



Research Article

Employment Outcomes and Educational Pathways of Senior High School Graduates: Implications for an Enhanced Implementation Program

Nimcy M. Ortiz , Reynaldo A. Talavera **Author Information:**

Department of Education - Region IVA
CALABARZON, SDO Cabuyao City,
Laguna, Philippines

Corresponding Authors:

Nimcy M. Ortiz
nimcy.ortiz@deped.gov.ph

Reynaldo A. Talavera
Email: reynaldo.talavera@deped.gov.ph

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Abstract. This study aimed to track the status of Senior High School (SHS) graduates in the Schools Division Office of Cabuyao City from 2018 to 2022, assess the alignment of SHS tracks and strands with employment and post-secondary engagement, and provide a basis for an enhanced SHS implementation program. The study employed a descriptive research design and snowball sampling because of accessibility challenges, yielding 438 respondents from a target population of 1,264 graduates. Data were collected through a researcher-developed survey questionnaire administered through Google Forms and analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, ranking, and inferential statistics, including Spearman's rho and chi-square tests. Findings revealed that most respondents were female (61.2%) and single (97.7%), with the majority enrolled in the Academic Track (59.5%), followed by the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Track (38.7%). Employment analysis indicated that 51.3% of graduates were engaged in part-time work, while only 12.8% held permanent positions. Although graduates generally perceived their SHS education as relevant to their current status, only 50.2% were employed in occupations aligned with their SHS specialization, suggesting a mismatch between training and labor market demands. The findings indicate that while SHS provides foundational preparation for employment and further education, gaps in employability and job alignment persist. The study recommends strengthening curriculum-industry alignment, enhancing work immersion and employability programs, intensifying career guidance and placement services, and promoting post-SHS upskilling through TESDA and industry-recognized certifications to improve graduate outcomes.

Keywords: Career readiness; Educational pathways; Employment outcomes; Senior high school graduates; Tracer study.

Tracer studies have become an important mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs by examining graduates' employment, continuing education, and utilization of acquired competencies. These studies provide evidence on how well educational institutions prepare learners for workforce participation and lifelong learning. In the Philippine context, the implementation of the K to 12 Basic Education Program introduced Senior High School (SHS) as a major reform intended to equip learners with competencies needed for employment, entrepreneurship, and higher education. Consequently, assessing SHS graduates' outcomes has become essential to determine whether the reform is achieving its intended goals. Tracer studies likewise provide valuable information regarding the relevance of educational programs and their responsiveness to labor market demands.



This study is anchored on Human Capital Theory, which posits that education serves as an investment that enhances individuals' knowledge, skills, and competencies, thereby improving productivity and employability. In the context of Senior High School (SHS), the theory explains how competencies gained from different tracks and strands can influence graduates' employment opportunities, career readiness, and post-secondary pathways. The study is likewise informed by Career Construction Theory, which emphasizes that educational experiences, personal adaptability, and labor market opportunities shape career development. This perspective suggests that graduates' career outcomes are influenced not only by the skills acquired in school but also by their ability to apply these competencies in navigating employment and educational opportunities. Guided by these theories, the present study examines how SHS track and strand specialization relate to graduates' employment outcomes and educational pathways. The framework provides a lens for understanding the alignment between educational preparation and labor market demands, as well as the factors influencing graduates' transitions from school to work or further education.

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of tracer studies in evaluating graduate employability and educational outcomes. Saputra et al. (2021) and Sichombe (2022) highlighted the usefulness of tracer studies in examining graduates' transitions from education to employment. Employability scholars such as Abelha et al. (2020), Tomlinson (2021), and McGunagle and Zizka (2020) further argued that successful labor market outcomes depend not only on disciplinary knowledge but also on transferable skills such as communication, adaptability, collaboration, and problem-solving.

Research on Senior High School graduates has produced varying findings regarding educational and employment pathways. De Asis et al. (2021) found that strand selection significantly influences graduates' educational and employment outcomes. In contrast, Dagli et al. (2019) reported that many graduates choose to pursue higher education rather than enter the workforce immediately. These findings suggest an ongoing tension between employability readiness and higher education preparation, indicating that SHS graduates follow diverse post-school pathways.

Studies focusing on employability and labor market alignment have identified persistent challenges. Burac and Habla (2023) reported that Technical-Vocational-Livelihood graduates possess relevant competencies but still face difficulties with job availability and industry alignment. This reflects the ongoing issue of skills mismatch, where educational preparation does not always align with labor market requirements. Such findings underscore the need for stronger school-industry collaboration and responsive curriculum implementation. Furthermore, Gorospe and Joaquin (2022) emphasized that track and strand choices significantly influence learners' future educational and occupational outcomes. Similarly, Jackson and Tomlinson (2020), Suarta et al. (2020), and Umar et al. (2021) stressed the importance of career planning, workplace readiness, and employability skills in facilitating successful school-to-work transitions. Viewed through Human Capital Theory and Career Construction Theory, these studies suggest that employment outcomes are shaped by both educational investments and how well acquired competencies align with labor market expectations.

Despite the growing body of literature on SHS implementation and graduate employability, limited research has examined the long-term employment outcomes and educational pathways of Senior High School graduates in the Schools Division Office of Cabuyao City. While previous studies have explored graduate outcomes in other contexts, little evidence exists on the alignment between SHS specialization and employment outcomes among graduates in the locality. The lack of localized tracer data limits the development of evidence-based interventions to improve curriculum relevance, employability, and workforce preparation. This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive tracer study that can inform policy formulation and program enhancement within the division.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design to determine the educational profile, employment status, job alignment, and post-secondary outcomes of Senior High School (SHS) graduates in the Schools Division Office of Cabuyao City from 2018 to 2022. Descriptive research was deemed appropriate because the study sought to describe existing conditions and examine relationships among variables without manipulating them. The design enabled the researchers to gather information regarding graduates' educational pathways, employment experiences, and the extent to which their SHS specialization aligned with their status.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The target population consisted of 1,264 Senior High School graduates from selected public senior high schools in the Schools Division Office of Cabuyao City who completed their studies between 2018 and 2022. Because graduates were difficult to locate after completing basic education, the researchers used snowball sampling. This non-probability sampling technique allowed initial respondents to identify and refer other eligible graduates within their networks, thereby expanding the pool of participants. A total of 438 graduates voluntarily participated in the study.

The respondents were drawn from six public senior high schools: Bigaa Integrated National High School, Cabuyao Integrated National High School, Casile Integrated National High School, Mamatid Senior High School, Pulo Senior High School, and Southville 1 Integrated National High School. Inclusion criteria required participants to be SHS graduates from the identified schools within the specified period and willing to participate in the survey. The study excluded graduates outside the covered cohorts and those who did not provide consent.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-developed survey questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The instrument was designed to gather information on respondents' demographic characteristics, SHS track and strand, employment status, employment alignment with SHS specialization, post-secondary engagement, and reasons for unemployment. The questionnaire consisted of structured items that enabled the collection of quantitative data relevant to the study objectives. Before administration, the instrument underwent expert review to ensure content validity and alignment with the tracer study objectives. The researchers incorporated necessary revisions based on recommendations to improve the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the survey items.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before data collection, the researchers secured permission to conduct the study from the Schools Division Superintendent and the heads of the participating schools. Upon approval, the survey questionnaire was converted into an online format using Google Forms and distributed to identified graduates through available communication channels and social media platforms. Initial respondents were encouraged to share the survey link with fellow SHS graduates from the same graduating cohorts, following snowball sampling principles. Data collection was conducted electronically to facilitate wider reach and accessibility among graduates. The researchers regularly monitored, verified, and consolidated responses until they reached the desired sample size. After data collection, the gathered information was organized and prepared for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency counts, percentages, and ranking were employed to describe the respondents' educational profiles and employment characteristics. To determine the relationship between SHS educational profiles and employment outcomes, inferential statistics such as the chi-square test of association and Spearman's rho correlation coefficient were utilized. The results were interpreted in line with the study objectives and served as the basis for conclusions and recommendations.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's purpose, nature, and significance before completing the survey. Respondents provided informed consent through the online questionnaire before proceeding. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, no personally identifiable information was collected or disclosed in the presentation of results. All responses were treated confidentially and used solely for academic and research purposes. Researchers stored electronic data securely and made it accessible only to the researchers. Participants were further informed that they could decline to participate or discontinue their involvement at any time without penalty or negative consequences.

Results and Discussion

SHS Track and Strand Distribution

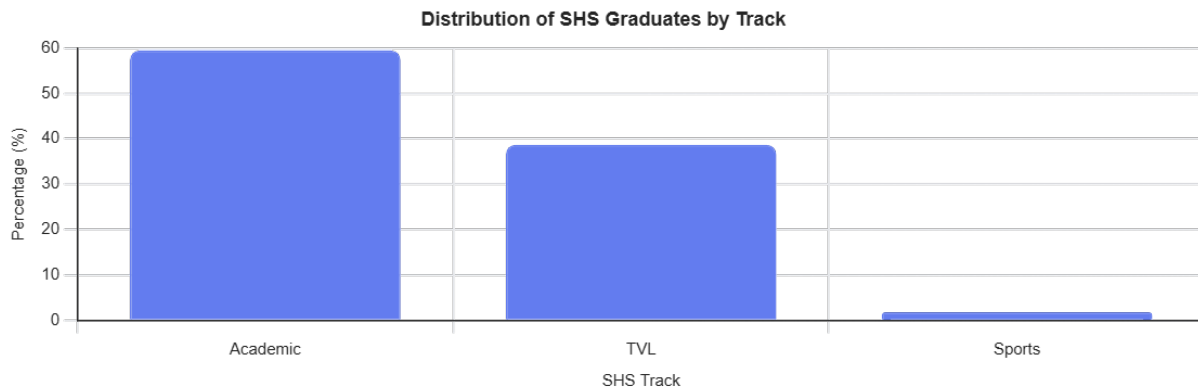


Figure 1. *Distribution of Senior High School Graduates According to Track*

Figure 1 presents the distribution of Senior High School graduates according to track. The findings showed that the Academic Track had the highest enrollment, accounting for 59.5% of respondents, followed by the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track at 38.7%, while the Sports Track represented only 1.8% of graduates. Among the strands, TVL Home Economics recorded the highest proportion, followed by the General Academic Strand. These findings indicate that many SHS learners continue to prefer pathways that support either higher education or the acquisition of practical skills for employment. The dominance of the Academic Track aligns with De Asis et al. (2021), who reported that many senior high school learners view academic strands as a pathway to higher education and broader career opportunities. Similarly, Gorospe and Joaquin (2022) emphasized that learners' track selections significantly influence their educational and occupational outcomes. The results suggest that track selection remains a crucial factor in shaping graduates' future pathways and employment prospects.

Employment Status of SHS Graduates

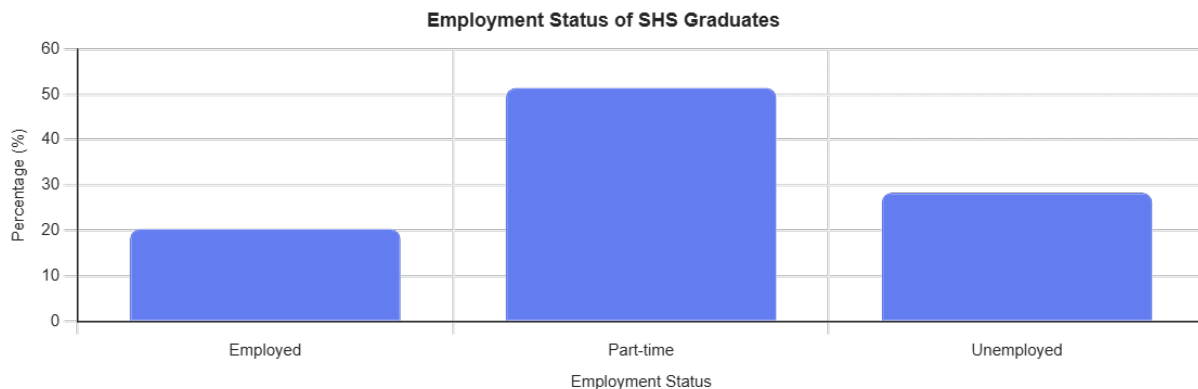


Figure 2. *Employment Status of Senior High School Graduates*

Figure 2 shows the respondents' employment status. Results indicate that 51.4% of graduates were engaged in part-time employment, 20.3% held full-time positions, and 28.3% were unemployed at the time of the survey. The findings reveal that although employment opportunities exist for SHS graduates, a substantial proportion remains employed in temporary or nonregular work arrangements. The prevalence of part-time employment suggests that many graduates encounter challenges in obtaining stable employment immediately after completing Senior High School. This finding supports observations from previous tracer studies indicating that SHS graduates often struggle to transition directly into permanent employment because of skills mismatches, limited work experience, and evolving labor market requirements. While SHS has strengthened learners' foundational competencies, the transition from school to stable employment remains challenging for many graduates. The prevalence of part-time

employment among graduates suggests ongoing challenges in transitioning from school to stable work, a trend similarly observed in tracer studies in other educational contexts (Sichombe, 2022; Tomlinson, 2021).

Reasons for Unemployment

Among unemployed respondents, the most frequently reported reason was the lack of employment opportunities related to their SHS specialization, accounting for 40.7% of responses. Other commonly cited reasons included concerns regarding salary and benefits, limited work experience, and continuing educational pursuits. These findings indicate that employment challenges extend beyond job availability and encompass issues related to job quality, career suitability, and professional growth opportunities. The results highlight a continuing gap between educational preparation and labor market requirements. Burac and Habla (2023) reported similar findings, finding that graduates of Technical-Vocational-Livelihood programs often struggle to secure employment aligned with their acquired competencies. This mismatch suggests a need to strengthen curriculum-industry alignment and ensure learning experiences align with the skills required by employers. Furthermore, the findings reinforce previous studies showing that employability depends not only on technical competencies but also on labor market conditions, workplace readiness, career planning, and access to employment opportunities (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020; Umar et al., 2021). These results underscore the importance of enhancing work immersion experiences, strengthening career guidance services, and expanding partnerships with industry stakeholders to facilitate graduates' successful transition into meaningful employment.

Relationship Between SHS Educational Profile and Employment Outcomes

Inferential analysis revealed significant relationships between graduates' SHS educational profiles and their employment outcomes. The chi-square test and Spearman's rho correlation analysis indicate that track and strand specialization are associated with employment status and post-secondary outcomes. These findings suggest that educational pathways selected during Senior High School influence graduates' career trajectories, employment opportunities, and post-secondary experiences.

The results support the argument that educational specialization plays an important role in determining employment opportunities and post-secondary choices. Similarly, Gorospe and Joaquin (2022) found that SHS tracking significantly influences learners' subsequent educational and career pathways. The significant relationships observed in the present study emphasize the need for stronger career guidance programs to help learners make informed track and strand selections aligned with their interests, abilities, and future career goals. Furthermore, closer collaboration between schools and industry stakeholders may help ensure that SHS programs remain responsive to workforce demands and emerging employment opportunities.

The findings further support the view that educational preparation and the development of employability competencies shape career pathways throughout the learning process (Abelha et al., 2020; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Consequently, strengthening work immersion programs, industry partnerships, and career development initiatives may enhance SHS graduates' employability and career readiness, improving their transition from school to employment or further education.

Conclusion

This study provides localized evidence on the employment and educational outcomes of Senior High School graduates in the Schools Division Office of Cabuyao City, contributing to the growing body of literature on the effectiveness of the Philippine K to 12 Program. The findings highlight the critical role of Senior High School in preparing learners for higher education and employment while emphasizing that educational pathways significantly influence graduates' post-school opportunities and career trajectories.

The study underscores the importance of better aligning curriculum offerings with labor market demands. The identified gaps in employment alignment suggest the need for more responsive educational interventions, stronger industry partnerships, enhanced work immersion experiences, and expanded opportunities for skills certification and workforce preparation. These initiatives may better equip graduates with competencies that are relevant to evolving economic and industry requirements.

From a policy and educational perspective, the findings provide valuable insights for curriculum planners, school

administrators, guidance personnel, and education policymakers. The results may serve as a basis for improving career guidance programs, refining work-based learning initiatives, and developing evidence-based strategies that support informed track and strand selection among learners. Moreover, the study provides empirical support for developing an enhanced Senior High School implementation program responsive to local needs and workforce expectations.

Consistent with contemporary research emphasizing employability skills, curriculum relevance, and work-integrated learning experiences, the study affirms the need for sustained collaboration among schools, industries, higher education institutions, and government agencies to facilitate successful school-to-work transitions (Tomlinson, 2021; Zegwaard et al., 2023). Future research may focus on longitudinal tracking of graduates, employer assessments of SHS competencies, and comparative studies across different divisions and regions to further strengthen the evidence base for policy development and continuous improvement of Senior High School education in the Philippines.

Contributions of Authors

Author 1: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Writing-Original Draft

Author 2: Conceptualization, Data Collection, Review and Validation

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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