



# UNRAVELING THE FACTORS SHAPING THE CAREER CHOICES OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to examine and understand what are the personal experiences and external factors driving SHS students to their preferred careers, and how they viewed them as significant influences on their decision. The researcher employed descriptive qualitative method with the use of in-depth interviews and focus group discussion as data sources. Data collection was sourced from 20 grade 12 students, coming from 4 different schools in Tagum City. The results revealed that personal experiences such as, having interest on the nature of the career, seeing the downsides of the other professions, being influenced by family and social circle, and exposing oneself to a career's real-life situation have urged participants to their career decisions. Meanwhile, expectations of salary, the desire to address social issues, existence of social media platforms, and demand in labor market have been collectively proven to be an external force in career planning. Lastly, gaining support and influence, assuming financial stability and employment, and imbibing resiliency and determination are the essential views towards the factors shaping the career choices. The aforesaid findings encourage guidance counselors and educators to step up career guidance programs and, at the same time, intensify their innate attributes like being a good communicator, inquisitiveness, lifelong learner, collaborator, and empathy on the students' diverse backgrounds and preferences.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Guidance And Counseling, Factors Of Career Choices, Descriptive Approach, Thematic Analysis, Senior High School Students, Tagum City*

## INTRODUCTION

Senior high school students' career choices are influenced by multiple factors such as personal interests, family, peers, and societal expectations, yet many struggle to decide on their future paths. The lack of clear understanding of which factors are most influential leads to confusion, anxiety, and premature decision-making. Globally and locally, studies show that insufficient career guidance, limited information about career options, and lack of research on influencing factors contribute to students' indecisiveness. As a result, guidance counselors face challenges in designing effective, tailored programs. In the Philippines, particularly in Tagum City, students continue to experience uncertainty in choosing college courses, highlighting the need to identify key career decision factors to better support them.

This study addresses gaps in previous research by using a descriptive qualitative approach to explore senior high school students' career decisions more deeply. Unlike Almario (2021), which used a quantitative method focused on socio-economic factors, this study captures richer insights into various influences. It also differs from Abe and Chikoko (2020), which focused on university STEM students using phenomenology, by examining SHS students from different strands before entering college. Conducted in four schools in Tagum City, this research provides a new and underexplored local perspective on career decision-making.

## Research Questions

1. What personal experiences influence the career choice of senior high school students?
2. What external factors shape the career choice of SHS students?
3. How do the senior high school students view their personal experiences and external factors as significant influences for their career decision?

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed descriptive qualitative method. Participated by 20 grade 12 senior high school students who were enrolled in four different schools in Tagum City for the academic year 2025-2026. These participants were chosen through a purposive sampling method. The selection of the participants was based on the following criteria: (a) first, they were self-professed to have a clear career choice during the conduct of the study. (b) Second, all of the participants were Grade 12, and at least 17 years old or older. (c) Lastly, each participant was taking up one of the senior high school strands prescribed by the Department of Education, which includes: Accountancy, Business and Management (ABM), Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS), Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), General Academic Strand (GAS), and Technical-Vocational- Livelihood (TVL). 10 participants underwent in-depth interviews, while the other 10 participated in a focus group discussion.



## RESULTS

### Essential Themes and Core Ideas About the Personal Experiences that Influence the Career Choices of Senior High School Students

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Having Interest on the Nature of the Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanting to be in direct contact with the patients</li> <li>• Desiring to frequently travel</li> <li>• Preferring to do scientific research</li> <li>• Loving to do problem-solving and construction</li> <li>• Being curious on why people act certain behavior and how the mind works</li> <li>• Being fascinated to women's health and childbirth</li> <li>• Having a strong interest towards planting</li> </ul>
Seeing the Downsides of the Other Professions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling discouraged by an occupation that requires too much socialization</li> <li>• Being skeptical in doing a job that is deadly or life-threatening</li> <li>• Finding some interpersonal professions discouraging because they are emotionally challenging</li> <li>• Losing interest on the degree program that requires proficiency in a particular subject</li> <li>• Not wanting the isolating and repetitive nature of the job</li> </ul>
Being Influenced by Family and Social Circle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting assurance and support from the family member</li> <li>• Being urged by aunt and uncle</li> <li>• Receiving motivation from churchmates and the people around them</li> <li>• Gaining influence from the professionals to take the same path</li> </ul>
Exposing Oneself to a Career's Real-Life Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having experienced taking care of a sick family member</li> <li>• Immersing in different sites and workplaces</li> <li>• Doing the actual duty or task of the profession</li> <li>• Observing medical workers when confined in the hospital</li> </ul>

### Essential Themes and Core Ideas About the External Factors that Shape the Career Choice of SHS students

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Salary Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrowing down the options based on salary</li> <li>• Becoming a professional in a specific field will pay off everything</li> <li>• Earning a high salary if working in a particular industry</li> <li>• Earning enough salary to buy needs and wants</li> <li>• Getting paid by the clients for the services rendered</li> <li>• Receiving higher salary abroad</li> <li>• Receiving money from the profession</li> </ul>
Desire to Address Social Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanting to make a change inside the workplace</li> <li>• Dreaming of formulating a medicine that would cure specific illness</li> <li>• Desiring to help people needing medical attention</li> <li>• Longing to mitigate environmental destruction and economic crisis</li> <li>• Hoping to understand geopolitical conflict</li> <li>• Aiming to uplift the degrading reputation of a certain profession</li> </ul>
Prevalence of Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeing TikTok feeds pertaining to the career</li> <li>• Going over the details of college course through school's Facebook page</li> <li>• Accessing information of the profession via search engine technology- Google</li> <li>• Learning about different professions through other social media platforms</li> <li>• Getting influenced by social media influencers and personalities</li> <li>• Being inspired by mass media including beauty pageants and movie</li> </ul>
Labor Market Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceiving certain profession outnumbers other professions</li> <li>• Considering the scarcity of a particular profession in Tagum City</li> <li>• Realizing the lack of medicinal expert in the community</li> <li>• Recognizing the demand of auditing expert in businesses</li> <li>• Being aware of the demand of medical professions in abroad</li> </ul>



**Essential Themes and Core Ideas About the Views of Senior High School Students on their Personal Experiences and External Factors as Significant Influences for their Decision**

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Gaining Parental Support and Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizing optimism and trust of parents is uplifting</li> <li>Earning support from parents brings happiness</li> <li>Letting oneself to reexamine decision makes feel assured</li> <li>Receiving support and encouragement from parents is essential</li> <li>Getting motivation from parents will make them succeed</li> <li>Having a communicative and helpful father inspires to help others</li> <li>Having a strict father urges to excel academically</li> <li>Acknowledging mother's support is empowering and increases motivation</li> </ul>
Assuming Financial Stability and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fulfilling career choice guarantees financial stability</li> <li>Realizing career aspiration allows to give back to parents financially</li> <li>Being in a dream profession satisfies the needs and wants in the future</li> <li>Achieving career choice promises various job opportunities</li> <li>Filling the scarcity of the profession equates to employment stability</li> </ul>
Imbibing Resiliency and Determination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pushing oneself to the limits so parents will not get disappointed</li> <li>Resonating a proverb to overcome challenging circumstances</li> <li>Believing God's grace and guidance if feeling uncertain or discouraged</li> <li>Proving one's capacity of finishing studies to parents</li> <li>Persisting oneself in order to help others</li> <li>Availing opportunities and achieving high grades to finish studies</li> </ul>

**Implications for Counseling Practice**

Ultimately, the personal experiences and external factors that influenced the career choices of the senior high school students as well as understanding how they view these factors as significant influences for their decisions have been unraveled. The following are the implications for counseling practice in relation to the research findings:

First, the participants were collectively driven to make their ideal occupation happen because of the personal experiences they went through. Thus, guidance counselors or advocates are urged to step up career guidance program by basing it on the factors under personal experiences. For instance, different professional societies and organizations need to be invited to present the overview, highlights, and challenges of their respective careers through booth and symposium. Through this activity, the students would gain more insights whether or not their interest or fascination is really aligned to the career they are considering to. Also, being able to listen to the firsthand narratives from the professionals of their field of expertise, the perceived downsides or misconceptions about different professions would be addressed or unlearned. Apart from setting up booths and conducting symposiums during the enhanced career fair, guidance counselors can also organize a group counseling unique for students who will be taking the same career path. The group counseling will be comprised of the students, parents, teachers, and professionals of the specific field that students have interest on. This way, the expectations, questions, and other concerns pertaining to the career would be reconciled, resulting to a more positive impact for the students. Lastly, part of this improved career fair is the immersion of students to the different companies

and industries. This activity is definitely an effective approach in career guidance as it does not only foster one of the participants' personal factors, which is exposing oneself to a career's real-life situation, but it also enforces the two levels of Edgar Dale's Cone of Experience: The Direct Purposeful Experiences and Study Trips.

Another finding that emerged in this study are the external factors moving the participants to their choices. In order to come up a more realistic and informed career decisions, guidance counselors are required to be a good communicator. At all times, they need to make the students understand the concept of entry-level and long-term earning potential and, at the same time, encourage them to develop their skills and qualifications required for desired salary levels. This way, the students would learn how to manage salary expectations versus reality. Moreover, a good communicator has also the ability to make the students acknowledge that addressing social issues through career choices is a long-term commitment. Taking part to the attainment of solution may take a lifetime and it demands effort, finances, time, and perseverance. Also, guidance counselors need to instill that there are only two consequences in trying to resolve problems in the society- either success or failure. Meanwhile, the third external factor which is the prevalence of social media can serve as a best weapon in career guidance. Through social media, guidance counselors can create an online community linking students, teachers, professionals, institutions, and stakeholders. They will fulfill the role as an online moderator, engaging students to explore options with the use of digital technology. And, finally, the extrinsic factor labor market demand prompts guidance counselors to be more inquisitive about the career goals



of the students. They can employ a reflective and analytical questions leading to the student's realization on what specific education, training, and skills are needed to meet the current and future demand of different industries. By doing so, it would reduce the increasing number of unemployment and underemployment rates in the country.

Overall, the factors under personal experiences and external urge guidance counselors to have a better grasp on the concept of diversity of students. It is essential to understand learners' gender identity, needs, strengths, interests, experiences, as well as their linguistic, cultural, socio-economic and religious backgrounds so that counselors will be able to properly position themselves on how to provide appropriate career guidance based on the learners' multi-faceted background. Moreover, the participants' career influences also imply to build networks outside the school and continuously engage with other professionals- as no man is an island and it truly takes a village to raise a child. Lastly, guidance counselors are pressed to engage themselves to a continuous learning since it is a never-ending process, and so, they could give their clientele what they have.

### Concluding Remarks

The adage of Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, "Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought" personally relates to the journey that I have taken as a researcher. Every choice we make is something that we always see and, more often than not, construed as "nothing-special" to all of us. We have always believed that it is nature to humankind and part of the developmental stages. However, we oftentimes miss to circumspect what are the underlying factors of our choices. What made a certain person decide to be in his/her position? This research endeavor has definitely opened my eyes on the things that are often overlooked. Specifically, the participants did not just select the career for the sake of having one, but their choice and decision are profoundly rooted from their desire to make the world a much better place to live- an altruistic motive that we sometimes fail to take heed.

In addition, I also realized that the choices made by my participants are parallel to the theories I included in the initial part of this study. It turned out the career decisions are based on the interconnected systems or environments conceptualized by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The parents and teachers who belong in the microsystem directly influenced the participants through good parenting and teaching. Meanwhile, the mesosystem which is the interaction between the students' microsystems has helped them to make an intelligent choice by leveraging the ideas of the people around them. Furthermore, parent's job which is under exosystem indirectly motivated children to take the same exact path as their parents because their needs were provided. Also, the macrosystem which covers cultural and societal norms has convinced students to be in the medical field since helping others in dire need conforms to the societal values. Finally, the time and life changes collectively under chronosystem impacted the participants to become accountants, commercial pilot, IT expert,

and engineers since they perceived it will be in demand and lucrative after they graduate.

Another theory which explicitly reflects the findings of this research is the Theory of Career Choice or RIASEC model proposed by John Holland. One of the key concepts of this theory is Realistic, which means a person prefers a career which lets him/her do hands-on tasks. Based on the narratives of my participants, they wanted to become engineer, aircraft maintenance technologist, and chemist because they enjoy working with concrete tools, machines and apparatuses. By satisfying their tactile sense, efficiency as well as the productivity rate of the task would likely increase. Moreover, the fourth concept in RIASEC model is Social, which simply means individuals select their careers because they are fond of interacting with other people. Apparently, this idea has made the participants to take nursing, teaching, and psychology in college because they are passionate on dealing with people- a skill which may be unique to some of us but absent in the other people.

Truly, the scientific process of unraveling factors shaping the career choices of senior high school students has added another schema to me as a researcher, as well as to the teachers, guidance counselors, and policy makers, regarding the diverse perspectives among the visionary students in the city of Tagum.

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