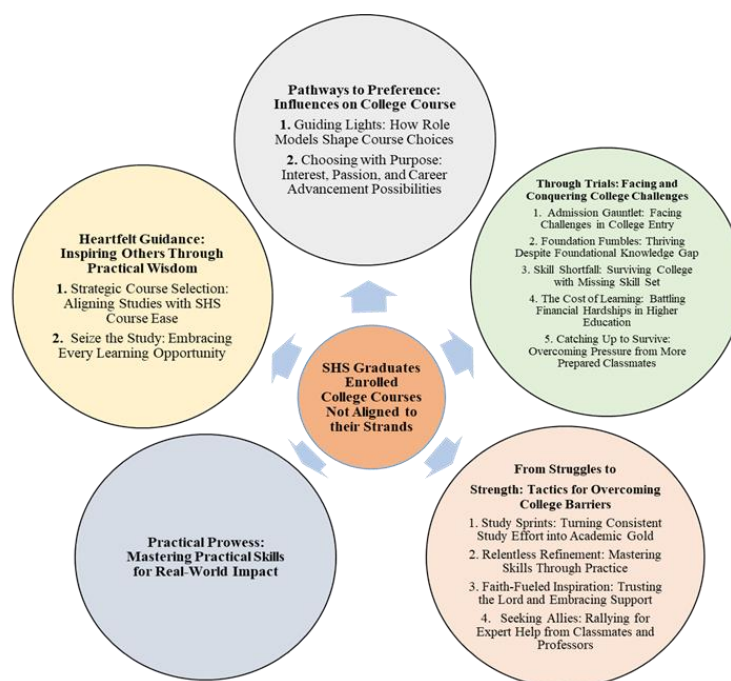


Figure 1. Research Simulacrum

### Theme 1: Pathways to Preference: Influences on College Course Selection

Choosing a course is a pivotal decision shaped by diverse factors, as revealed by participants' experiences. Many students are influenced by role models such as parents, family members, and teachers, while others are driven by their personal passions, interests, and career prospects. These influences will be discussed below as subthemes: (a) Guiding Lights: How Role Models Shape Course Choices, and (b) Choosing with Purpose: Interest, Passion, and Career Advancement Possibilities.

#### Subtheme 1: Guiding Lights: How Role Models Shape Course Choices.

For students enrolled in college course that do not align with their senior high strands, the influence of parents and family is significant. John shared, “Sila mamang, sila man gud ang gapili og sila man pod ang gagasto nako” (My mother (and father) are the ones choosing, and they are also the ones spending money on me). Similarly, King expressed his concerns, saying, “Si mama kay morag na hog na baya sa ital-ital ma’am nya morag nabalaka pod ko unsa pod ilang ma sulti ba di nako ka skwela ana mao na sya ma’am unya sayang kaayong tinuig” (Ma’am, it’s my mother because we ended up in an uncertain situation, and I’m worried about what they might say if I can’t go to school anymore. That’s why, ma’am, it would be such a waste of a year).

Badjing recounted her aunt’s influence, stating, “Si (name of aunt) first gid nako nga gi enroll ma’am ang communication nga subject nga related sa computer pero focus sya sa mga drawing mga edit then hing advice sya sa akua nga morag lisod kuno morag dili kuno nako kaya kay sympre wala koy gusto mag drawing-drawing kay hate nako so amo to nga ning balhin ko og cooperative (course)” (Yes, Aunt [Name]. At first, I enrolled in a communication subject related to computers, but it focused on drawing and editing. She advised me that it seemed difficult, and that I might not be able to handle it since I don’t like drawing at all. So, I ended up switching to a cooperative course).

Benben, Bea, and Bebe also highlighted the significant role of teachers in their course selection. Benben recalled, “Si (name of teacher) og si papang... kay katong nag senior high pako mao gid na ang gusto ni sir (name of teacher) sa akua eventhough nga dili nako ma kuha ang Education at least may naa pa gyapon option nga I.T.” (Mr. [name of teacher] and my father... because back when I was in senior high school, that’s what Mr. [name of teacher] wanted for me, even though I couldn’t take Education; at least there’s still an option for IT). Bea reinforces this, stating, “Ang naka impluwensya nako ani si sir (name of teacher) kay naa mi conversation ligad

about sa mga courses unya ni ana sya nga kanang gipa pili mi niyag mga courses ba nga kanang demand kuno ana sya ang IT kuno ang agriculture og ang teacher.” (The one who influenced me was Mr. [name of teacher] because we had a conversation before about courses, and he said we should choose courses that are in demand. He mentioned that IT, agriculture, and teaching are in demand). Bebe added, “Si sir (name of teacher) ang natulod gyud sa ako-a... ana siya nga si (name of another student) e try lang wala may mawala sa imoha” (Mr. [name of teacher] was the one who really pushed me... he said, 'Just try it like [name of another student]; you have nothing to lose.').

As shared by six (6) participants, the process of selecting a course often hinges on decisions made by parents and family, considering factors such as financial feasibility, competitiveness, valuing time efficiency, and the desire to avoid undue pressure, regardless of the chosen field. Teachers also play a crucial role in raising awareness about various courses that are currently in demand, guiding students in making informed decisions about their academic career paths.

Research supports these findings. In the study by Matolo et al. (2022), family influence significantly impacts the decision-making process regarding course selection. Furthermore, Hasan et al. (2023) found that program selection is often shaped by family dynamics. Additionally, the choice of career is influenced by parents; however, variations among different populations. A better understanding of the numerous factors that affect career preference includes parental support (Audu et al., 2023).

Moreover, “as an important environment for students to learn and grow, the family has a subtle influence on students. Students often draw on their family’s advice when choosing majors. Family influences arise from a combination of factors such as the financial situation, family experience, family atmosphere, parental occupation” (Liang et al., 2022).

### ***Subtheme 2: Choosing with Purpose: Interest, Passion, and Career Advancement Possibilities***

Course selection based on interest, passion, and career advancement possibilities sometimes leads to a mismatch with the senior high school strands. This often occurs when students prioritize their aspirations over the specific academic track they followed in senior high school, reflecting their evolving interests and ambitions regarding their educational and professional futures.

Inday and Cis are committed to pursuing their dreams, fueled by their passions. Inday shared, “Pangandoy ko man gid sukad pa gid sa una nga mag crim, tapos na pulis akong magulang mao nang ako gyud nga gi pursue nga mo crim... ako gid ning gusto og makatabang sa atong community og kanindot pod abi lantawon sa mga pulis pag naka uniform unya may matabang” (I’ve always dreamed of pursuing criminology because my older sibling is a police officer. That’s why I’m really focused on studying criminology. I want to help our community, and it’s also really impressive to see police officers in uniform and be able to assist people). Cis added, “Pag senior high nako gusto nako mag seaman nya natuman naman gastoan man ko nila lolo”. (When I was in senior high, I wanted to become a seaman. It came true because my grandfather would cover the expenses).

The participants also express aspirations aimed at career progression. Benben reminisced, “Maging super-engineer ba ko puhon, application designer mao na permi akong gina huna-huna unsa kaha ko puhon after I graduated IT unsa kaha akong ubrahon mao na pero mangita pakog ubra ana after I graduate IT tapos mo skwela ko dayon og masteral or supplemental para makuha akong kurso nga gusto gid”. (I’m thinking of becoming a super-engineer or an application designer in the future. I often wonder what I’ll do after graduating with an IT degree. I plan to find a job in that field after graduation and then continue my studies with a master’s or supplemental courses to achieve my dream career). Baby explained, “Maka-pasar og maka-human og skwela, pwede ka manog lay-out og bag, mga t-shirt ma’am, mo ubra kag mga tarpaulin under pod na sya sa course nga IT, pwede ka ma photography, video editing. Kung maka graduate naka diba pwede naka maka skwela og supplemental para education” (If I pass and finish my studies, I can do things like layout design for bags and t-shirts, create tarpaulins, and other related tasks under the IT course. I could also get into photography and video editing. Once I graduate, I can also pursue supplemental studies for Education). King expressed similar ambitions, saying, “Maka graduate tapos maging successful someday tapos ma apply pod nako akong mga nabal-an pag college nga related sa akong course ron like data analyst, data encoder tapos pwede sad ka maging software engineer, software developer, og daghan pa og makatabang pod ko sa pamilya”-King. (After graduating and becoming successful someday, I plan to apply what I’ve learned in college to my course, like becoming a data analyst or data encoder. I could also become a software engineer or software developer, among other things. This way, I’ll be able to help my family as well). Bebe also aspires to secure employment overseas, stating, “Sa uban nga lugar ka mo ubra pareha anang Taiwan didto nga course kay very hiring gid na sila kaayo...ara nga course ba kay maka teach pod ka didto sa uban nga lugar... Taiwan and Thailand pwede ka maka teacher sa Buddhist studies”. (In other places, like Taiwan, the course is in high demand there. With that course, you can also teach in other locations. In Taiwan and Thailand, for example, you could teach Buddhist studies).

Badjing dreams of starting her own business inspired by her recent course. She shares, “Mag business kanang mga sari-sari store ma’am kanang wala sa Tamlang maoy eh tukod like mga drugstore”. (I want to go into business, like starting a sari-sari store. I plan to set up something that isn’t currently available in Tamlang, such as a drugstore).

The stories of the seven participants reveal their areas of interest, personal passion, and opportunities for career growth led them to choose courses that did not align with their senior high school strands. They opted for courses that didn’t match their senior high school strands. Their decisions reflect strong personal interests and ambitions for future job prospects.

In the study by Matolo et al. (2022), many students find the decision of which college course to take quiet challenging, often driven by their interests, skills or expertise. Moreover, factors such as quality education, the influence of their environment, personal choice, and the accessibility of schools are important in course selection (Daen, 2018). He added that personal choice is a significant factor influencing college course selection.

Choosing a college course is a pivotal decision that shapes students' future professional lives and trajectories, making the decision-making process both crucial and uncertain. Researchers have identified key factors influencing students' decision-making during the pandemic, including interest, skills and abilities, job demands, and job opportunities (Dizon et al., 2022).

## **Theme 2: Through Trials: Facing and Conquering College Challenges**

Students often encounter significant challenges when their college courses do not align with the academic strands they pursued in senior high school. These challenges can manifest in several ways. First, adapting to the expectations and academic rigor of their chosen college courses can be daunting, particularly if these differ substantially from their prior education, potentially impacting initial performance and self-confidence. Additionally, many students find themselves lacking the foundational knowledge essential for their college courses, hindering their ability to grasp advanced concepts and keep pace with peers who may have received more aligned preparation. There may also be shortfalls in the skill sets required for their college courses; for instance, practical skills or specialized knowledge crucial for success may not have adequately covered in their senior high school education.

These compounded challenges will be further explored through the following subthemes: (a) Admission Gauntlet: Facing Challenges in College Entry, (b) Foundation Fumbles: Thriving Despite Foundational Knowledge Gap, (c) Skill Shortfall: Surviving College with Missing Skill Set, (d) The Cost of Learning: Battling Financial Hardships in Higher Education, and (e) Catching Up to Survive: Overcoming Pressure from More Prepared Classmates.

### ***Subtheme 1: Admission Gauntlet: Facing Challenges in College Entry***

Challenges in college admission due to not passing the entrance exams can significantly impact students' educational plans and aspirations. Failing to meet the required scores can limit their options for attending their desired colleges or programs, often necessitating additional preparation and retesting, which adds stress and uncertainty to the application process. Furthermore, not passing the entrance exam can delay their academic journey, potentially affecting their timeline for starting college and achieving their career goals. The disappointment and frustration of this setback may force students to pursue alternative paths to higher education.

Several participants shared their struggles with entrance examinations, which led to a mismatch in their chosen courses. According to Benben, "Education, galing kay ilang standard sa Education is 93 above unya ang average nako pag entrance exam kay 92 ra to". (In Education, their standard requires a score above 93, but my average on the entrance exam was only 92). Similarly, Baby expressed, "Akong gusto nga course Education unta unya wala man nakuha kay wala kapasar". (I originally wanted to take up Education, but I didn't get accepted because I didn't pass). King also shared his experience: "Crim gid tani ma'am unya kaso wala man palara" (I really wanted to study criminology, but unfortunately, I wasn't lucky enough to pass). Chell added, "Hing take kog entrance exam (Crim) unya wala man ko nakapasar"-Chell. (I took the entrance exam for criminology, but I didn't pass). Badjing also mentioned, "Sa entrance exam (BSBA) nuon ma'am budlayan ko ato pag kuha" (I had a hard time with the entrance exam for BSBA).

The shared experiences of five (5) participants reveal that passing the entrance examination is crucial, as it serves as the primary criterion for admission into the desired college course. Failing to meet this requirement prevents them from enrolling in specialized coursework essential for their future career paths, potentially delaying or hindering their academic and professional aspirations. Therefore, the importance of passing the entrance examination cannot be overstated, as it directly affects students' ability to pursue and succeed in their chosen college courses.

Supporting this, Naguenian (2021) notes that high school is a pivotal stage where students face various challenges. As the approach their senior high school years and prepare for college applications, students often feel the pressure to improve their academic performance, aiming to secure good grades and prepare for the college admission tests of the institutions they wish to attend, both locally and internationally. Additionally, college admission exams are standardized tests that determine students' chances of pursuing a degree in a given academic institution (Bai, Chi, & Qian, 2014 as cited in Fabito et al., 2018).

Republic Act No. 7731, An Act Abolishing the National College Entrance Examination, NCEE Repealing for the Purpose Presidential Decree No. 146, passed on June 2, 1994, abolished the National College Entrance Examination, which previously required all high school graduates seeking admission to post-secondary degree programs to pass a national entrance exam. Under this law, those who fail to meet the entrance exam requirement of a particular institution can no longer be denied admission based on exam performance, subject to the institution's other admission criteria.

Furthermore, a study by Caballes et al. (2022) found that one of the reasons students do not pursue courses aligned with their academic strands is the inability to meet the course's standard grade during the entrance exam.

### ***Subtheme 2: Foundation Fumbles: Thriving Despite Foundational Knowledge Gap***

The academic journey often presents a variety of challenges for students, such as difficulty understanding complex concepts, managing

heavy workloads, maintaining motivation, and balancing academic responsibilities with personal commitments. These struggles may also involve setbacks like receiving lower-than-expected grades, encountering learning disabilities, or feeling overwhelmed by the demands of coursework and exams. For students whose college courses do not align with their senior high school strands, the adjustment can be particularly challenging.

Inday shared her struggle with mismatched course, stating, “Budlay kaayo oi ang akong nakuha ron nga course kay laban man sa mga law, policies unya katong pagsenior high nako puro ra man to computer unya wala jud kaayo nako nagamit ang akong gi-eskwelahan pag senior high. Pila ra pod kabook topic ang makuha sa TVL laban gid wala”. (It’s really challenging. The course I ended up with deals a lot with laws and policies, while during senior high, it was all about computers, which I didn’t really use in my current course. There were only a few topics from TVL that are relevant, but not much).

Similarly, Bea, highlighted the gap between her SHS strand and her current course: “Mga topic sa among course ron layo kaayo sa HUMSS ba nga mga gipang klase sa una naa syay ma balik sa among course pero dyotay ra jud kaayo daghan og mga topics nga related ra jud diay sa strand nga STEM”. (The topics in our current course are very different from the HUMSS subjects we took before. There are a few that overlap, but only a small number. Most of the topics are actually more related to the STEM strand).

Baby also described the disparity between her SHS strand and her college course: “Lisod kay layo ra jud kaayo among course ma’am kay pag senior high school HUMSS among gi kuha unya pag college animation wala gani ko kahibaw og unsa na ang animation”. (It’s difficult because our current course is very different from what we took in senior high school. We took HUMSS, and now in college, we’re studying animation, which I didn’t even know about before).

King shared similar experience: “Sa mga subjects medyu ayawan sad kog adjust ba syempre mao pod to ko kasugata nga mga subject tapos morag layo ra jud kaayo sya sa HUMSS nga strand”. (I’m having a hard time adjusting to the subjects because they’re quite different from what I studied in HUMSS).

Bebe faced challenges not only academically but also in dealing with diverse cultural content, saying, “Lahi ra ang subject ma’am since naa miy majoring about kay Buddha”. (The subjects we’re taking now are far from what we had before, especially since we have a major related to Buddha).

Lastly, Cis, who is pursuing a maritime course, expressed his difficulties: “Ang subject gid sa maritime kay wala jud nako na agi-an ang major namo na bag-ohan ko kalabanan sa engine automation sa barko. Naka huna-huna sad ko bisag lisod na kaayo among subject mag huna-huna rakag mo undang na lang kay dili na makaya kay wala nako naagi-an pag senior high”. (The subjects in maritime are completely new to me, especially the major ones like ship engine automation. I’ve thought about quitting because the subjects are so difficult and I didn’t have any background in them during senior high).

The stories of the six (6) participants in this phase highlight the challenges they faced due to foundational knowledge gap caused by a mismatch between their college courses and their senior high school strands. This gap often manifests in difficulties understanding core concepts or applying necessary skills relevant to their new field of study.

Several studies have examined the experiences of students with mismatched courses in college. According to Formaran et al. (2022), “Students undergoing strand mismatch are in an unfavourable situation, where lacking the prior knowledge of the selected course puts these students at a disadvantage”. They stressed that these students often exert extra effort, such as compromising and sacrificing sleep, to keep up with the workload. Moreover, course mismatch can negatively impact students’ self-esteem and self-efficacy, leading to feelings of frustration, stress, and failure (Sidek et al., 2023).

In addition, several studies have explored the lived experiences of college students who chose a field of study unrelated to their senior high school strand. It was discovered that most of these students struggle with the setbacks of course mismatch. Batu et al. (2018) as cited in Sidek et al. (2023), in their study of former ABM students, found that the most common problem faced by mismatched students was their inability to keep up with the pace of lectures, particularly in subjects unfamiliar to them.

Moreover, transitions can also bring challenges such as homesickness, feelings of despair, difficulty fitting in, and financial instability (Millet, 2015, as cited in Gacita et al., 2023). Academic stress has become a significant part of students’ lives at the tertiary level due to various internal and external obligations placed upon them. Parents’ expectations for their children add to the pressure, creating a burden that many students struggle to bear (Reddy, et al., 2018, as cited in Gacita et al., 2023).

The academic system itself can contribute to the stress, negatively affecting students. Stress may stem from social factors such as peer pressure, family dynamics, and extracurricular activities. Students often feel pressured to perform well in their studies, including completing assignments, studying for exams, participating in labs, reading, and taking quizzes. Balancing these tasks, along with extracurricular activities, adds to their stress. This academic stress can result in poor exam performance, school avoidance, anxiety, physical symptoms, emotional outbursts, and a lack of interest in schoolwork.

Researchers have identified several sources of stress, including an overwhelming number of tasks, competition with other students, failure, financial struggles, and issues at home or with teachers. Higher secondary school education is an important stage that could result in the increased incidence of psychological problems in the academic life of any student (Ghatol et al., 2024). For many students,

tests and exams are the primary source of stress, but physical, social, and emotional factors also contribute. Family dynamics play a significant role as well, with parenting style, motivation, and monitoring impacting stress levels. Additionally, a family's socioeconomic status and educational background, as well as parental expectations for academic performance, can exacerbate stress. The structure of the family is another critical factor, as students may feel pressured to excel academically due to their parents' expectations (Deb et al., 2011, as cited in Osborne et al., 2024). Poor academic performance, illness, anxiety, and despair are some negative consequences of academic stress. In the study by Ogbogu, as cited in Gacita et al. (2023), findings demonstrate that university students experience varying degrees of academic stress, which in turn affects their academic performance.

### ***Subtheme 3: Skill Shortfall: Surviving College with Missing Skill Set***

Skills are considered essential for comprehending and effectively applying knowledge within a given field. Skill gaps can hinder a student's ability to grasp advanced concepts or perform well in coursework. This was evident in John's experience, where he struggled in his subjects and lacked exposure. According to him, "Katong PE namo nga nabagsak ko sa midterm 74, unya sa purposive communication kulba kaayo ba kay nag speech mi sa tunga unya gamitan og microphone, nangurog ko oi luspi na kaayo ko kay wala daan ko kaagi pag-high school, maulawon kayo ko". (In PE, I failed the midterm with a grade of 74. In purposive communication, I was really nervous because we had to give a speech in front of the class using a microphone. I was so scared and shaky because I didn't have any experience with this in high school. I was very shy).

Benben also faced challenges also in his major subjects, which were vastly different from his SHS subjects. He described his struggle: "Major subject gid ang budlay kay lain ang pag senior high HUMSS man ko nya grade 11 kag grade 9 pako ato that time so medyu na erase na jud sa akon mind (the major subjects are really challenging because they're very different from what I studied in senior high, which was HUMSS. I was in grade 11 and grade 9 at that time, so a lot of what I learned has faded from my memory. I'm nervous because I'm still lacking experience with computers). He also added, "una kulba kay dili pa nako kaya ang computer lack of experience pako sa computer so after that gina tun-an ra nako sa boarding house mag lantaw rako sa Youtube para makabalo paano mag create og program mao na naka kat-on ko sa computer". (At first, I was nervous because I didn't have much experience with computers. To overcome this, I studied on my own in the boarding house, watching YouTube tutorials to learn how to create programs, which helped me improve my computer skills).

Chell also experienced hurdles due to the mismatch between her strand and college course course: "Morag feel nako ang diri kaysa didto mas budlay gid didto kay diri dili man gud match maam kay HUMSS ko diri tapos didto accounting. Nabudlayan pa gid ko ana maam kana bang tuksoon ka tapos kinahanglan gyud nimo e English tanan, ako gud dili man gud ko sagad sa English. Og nabudlayan pod ko maam kay wala ko kaagi og report dinhi pag senior high pag-abot nako og college maam nakibot gid ko kay kami na ang mo discuss". (I feel like it's much harder here than I was here. It's challenging because I'm from HUMSS, and now I'm dealing with accounting, which is a big adjustment. It's difficult when you're required to use English all the time, especially since I'm not very fluent in it. I also struggled because I didn't have any experience with reporting in senior high, and when I got to college, I was surprised that we were the ones expected to discuss and present).

The experiences shared by these three (3) participants highlighted that when skills acquired in senior high school do not align with college expectations, students encounter significant challenges, such as difficulties in understanding coursework, adapting to academic demands, and achieving academic success.

In the study by Andrada et al. (2020), which investigated course mismatch among former STEM students, mismatched students expressed regret for having a previous strand that was misaligned with their selected course. The skills they acquired in senior high school were not appropriate for their recent course.

Course mismatching can lead to overqualification among graduates, negatively impacting long-term career outcomes. Career learning strategies and labor market policies are crucial for managing underemployment (Jackson, 2021). Moreover, mismatching courses, whether overmatching or undermatching, affects Black undergraduates' degree completion. Overmatched students at selective institutions have higher graduation rates, while undermatching reduces the likelihood of degree completion (Porter, 2022).

### ***Subtheme 4: The Cost of Learning: Battling Financial Hardships in Higher Education***

Financially disadvantaged students face significant challenges in accessing educational resources and opportunities due to limited financial means. This often includes difficulties affording tuition fees, covering transportation costs, and meeting basic living expenses while attending school. These financial constraints can also impact their ability to participate in extracurricular activities and obtain the necessary academic support services needed for their coursework.

John shared his struggles with tuition fees, which sometimes affected his academic performance, considering his parents' limited financial resources. He explained, "Nagproblema sa bayranan kay humana ang klase naa japun bayranan, maghuna-huna pod ko nilang mamang nga wala-wala na pod, maulaw pod ko mangayo kay mao-mao ra pod" (I'm having trouble with payments because even after the classes are over, there are still fees to pay. I also worry about asking my parents for money because I know they don't have much to give).

Benben struggled with meeting basic living expenses while attending school due to financial constraints. He sacrificed his weekly food

allowance to cover school requirements such as projects and outputs. He mentioned, “Financial problem pod like ang allowance mga bayaran sa project so kulang pa kaayo akong allowance para lang mabayaran akong mga projects, output usahay dili na lang mo kaon kay unahon ang project para dili lang ma bagsak kay dili ko gusto ma bagsak mao to ga paninguha ko nga even though wala koy allowance usahay” (I also have financial problems, like my allowance isn’t enough to cover project expenses. Sometimes, I even skip meals to prioritize paying for projects so that I don’t fail. I don’t want to fail, so I make an effort even when I don’t have any allowance at times).

Similarly, Bea faced financial struggles: “Struggle mi og financial ma’am oy ma uwaw na gud ko usahay mangayo ni papa kay mo ana na sya nga mao rani akong sweldo ipa kita na niya iyang sweldo nako unya mo ana nana sya dayon nga kanang mag tipid sa ta ron unya naa gid time nga naa kog boarding house ma’am akong sud-an didto mo palit kog itlog ba unya usahay dili na lang lagi mo kaon kay ang uban nga kwarta eh bayad sa mga project”. (We’re struggling financially, and I feel embarrassed sometimes to ask my father for money. He shows me his salary and tells me to be frugal. There are times when I’m staying in a boarding house and I buy eggs to eat, but sometimes I don’t even eat because I need to use the remaining money to pay for projects).

Baby also shared, “Usahay jud ma’am ma worry jud ka ma kwangan ko sa akong allowance pero ok raman manghulam lang ko sa akong mga kuyog... ang (name of present college institution) kay free tuition ra walay balayran walay kalibgan kay ang semester walay balayranan”. (Sometimes I really worry about running short on my allowance, but it’s okay because I can borrow from my friends. At [name of present college institution], tuition is free, so there are no fees to worry about each semester).

Not financially supported by his family, King shared emotional experience: “Ga-struggle gid ma’am kay ligad akong magulang ga skwela pod tapos graduating tapos mao na budlay gid kaayo wala pa gid ga support namo nga mga pamilya” (We’re really struggling because my older sibling is also studying and about to graduate. It’s very difficult because our family isn’t providing support).

Chell added, “Usahay kulang sa budget ba maam kanang allowance ba mao na maka absent ko...mao to nga kis a pod ma-short pod akong budget mao nang gitipid nalang pod nako akong balon”. (Sometimes the budget is short, like with my allowance, which causes me to miss classes. Because of this, I sometimes have to cut back on other expenses and save on what little money I have).

Besides the struggles of the academic journey, financial challenges also play a significant role in the cost of learning, encompassing various obstacles that students face in affording their education. Collectively, the experiences of the six participants highlight those financial constraints are not the sole hindrance to acquiring a college education. The key lies in understanding the importance of budgeting and making personal sacrifices for essential needs and wants.

In addition, financial shortages can severely impact academic performance, as the stress of managing tuition, living expenses, and debt can detract from students’ ability to concentrate on studies. This distraction can lead to lower grades, delayed progress, and even academic probation or dropout. Limited access to educational resources and opportunities due to financial constraints can further hinder their learning experience and professional development. Beyond academics, financial insecurity can affect their health and well-being, with students potentially foregoing necessary healthcare or experiencing heightened anxiety and stress. Socially, financial challenges may contribute to feelings of isolation or alienation on campus, affecting their sense of belonging and overall college experience. These cumulative effects highlight the urgent need for robust support systems and policies to mitigate financial barriers and ensure equitable opportunities for all students.

Several studies have revealed that financial troubles are frequently identified as a major cause of stress for college students (Northern, O’Brien, & Goetz, 2010, as cited in Potter, 2020). Financial stress has a strong impact on participation in different academic and personal activities of a student. Therefore, parents, university administration and student counselor should consider the factor to assess stress of a student (Hossain et al., 2023).

Financial issues present a huge challenge when it comes to education. Even if a student is on a scholarship, they still need money to sustain their needs, and without enough of it, they will struggle. The reason why some students stop attending school (Dominguez et al., 2019).

Another study revealed that one of the major sources of stress for students, observed among higher education systems in different parts of the world, is financial pressure (Aherne, 2001; Joo, Durband, & Grable, 2008; Roberts, Golding, Towell, & Weinreb, 1999, as cited in Bernardo et al., 2018). Not surprisingly, stress related to financial strain and uncertainty has a negative impact on student well-being (Mahmoud, Staten, Hall, & Lennie, 2012; Smyth, Hockemeyer, Heron, Wonderlich, & Pennebaker, 2008, as cited in Bernardo et al., 2018). Students’ financial stress is associated with higher self-reported mental health needs (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2006), difficulties in college adjustment (Meehan & Negy, 2003), and a range of adverse behaviors, social relations, and academic outcomes (Adams, Meyers, & Beidas, 2016; Northern, O’Brien, & Goetz, 2010, cited in Bernardo et al., 2018).

#### ***Subtheme 5: Catching Up to Survive: Overcoming Pressure from More Prepared Classmates***

This subtheme examines the challenges of navigating an academic environment where some students may have a head start or seem more prepared. It explores strategies and mindset shifts that can empower individuals to succeed, even when they initially fell behind.

Bea shared her experience, saying, “Kanang usahay dili ko kasabot ba kay kanang sa STEM gid lagi ni nga ano di ko usahay kasabot

ba niya, ma-uwaw man ko usahay mangutana mao na ma'am naa ligad nga ma-80 ka niya sila dagko. Ma- pressure ka ba kay sa ilahang advance lagi kaayo sila sa ilang koan, dyotay raman pod gud og nag HUMSS sa amoa". (Sometimes I don't understand things because in STEM, there are topics that are really challenging. I feel embarrassed to ask questions because I'm often pressured by classmates who are more advanced. I only had a small background in HUMSS compared to their extensive knowledge).

Bea's reflection highlights the significant hurdles she faced in academic settings where her peers may possess greater preparation or advantages. This situation leads her to exert extra effort to match the academic performance of her more prepared counterparts. The pressure to catch up can be daunting, resulting in heightened stress and anxiety as she navigates a potentially steeper learning curve.

Empirical findings underscore the pivotal role of teacher and/or peer support in mitigating students' stress and enhancing academic achievement; however, multilevel analyses that consider contextual class and individual student effects are scarce (Hoferichter et al., 2022). Additionally, the study by Garcia et al. (2024) emphasizes that students may encounter various forms of social pressure, including peer, family, and academic pressure, which can adversely affect their academic performance and well-being.

### Theme 3: From Struggles to Strength: Tactics for Overcoming College Barriers

Students employed strategic methods to overcome barriers encountered in college, utilizing collaborative efforts, resourceful problem-solving, and resilience-building strategies to achieve academic success. Four subthemes emerged upon evaluation of the participants' narratives, which will be discussed: (a) Study Sprints: Turning Consistent Study Effort into Academic Gold, (b) Relentless Refinement: Mastering Skills through Practice, (c) Faith-Fueled Inspiration: Trusting the Lord and Embracing Support, and (d) Seeking Allies: Rallying for Expert Help from Classmates and Professors.

#### Subtheme 1: Study Sprints: Turning Consistent Study Effort into Academic Gold

This subtheme highlights the importance of harnessing periods of intense, concentrated study to transform consistent effort into academic success. It is crucial for transforming consistent effort into academic success as it enables deep learning, enhancing comprehension and retention. Catching up on missed lessons helps you understand important topics more thoroughly. It reinforces knowledge and builds confidence while developing certain ability to handle challenges. By focusing on studies, turn setbacks into opportunities for growth, ultimately preparing for future success.

John emphasizes, "Pareha anang kanang mag test, mag-long quiz ba, magtuon gyud ko ana, medyo sayon-sayon na lang kay nakatuon man. Makahuman og eskwela pinaagi sa pagtuon og tinood nga paningkamot para makalahutay, makatabang pod sa ginikanan, makalampuwas sa kapigaduhon og para magmenyo puhon dili na maglisod". (When it comes to tests or long quizzes, I really study for them. It becomes easier because I've prepared. I aim to finish school through diligent study and effort to endure, help my parents, overcome poverty, and eventually get married without difficulties). He stresses that the key to achieving his dreams lies in persistently studying so he can support his parents in the future.

Similarly, Inday shares, "Magtuon, maminaw na lang gid sa maestro og sa mga teacher kay bali mabudlayan man gyud ka gud labi na og bag-o sa imoha, bag-o pa nimo na nabatian, mga topics basa lang gyud, balik-balik tapos mangutana sa mga classmate kung unsa man gid og magcommunicate sa maestro kung wala kay nasabtan. Magfocus para makapasar tapos maka graduate". (Study hard, listen to the teachers, and focus, especially if the material is new to you. Read the topics repeatedly, ask classmates for clarification, and communicate with the teacher if you don't understand something. Stay focused to pass and graduate).

Benben also expresses similar commitment: "Study hard lang gid todo tapos eager to learn gid sa computer para puhon maka apply dayon sa kana nga company after I graduate dapat sustainable na akong kinabuhi tapos ma providedan nako silang mamang og papang sa ilang gusto unya akong gusto mao na akong dream goal nila skwela ko dili sa akong kaugalinon kundi para nila" – Benben. (Study hard and be eager to learn about computers so that I can apply to a company right after graduation. My goal is to have a sustainable life and provide for my parents and their desires. My dream is to achieve this not just for myself but for them).

Baby adds, "Tun-an nimo na maayo, take down notes og dili ka maka sabot ato nga klase pwede man to nimo studyhan usab inchindihon maayo" – Baby. (Study it well, take notes, and if you don't understand a class, you can review it and try to understand it better).

Cis reflects on her future goals: "Mag study para makahuman tun-an nako maayo unsa ang mga training pagka human inig graduate nako unsay mga training sa barko mag study nako maayo sa akong mga subject nga kanang makuha nako inig third year" – Cis. (I'll study hard to finish my studies and learn about the training required after graduation. I'll focus on my subjects and prepare well for the ship training that I'll need to take in my third year).

Maintained focus to match the mismatch. Badging states, "Mag-study permi focus sa mga activity para maka learn". (I'll always study and focus on activities to learn). And Chell emphasizes her eagerness to pursue studies even in disparity "bahalag lisod basta sige lang ko gihapon focus lang ko sa major nako og residido gid mo-eskwela". (Even if it's difficult, I'll keep going and stay focused on my major. I'll persist in studying).

Bebe copes by reaching out to her mother: "So ako ra jud tuon ra jud tuon sa akong mga studies, mo tawag rako kay mama kung mingaw kay mao mani akong choice" – Bebe. (So, I'll just focus on studying, and I'll call my mom when I feel lonely because this is my choice).

Faced with diverse hurdles, the nine participants in this phase employed specific approaches to overcome obstacles in their coursework. They actively identified and implemented practical solutions to the issues they encountered while studying.

Several studies have explored the coping mechanism of students dealing with course mismatch in college compared to their SHS strands. According to the research conducted by Gacita et al. (2023), emotion-focused coping is evident in the participant's responses, particularly through acceptance. One participant learned to accept the reality of her stressful situation, acknowledging that she was a product of course mismatch and needed to embrace consequences. This acceptance enabled her to face the challenges stemming from her decision.

This study also highlighted that student with strand and course mismatch may cope through problem-focused strategies. For instance, one participant chose to confront her difficulties by studying diligently, engaging in advance reading, and pursuing self-learning. Conversely, she sometimes manages stress through emotion-focused coping, distracting herself by socializing with friends, visiting the mall, or watching movies before addressing her academic challenge.

The participants recognized that they would need to invest extra effort to succeed in their college courses and future careers (Formaran et al., 2022). They also noted that adaptive coping mechanisms vary from one student to another, as each individual navigates the unfamiliar academic environment. This process requires time and motivation, particularly when the chosen path may seem more complex than usual. Nevertheless, passion serves as a driving force, enabling many participants to strive harder and persist despite difficulties. Establishing a solid mental foundation is essential, especially during the later stages of one's academic journey, and this mindset should extend beyond college life.

### ***Subtheme 2: Relentless Refinement: Mastering Skills through Practice***

Gaining expertise requires consistently practicing and honing specific skills over time. This involves repetitive application and refinement of techniques or abilities to achieve proficiency and mastery.

Practice makes perfect,

As Chell emphasized: “Practice ra gid ko diba budlay akong course practice nalang gid ko nga practice para incase nga makarecover ko sa akong kaugalingon makabalo nako”. (I’ll just keep practicing since my course is difficult. I’ll practice a lot so that in case I recover, I’ll be prepared and knowledgeable). She highlighted that practice is essential for overcoming difficulties in her academic performance. She also added, “Feel nako dili nako kaya mao to nga ana ko nga amat-amat ko og practice para makabalo ko, mao to sa pag prelim nga exam nag-amat-amat ko og practice pag incase nga mo exam na modako pod ako ang score. Ana ko nga try daw nako og walay gamit calculator, g try nako ana ko nga ah makaya ra man di-ay basta mo focus lang ka”. (I felt like I couldn’t handle it, so I decided to practice gradually to improve. By the prelim exam, I had practiced enough to increase my score. I challenged myself to take the exam without using a calculator and found that I could do it as long as I focused).

Chell’s story illustrates that continuous repetition and refinement of skills lead to mastery. By consistently engaging in deliberate practice, individuals not only improve their proficiency but also enhance their ability to perform tasks more effectively and precisely over time. This concept emphasizes the importance of dedication, persistence, and ongoing effort in achieving excellence in various endeavors.

The development of new skills relies on consistent practice. Our future selves are shaped by the habits, actions, beliefs, and values we live and practice today (Raab, 2018). She emphasized that how we live our lives today is a good indicator of who we will become, but it must involve daily practice of our capacities. It is through this daily practice of our skills, character, and beliefs that our future selves are formed.

Moreover, Aristotle noted two thousand years ago, “We learn by doing. We become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts brave by doing brave acts”. Every day presents students with numerous opportunities to aim high, build strong habits, and learn through action. They must consider how they treat friends, family, and strangers; how they prioritize their time; and how they respond to setbacks and frustrations. Courage will not look the same in every situation, and it takes practice and experience to habitually respond to challenges bravely (Bohlin, 2021).

### ***Subtheme 3: Faith-Fueled Inspiration: Trusting the Lord and Embracing Support***

This subtheme explores how individuals draw motivation from their faith in God. They rely on their beliefs as sources of encouragement, guidance, and resilience when facing challenges and pursuing goals. This foundation of spiritual and moral support helps individuals navigate difficulties and maintain a positive outlook as they strive towards their aspirations.

Participants demonstrate a concrete dedication to their studies while placing their trust in the Lord's guidance. Baby, King, Benben, and Bea all believe that they will receive blessings from God. Baby states, “Maninguha lang jud ka maayo ma’am para overcome nako na nga mga subject ma pasar tanan pinaagi sa pagtuon og salig lang jud ka sa Ginoo nga maka human”. (Just work hard to overcome those subjects and pass them all through studying. Have faith in God that you will finish studying).

King adds, “Kalma lang ba kay og mao jud na ang para nimo mao jud na, budlay man pod tuod pero need gid nimo tun-an, padayon

lang gid explore and learn lang jud tapos salig lang pod sa Ginoo ba”. (Stay calm because if it’s meant for you, it will be. It’s difficult, but you need to learn. Just keep going, explore, and learn, and also have faith in God).

Benben encourages, “Take as inspiration para sa mga tawo nga nag tuo nga kaya na nimo nga dapat eh pursue jud na nimo bisag unsa kalisod ang kinabuhi laban ra gyapon kay puhon paburan ka sa Ginoo”. (Take it as inspiration for those who believe in you. You should pursue it no matter how hard life gets, because eventually, you will be blessed by God). “Salig lang gid sa taas tapos mag tuon kag taman unya dapat mag sipag jud kag maayo” - Bea. (Have faith in the higher power, study as much as you can, and be diligent in your efforts).

Challenges may be daunting, but our God is greater. With faith as your anchor, you can face many obstacles and overcome them. Hold onto the truth that God’s love, provision, and strength are available to you, even in the midst of adversity (Patterson, 2023).

Research on trust in God is still in its nascent stage, with two initial research programs having been established (Hook et al., 2021). Both approaches view trust in God as primarily a cognitive and affective construct, involving beliefs about God (Krause, 2015; Rosmarin, et al., 2009, as cited in Hook et al., 2021). Furthermore, findings reveal that the structure of the Jewish concept of faith is to trust in Him, hope in Him, fearing Him, as well as obedience to Him (Pojman, 2024). Unshakable beliefs are a comprehensive guide to strengthening and depending your faith in today’s fast-paced and often challenging world (Andrews, 2023).

#### ***Subtheme 4: Seeking Allies: Rallying for Expert Help from Classmates and Professors***

Actively reaching out to classmates and professors for expert help and support involves collaborative relationships where students and educators work together to overcome challenges, clarify concepts, and enhance learning outcomes. This approach not only fosters a supportive learning environment but also leverages collective knowledge and experience to navigate academic hurdles effectively. By seeking expert help, students can access valuable insights, guidance, and resources that contribute to their academic success and growth.

As the saying goes, “No man is an Island”. This quote relates closely to Inday’s story. She emphasized the importance of seeking help from classmates and persistent communication with experts, stating that asking for assistance can help her understand and solve the difficult academic challenges she faces: “Mangutana sa mga classmate kung unsa man gid og magcommunicate sa maestro kung wala kay nasabtan”. (Ask your classmates for clarification and communicate with the teacher if you don’t understand something).

Previous multilevel studies suggest that teacher support has a positive impact on student learning and behavioral outcomes. For example, Ma et al. (2021) cited in Hoferichter (2022) found that perceived teacher support promoted academic self-concept and enjoyment of learning, while Yildirim (2012) cited in Hoferichter (2022), found a positive relationship between teacher support and students’ use of learning strategies in mathematics. Another multilevel study highlighted the important role of teacher support in student motivation and engagement (Wentzel et al., 2017, as cited in Hoferichter, 2022). These studies take a promising approach by viewing classrooms as complex learning environments, considering both individual (student) perspectives and contextual (classroom) aspects.

Moreover, improving students’ relationships with teachers has significant, positive, and long-lasting implications for both academic and social development. While simply enhancing student-teacher relationships will not automatically lead to gains in achievement, students who have close, positive and supportive relationships with their teachers tend to achieve higher levels of achievement compared to those with more conflict in their relationships (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2018).

Furthermore, it often takes a little support, guidance, and encouragement from others to keep the fire burning as one embarks on their endeavors. The initial struggles of strand mismatch became bearable for most participants as family members, professors, and peers served as their pillars for support throughout their experience (Formaran et al., 2022).

Additionally, while there is much discussion about how challenging times can help students develop resilience, it is crucial to recognize that it is not just facing adversity that builds resilience—it is facing adversity with support. According to Harvard’s Center for the Developing Child, “The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult”. Educators can serve as that “other adult” (Bohlin et al., 2021).

#### **Theme 4: Practical Prowess: Mastering Practical Skills for Real-World Impact**

Participants developed proficiency in skills that directly contributed to tangible outcomes and solutions in their everyday situations. This includes acquiring hands-on experience, refining problem-solving capabilities, and applying theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios. By honing these skills, individuals are better prepared to address challenges, innovate, and make meaningful contributions in professional settings or personal endeavors. This practical mastery enables them to create positive changes and achieve measurable results that significantly and lastingly influence their surroundings and communities.

Significant hands-on learning experiences from the current course were mentioned by Baby, King, and Cis. Baby noted that she knows how to edit videos and pictures, and do animation, saying, “Mag-edit og mga video, edit og mga picture mo paano mag drawing sa tablet gamit ang pencil”. (Edit videos and pictures, and learn how to draw on a tablet using a pencil). King also shared his practical experiences acquired from his course, stating, “Mga experiences mo ubra og mga applications, mga video, video editing ana paano mag-assemble sa PC sa computer. Sa coding pod, di man ko koan pero may experience lang ko gamay”. (My experiences include working with applications, video editing, assembling PCs, and a bit of coding. I don’t have extensive experience, but I know a little).

Cis added, “Experience about sa pag open sa mga makina sa barko.” (Experience with opening ship engines).

Badjing hopes to achieve success as an entrepreneur in the future, saying, “Akong na-learn gid to become successful puhon, maka-negosyo og paano maka-padako og negosyo”. (What I’ve learned is how to become successful in the future, including how to start and grow a business).

Collectively, the four participants shared stories that denotes that, despite the course not being directly aligned with their aspirations, the practical experiences acquired will serve as valuable assets for their future career pursuits. Students engage in advance self-study to acquire foundational knowledge about their current courses, indulge in food and leisure time as rewards for themselves, and attend bridging programs to help them catch up in class. Regarding the bridging programs, these additional sessions have been reported to expose the K-12 program as a burden to the Filipino people (Sidek et al., 2023). Furthermore, their efficiency in providing advancement to students remain unclear (Philippine Basic Education, 2018).

In the fast-paced and dynamic landscape of education and professional development, the ability to apply acquired knowledge and skills in real-world scenarios is paramount. In the study of O’Neill et al. (2023), based on responses from 1041 students, supports the linkage students are making of their study on how practical skills can support their readiness for employment. It is important to note that the views with respect to authentic learning and preparation for work were varied and there was considerable nuance evident in the data. The drive to connect with employment and the world beyond their classroom has been evident in many higher education disciplines for some time. Traditionally, only certain professions expected to take part in practical ‘real-world’ experiences as part of their programmes of study.

### **Theme 5: Heartfelt Guidance: Inspiring Others Through Practical Wisdom**

This theme highlights the profound impact of practical wisdom derived from personal experience and understanding. It's about offering sincere advice, support, and encouragement based on empathy and insight. This guidance aims to positively impact others by sharing lessons learned, offering solutions to challenges, and providing perspectives that can lead to personal growth and achievement. Two subthemes surfaced as the participants’ responses were analyzed: (a) Strategic Course Selection: Aligning Studies with SHS Course for Ease, and (b) Seize the Study: Embracing Every Learning Opportunity.

#### ***Subtheme 1: Strategic Course Selection: Aligning Studies with SHS Course for Ease***

This subtheme offers heartfelt guidance to upcoming senior high school graduates in choosing academic paths that directly relate to the specific strand they studied in senior high school. This alignment ensures that the next generation can build upon their existing knowledge and skills, making their coursework more relevant and manageable. By strategically aligning their studies, students can maximize their learning potential and streamline their educational experience, effectively achieving their career goals.

Inday, Bea, and Bebe shared a common experience. Inday advises pursuing a college course that correspond to their strand: “Kung sa man gyud ang ilahang gikuha nga strand sa senior high dapat pag-abot sa college mao napod para dili sila mabudlayan kay may knowledge na sila gikan sa senior high”. (Whatever strand they took in senior high should be the same when they get to college to avoid difficulties, as they will already have the knowledge from senior high). Bea, emphasized the importance of first understanding the course they wish to pursue and ensuring it aligns with their senior high school strand: “Dapat kanang hibaw-on jud nila daan ilang course tapos ilang i-relate jud sa ilang strand ron kay lisod kaayo og dili related ang imong strand ron sa imong course unya ig-college, daghan kaayog wa kay nabaw-an”. (They should know their course in advance and make sure it relates to their current strand. It’s very difficult if your strand doesn’t relate to your course in college, as you’ll end up struggling with many things you’re unfamiliar with).

Similarly, Bebe advises that at the grade 10 level, it is crucial for students to actively inquire and decide which senior high school strand aligns best with their interests and career aspirations: “Sugod pa lang, mag-grade ten pa lang mo, pilia ang strand or track nga gusto jud nimo kay mo-reflect man gyapon na pag college”. (Even in grade ten (you should start thinking to) choose the strand or track you really want because it will still affect your college experience).

Upon evaluating the stories from three participants, it is clear that the importance of aligning college courses with senior high school strands lies in ensuring coherence and relevance in students’ educational pathways. By connecting college courses to the strands offered in senior high school, students can build upon the foundational knowledge and skills acquired during their earlier education. This alignment facilitates a smoother transition from secondary to tertiary education, enabling students to pursue fields of study that are closely related to their interests and career aspirations. Additionally, it enhances the effectiveness of the curriculum in preparing students for higher education and future employment opportunities by ensuring that they have the necessary background and preparation in their chosen fields.

The study by Gonzales et al. (2024) highlights that the best education and training can be chosen when individuals, especially those starting high school, have a clear idea of the career they want to pursue. With K-12 programs, students can make their own career decisions. Choosing a career in high school is a crucial first step for students. This stage is significant because it forms the basis of their preparation. The choice of a career path must be planned carefully, as it has a long-term impact on a person’s development and future success. The authors also stressed that to prevent high school students from making poor career choices, schools should implement comprehensive career counseling programs.

In addition, before choosing the desired track or strand, it is essential to conduct thorough research. Identify possible careers and job opportunities in the future, and investigate average salary offers. The study of Lozano (2024) demonstrated the importance of role models, comprehensive career. It can thus be concluded that events which are directed at high school learners will be beneficial to them. Critically, career talks, career advising, and career counseling are more effective when conducted with professionals in the field sharing their journeys, since that encourages learners to select and pursue similar career paths. They also stretched that point to the need for teachers of careers advising to ensure enough time are included in the career advising so learners do not suffer from mental fatigue and confusion as well as gathering input from learners on the careers they would like to learn about. Moreover, if you're a student wondering how to leap into the vast ocean that is your career, or if you're early in your career and uncertain about what to do next, the best advice I can offer - one I've received numerous times in my own career - is that your career or your future is not defined by a single moment or event. It's defined by how you reflect on and learn from those moments and how you use that knowledge to propel yourself forward. And you can be assured that there is no better support system for navigating those moments than the community you build around you (McCullough, 2019).

### ***Subtheme 2: Seize the Study: Embracing Every Learning Opportunity***

Gave guidance to others to seized every opportunity, even if their desired course of study was not initially met, emphasizes the importance of resilience and adaptability in pursuing educational and career goals. It encourages individuals to remain steadfast in their dreams of obtaining a bachelor's degree and ultimately securing a better job in the future. Educational journeys may not always follow a straight path. Sometimes, initial plans may need to be adjusted or alternative routes explored.

Don't lose hope and grab the opportunity, Chell and Benben offered same advices to upcoming high school graduates planning to pursue college. "Ang ako a lng advice nga og naa may gihatag si God sa inyoha nga course bisan dili ninyo gusto e grab na lang total usa ra may point nato makatapos og eskwela"- Chell. (My advice is that if God has given you a certain course, even if you don't like it, just take it. After all, we all have the same goal—to finish school). And, according to Benben "take lang gid ang opportunity nga skwela lang maayo even though nga dili gid related or wala ninyo na kuha inyong gusto nga course". (Just take the opportunity and study well, even if it's not related to or doesn't align with the course you originally wanted).

Persist even if you can't pursue your desired course; continue to explore other options as Baby and Badjing advices. "Akong ma advice sa mga senior high nga mo college ron dapat dili sila mo surrender like nga dili na lang sila mo padayon kay wala sila ka pasar dapat mangita gyapon silag pamaagi nga maka skwela sila"-Baby. (My advice to senior high students going to college is that they shouldn't give up. Even if they haven't passed, they should find ways to continue their education). Besides, "akong ma advice nila kung dili man gid nila makuha ilang first course nga gi applyan dili sila ma walaan og pag-asa dili gid mo surrender dapat go lang gid para maka skwela maka graduate"-Badjing. (My advice is that if they don't get their first choice of course, they shouldn't lose hope or give up. They should keep going and stay determined to continue their studies and graduate).

The stories of the four participants is a reminder to grab every opportunity and persist despite obstacles. These valuable pieces of advice from those who have firsthand experience highlight the importance of resilience and proactive engagement in achieving success. Embracing every chance for growth and persevering through challenges can profoundly impact one's academic and personal development.

Growth, both as a student and as an individual, is both an opportunity and a challenge. Continuous learning and developing new skills are essential part of life, but they often push us out of our comfort zones. Though it may feel awkward or difficult at times, embracing the growth journey is key to progressing toward our dreams and potential (Rovina, 2023).

Learning is not a one-time event; it's a continuous journey. Embrace every opportunity to learn something new, as it is the foundation of personal and professional growth (Tayi, 2023). As Ahrer (2023) puts it, "Life is a Classroom: Embrace Every Opportunity." Life is full of problems, challenges, and decisions. It doesn't matter if you succeed or fail; what matters is that you learn from every experience. In addition, quotes say "Don't limit your challenges; challenge your limits. Each day, we must strive for constant and never-ending improvement." There is no set formula for creating change and making it happen. You just decide to do something, to make a difference, and then, do it (Kouzes, 2024).

## **Conclusions**

This study highlights the various experiences faced by students at Tamlang National High School who are enrolled in college courses that do not match their senior high school strand. These experiences include a lack of foundational academic knowledge and gaps in essential skills and prior learning for tertiary education. Such deficiencies are widely seen as major barriers that limit their academic performance and potential.

One of the key challenges encountered by participants is the difficulty in gaining admission to college. Despite selecting a strand related to their intended course, they often fail entrance examinations, preventing them from pursuing their preferred field of study. Consequently, they are placed in courses that do not align with their original career aspirations. Another significant obstacle is the lack of foundational skills and prior knowledge. The academic background acquired in senior high school differs from the demands of college, causing students to struggle academically. As a result, they put in additional effort to bridge this gap, which can lead to

heightened levels of stress, and in some cases, depression. Financial hardship is yet another challenge highlighted through participants' narratives. Financial constraints frequently result in lower goal commitment, reduced academic engagement, and diminished persistence.

Despite these adversities, these students exhibited remarkable resilience. They faced their difficulties with courage, placed their faith in God, and continued to persevere. Through these experiences, they acquired valuable practical experiences that motivated them to strive for a brighter future, not only for themselves but also for their families.

The findings of this study provide a foundation for enhancing programs and policies that acknowledge and address the unique experiences of senior high school graduates who enroll in college calls for the implementation of comprehensive guidance and effective orientation for the students. To expand educational options, it is recommended to introduce additional strands that more closely align with the courses offered by nearby universities and colleges. This strategic approach aims to better accommodate the academic interests and career goals of students as they transition into higher education. Based on the findings of this research, these recommendations are put forward:

**To the Schools Division Office.** The offering of new strands requires coordination and communication with the Division Office. The experiences of the participants, particularly regarding the misalignment between senior high school strands and college courses, leave a profound impression. Therefore, it is recommended to strategically expand educational opportunities by introducing additional strands tailored to meet the evolving needs of students. This process should begin with a comprehensive assessment of local educational demands and an evaluation of the current strand offerings. By identifying gaps and assessing the alignment of existing strands with the courses offered by nearby universities and colleges, the Division Office can strategically plan the introduction of new educational pathways.

Collaboration with educators, stakeholders, and local academic institutions is essential during the curriculum development phase. It is recommended that the Division Office work closely with these partners to design robust curricula that not only meet educational standards but also effectively prepare students for higher education in related fields. This collaborative effort will ensure that the new strands are academically rigorous and align with the expectations and prerequisites of tertiary education programs.

Additionally, establishing strong partnerships with nearby universities and colleges is crucial. By understanding their course offerings, admission requirements, and educational philosophies, the Division Office can align the new strands with the broader educational landscape. This alignment will enhance the relevance and applicability of the educational pathways offered, thereby increasing student engagement and success in pursuing higher education.

It is also suggested to implement monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness and impact of the new strands over time. Regular reviews and assessments will help the Division Office identify strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement. This continuous improvement process will ensure that the educational pathways remain responsive to the needs of students and the evolving demands of the local and regional educational landscape.

In summary, the Schools Division Office serves as a proactive agent of change and innovation in educational offerings. By leveraging assessments, collaborations, partnerships, and evaluation mechanisms, the Division Office plays a vital role in expanding educational opportunities and ensuring the relevance and quality of educational pathways for students pursuing higher education.

**To the Schools Administrators.** The research findings indicate that senior high school graduates were not adequately informed about the different strands and the associated college courses while in school. Additionally, the limited availability of certain strands hinders students' access to diverse educational opportunities. It is strongly recommended that school administrators oversee the orientation and presentation of educational strands and the corresponding college courses to senior high school students. Their responsibilities include ensuring that students receive comprehensive guidance and support throughout their educational journey.

Since administrators are instrumental in curriculum planning and development, it is suggested they collaborate closely with educators and curriculum specialists to design clear and informative presentations that outline the specific focus areas of each educational strand. These presentations should not only highlight the academic content but also emphasize the career pathways and opportunities available to students upon completion of each strand. By providing structured and detailed information, administrators enable students to make informed decisions about their academic pursuits and future careers. Furthermore, coordination with the Division Office is necessary to expand the offering of additional strands, providing students with a wider range of choices.

Administrators are also responsible for overseeing guidance and counseling services within the school. They must ensure that students receive personalized support in understanding the implications of choosing different strands on their college and career prospects. Through individual counseling sessions and group workshops, administrators help students explore their interests, strengths, and aspirations, aligning them with suitable educational pathways. This personalized approach is crucial in empowering students to make well-informed decisions that resonate with their academic and professional goals.

Resource allocation is another critical aspect managed by school administrators. They secure and allocate resources such as informational materials, guest speakers, and technology platforms that enhance the orientation process. By providing access to up-to-date information about college courses and career opportunities, administrators enable students to explore diverse educational pathways

effectively. Moreover, they should facilitate partnerships with local colleges and universities to arrange campus visits, career fairs, and collaborative programs that expose students to real-world learning experiences and academic environments.

It is also recommended that administrators monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of orientation programs. Regularly assessing student feedback, academic outcomes, and post-secondary transitions to help gauge the impact of these initiatives. Based on this evaluation, administrators can implement necessary adjustments and enhancements to ensure that orientation programs remain relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of students and the educational landscape. Moreover, it is strongly advised to track the progress of senior high school graduates, including whether they continue their education, pursue courses aligned with their studies, or choose alternative paths.

In conclusion, school administrators play a pivotal role in student success by spearheading the orientation and presentation of educational strands and college courses. Through proactive curriculum planning, personalized guidance, strategic resource allocation, and ongoing evaluation, administrators empower students to make informed decisions about their educational and career pathways. By fostering a supportive and enriching learning environment, administrators significantly contribute to students' academic achievements and future prospects.

**To Guidance Counselors/Advocates.** Guidance counselor provide personalized support and guidance to senior high school students, helping them align their chosen strand with their aspirations for college courses and future careers. Based on the participants' narratives, many students face difficulties in college admission and struggle academically due to the misalignment of their chosen course with their senior high school strand. It is recommended that guidance counselors assist students in navigating the application process, offer advice on selecting appropriate colleges or universities based on academic strengths and career goals, and ensure that students meet all necessary deadlines and requirements for a smooth transition to higher education.

**Teachers.** Teachers play a crucial role in the development and success of students by guidance and support. Through this it is recommended that teachers provide informative sessions about how each strand connects to various college programs. Thus, it can empower students to make informed decisions about their futures.

**To Senior High School Students.** Exploring the connections between senior high school (SHS) strands and college courses is essential for students as they prepare for their next educational steps. By understanding how their SHS education relates to college courses, students can make informed choices, ensuring they select a path that aligns with their passions and career goals. This exploration not only aids in their decision-making but also sets a solid foundation for future academic and professional success.

**To the Future Researchers.** This study focuses solely on the perceptions of 10 senior high school graduates who are enrolled in college courses that do not align with their chosen strands. Future researchers could expand this study by incorporating a mixed-methods research design that includes quantitative components such as surveys and questionnaires to provide a more comprehensive understanding. This approach would allow researchers to explore perspectives from both senior high school graduates and those in college regarding their strands and courses, potentially identifying correlations in the data. Additionally, future researchers could track the educational trajectories of senior high school graduates as they progress through college studies.

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