

Learning-Work Competencies and Track-Strand Challenges as Predictors of Career Path Preferences of Senior High School (SHS) Graduates in Capiz Province

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ABSTRACT: The Senior High School (SHS) program was established to equip learners with competencies necessary for higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, and middle-level skills development. However, the extent to which learning-work competencies and track-strand challenges influence graduates' career path preferences remains insufficiently explored. This study determined the predictive influence of learning-work competencies and track-strand challenges on the career path preferences of SHS graduates in Capiz Province. Employing a descriptive-correlational and predictive research design, data were collected from 387 SHS graduates selected through stratified random sampling. A validated questionnaire was used to measure learning-work competencies, track-strand challenges, and career path preferences. Descriptive statistics, Spearman rho correlation, and multiple regression analysis were utilized in analyzing the data. Results revealed that learning-work competencies had a moderate positive relationship with career path preferences ($r_s = .438, p < .001$), while track-strand challenges demonstrated a weak but significant positive relationship ($r_s = .191, p < .001$). Multiple regression analysis showed that learning-work competencies ($\beta = .384, p < .001$) and track-strand challenges ($\beta = .146, p = .002$) significantly predicted career path preferences. The regression model explained 20.1% of the variance in career path preferences ($R^2 = .201, F(2,384) = 48.292, p < .001$). Learning-work competencies emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that graduates with higher levels of interpersonal, cognitive, self-management, and technical competencies tend to exhibit clearer and more informed career preferences. The findings highlight the importance of competency development, experiential learning, and career guidance initiatives in supporting effective career decision-making among SHS learners.

KEYWORDS: Competency development, educational alignment, career decision-making and determinant, employability skills, student outcomes, Philippines

I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines has implemented Senior High School (SHS) in the basic education system through Republic Act No. 10533 or the K-12 curriculum to prepare learners with skills and knowledge for higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, and middle-level skills development (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013). Thus, the implementation of SHS included specialized tracks and strands to facilitate learners' acquisition of knowledge, skills, and experiences at the workplace that are critical for successful postsecondary transitions (Department of Education [DepEd], 2015; DepEd, 2017). However, despite these reforms, some learners still experience difficulty in matching their educational preparation and desired career paths, hence resulting in mismatched track or strand choices and future educational or occupational plans (Bacaling, 2018; Padios et al., 2021).

Personal, social, and educational factors impact one's career path preferences. One factor is the increasing emphasis on learning-work competencies that equip individuals with career readiness and employability skills, such as interpersonal and collaboration skills, cognitive and problem-solving skills, self-management and personal skills, and technical and foundational skills preparing people for success in academic and workplace settings (Care et al., 2018; Fadel et al., 2015). Studies suggest that individuals with higher employability-related competencies are more confident in making career decisions and selecting appropriate career paths (Abelha et al., 2020; Caingcoy, 2021). However, learners face various challenges in their track-strand selections, academic requirements, skill development, learning materials, and work immersion experiences, which may hinder their educational and career aspirations (Fernandez et al., 2023; Farao & du Plessis, 2024). Previous studies have explored the career choices, employability outcomes, and educational transition of Senior High School learners and graduates (Bacaling, 2018; Padios et al., 2021; Rin & Domondon, 2021; Puson et al., 2024).

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However, few studies have examined the predictive role of learning-work competencies and track-strand challenges on career path preferences, especially for Senior High School graduates in provincial areas. This is a significant research gap as local educational, socioeconomic, and labor market factors can influence graduates' evaluation of career opportunities and decision-making in terms of career paths. Using the Social Cognitive Career Theory of Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) and Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), this study sought to determine the predictive power of learning-work competencies and track-strand challenges toward career path preferences of Senior High School graduates in Capiz Province. The results are expected to contribute to the improvement of the career guidance program, curriculum delivery, and educational planning to support successful career transition of SHS graduates. Specifically, this study answered the following questions: 1) What are the levels of learning-work competencies, extent of track-strand challenges, and career path preferences among SHS graduates in Capiz Province? 2) Is there a significant relationship between learning-work competencies and career path preferences, and between track-strand challenges and career path preferences? And 3) Do learning-work competencies and track-strand challenges significantly predict career path preferences?

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational and predictive research design. The respondents consisted of 387 Senior High School graduates selected through stratified random sampling from a population of 42,706 graduates from selected public and private schools in Capiz Province.

Data Gathering Instrument

An adapted questionnaire from several authors were utilized. Padios et al. (2021) for the demographic profile, Student Employability Skills Questionnaire (SESQ) developed by Orji (2023), Fernandez et al. (2023) for track-strand challenges, and Bautista et al. (2018) for career path preferences, validated by experts and tested for reliability ($\alpha=.704-.954$) was utilized to gather data. The instrument was used to assess learning-work competencies in terms of interpersonal and collaboration skills, cognitive and problem-solving skills, self-management and personal skills and technical and foundational skills. Track-strand challenges were measured using the same dimensions and career path preferences were measured using indicators (interests, family influence, personality and job opportunities).

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was sought from the Schools Division Offices and concerned school authorities. Informed consent was obtained from all the respondents ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Data were collected through a Google Forms survey distributed using email, social media platforms, and messaging applications considering that the respondents were SHS graduates who were no longer regularly attending school. Responses were retrieved, screened for completeness and organized for statistical analysis. From the total responses obtained, respondents were selected through stratified random sampling to satisfy the required sample size and proportional allocation across strata.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to determine the levels of variables. Spearman rho correlation was used to determine relationships among variables, while multiple regression analysis was used to determine predictors of career path preferences. The level of significance was set at .05.

The scale for interpretation used were as follows:

Mean	Verbal Interpretation		
	Level of Learning-Work Competencies	Extent of Track-strand Challenges	Level of Career Path Preferences
1.00-1.49	Very Low	Never Experienced	Least Preferred
1.50-2.49	Low	Rarely Experienced	Less Preferred
2.50-3.49	High	Sometimes Experienced	Moderately Preferred
3.50-4.00	Very High	Often Experienced	Highly Preferred

RESULTS

A. Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Table 1. Overall Learning-Work Competencies, Extent of Track-Strand Challenges, and Career Path Preferences of SHS Graduates in Capiz Province

Variable	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Learning-Work Competencies	3.27	0.48	High
Track-Strand Challenges	2.58	0.73	Sometimes experienced

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Career Path Preferences	3.22	0.45	Moderately preferred
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Table 1 presents the summary levels of learning-work competencies, track-strand challenges, and career path preferences of SHS graduates in Capiz Province. The findings revealed that learning-work competencies recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.48$), interpreted as “high”. In contrast, track-strand challenges yielded an overall mean score of 2.58 ($SD = 0.73$), interpreted as “sometimes experienced”. Meanwhile, career path preferences obtained a mean score of 3.22 ($SD = 0.45$), interpreted as “moderately preferred”. These results indicate that the respondents generally demonstrated high learning-work competencies, occasionally experienced track-strand challenges, and exhibited moderate career path preferences.

Table 2. Level of Learning-Work Competencies of SHS Graduates

Category	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Self-Management and Personal Skills	3.38	0.52	High
Technical and Foundation Skills	3.36	0.58	High
Cognitive and Problem-Solving Skills	3.20	0.60	High
Interpersonal and Collaboration Skills	3.13	0.50	High
Learning-Work Competency	3.27	0.48	High

Table 2 presents that SHS graduates in Capiz Province demonstrated a “high” level of learning-work competencies ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.48$). Among the competency domains, self-management and personal skills obtained the highest rating, followed by technical and foundational skills, while interpersonal and collaboration skills received the lowest, although all dimensions were interpreted as high.

Table 3. Extent of Track-Strand Challenges of SHS Graduates

Category	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Self-Management and Personal Challenges	2.81	0.75	Sometimes Experienced
Technical and Foundation Challenges	2.59	0.79	Sometimes Experienced
Cognitive and Problem-Solving Challenges	2.51	0.88	Sometimes Experienced
Interpersonal and Collaboration Challenges	2.43	0.86	Rarely Experienced
Track-Strand Challenges	2.58	0.73	Sometimes Experienced

Table 3 presents that the SHS graduates in Capiz Province experienced track-strand challenges to “sometimes experienced” extent of challenges faced ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.73$). Among the domains, self-management and personal challenges obtained the highest rating, while interpersonal and collaboration challenges were the least experienced.

Table 4. Level of Career Path Preferences of SHS Graduates

Category	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Job Opportunity	3.41	0.49	Moderately Preferred
Interest	3.38	0.52	Moderately Preferred
Personality	3.36	0.52	Moderately Preferred
Family and Relatives	2.73	0.86	Moderately Preferred
Career Path Preference	3.22	0.45	Moderately Preferred

Table 4 presents that the SHS graduates in Capiz Province exhibited a “moderately preferred” level of career path preferences ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.60$). Among the dimensions, job opportunity obtained the highest rating, followed by interest and personality, while family and relatives received the lowest rating.

B. Test of Relationship

Table 5. Relationship Between Career Path Preferences and Learning-Work Competencies and Relationship Between Career Path Preferences and Track-Strand Challenges

Paired Variables	N	r_s	p-value
Career Path Preferences and Learning-Work Experiences	387	0.438	<.001
Career Path Preferences and Challenges Encountered	387	0.191	<.001

The results revealed that learning-work competencies were significantly and positively related to career path preferences ($r_s = 0.438$, $p < .001$), indicating a moderate relationship between the two variables. Similarly, track-strand challenges exhibited a weak but significant positive relationship with career path preferences ($r_s = 0.191$, $p < .001$).

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C. Regression Analysis of Career Path Preferences

Table 6 Predictors of Career Path Preferences of SHS Graduates

Predictors	B	β	p-value
Learning-Work Competencies	0.363	0.384	<.001
Track-Strand Challenges	0.091	0.146	.002

The regression model significantly predicted career path preferences, $F(2,384) = 48.292$, $p < .001$, explaining 20.1% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.201$). This indicates that learning-work competencies and track-strand challenges collectively contribute to the career path preferences of SHS graduates, although a substantial proportion of the variance may be explained by other factors not included in the model.

DISCUSSION

Overall Learning-Work Competencies, Extent of Track-Strand Challenges, and Career Path Preferences of SHS Graduates in Capiz Province

The learning-work competencies were rated high, indicating that SHS graduates acquired important interpersonal, cognitive, self-management, and technical skills needed for a successful transition to higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, and other postsecondary pathways. This implies that the SHS curriculum has been successful in honing skills that prepare the graduates for their future academic and career paths. This is consistent with the study of Bernardo et al. (2020) which claimed that SHS graduates have the communication, teamwork, and technical skills needed for higher education and employment. The moderate experience of challenges in the track strand implies that the academic and personal challenges experienced by the graduates were mostly manageable and did not significantly affect their academic progress. Or it may also mean that the students had coping mechanisms for these challenges and were provided with adequate support from their schools, families, and peers to cope with the demands of the strand. This is in agreement with the findings of Fernandez et al. (2023), who mentioned the influence of social pressures and parental expectations on the learners' educational journeys and career choices. Likewise, the influence of peers on the students' motivation and decisions which did not always align with their personal interests was also noted by Schimmelpennig (2025) and Erivera et al. (2025).

The results also reveal that career preferences were affected by a blend of personal interests, family influence, personality, and perceived employment opportunities. This indicates that career decision-making among SHS graduates is complex and influenced by both individual and contextual factors. The finding corroborates that of Pham et al. (2024), who underscored that career choices are affected by personal aspirations and environmental support systems. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening learning-work competencies and providing supportive learning environments to help graduates make informed career decisions and navigate successfully to postsecondary pathways.

Level of Learning-Work Competencies of SHS Graduates

The high level of competency of SHS graduates indicate that they frequently demonstrated competencies essential for academic success, career readiness, and workforce participation. Among the competency domains, self-management and personal skills obtained the highest rating, indicating that graduates demonstrated strong self-discipline, responsibility, and adaptability. In contrast, interpersonal and collaboration skills obtained the lowest mean, although they remained at a high level, suggesting opportunities for further enhancement of teamwork and communication competencies.

The findings are consistent with Bernardo et al. (2023), who reported that SHS graduates possess communication, teamwork, and technical competencies necessary for higher education and employment. Similarly, Orbeta and Potestad (2020) emphasized that SHS serves as an important foundation for developing employability-related skills that are further strengthened through higher education and workplace experiences. The results also support studies highlighting the role of competency-based and experiential learning in enhancing adaptability, collaboration, and problem-solving skills among learners (Abelha et al., 2020; Pérez Zúñiga et al., 2025). These findings suggest that the SHS program contributes significantly to the development of competencies essential for career readiness and future workforce participation.

Extent of Track-Strand Challenges of SHS Graduates

The extent of the track-strand challenges experienced by SHS graduates sometimes implies that they experienced some challenges in terms of their academic and personal experiences. The most highly rated challenge domains were self-management and personal challenges, suggesting that graduates experienced more challenges in the areas of time management, self-discipline, and balancing academic responsibilities. On the other hand, interpersonal and collaboration challenges received the lowest rating, suggesting that respondents experienced less challenges in communication, teamwork, and social interactions.

These findings imply that although graduates had some challenges in managing their personal and academic demands, they were generally able to relate and work with others. The results are consistent with the findings of Fernandez et al. (2023) who pointed

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out the potential influence of parental expectations and social influences on students' academic and career difficulties. Likewise, Kırdök and Harman (2018) asserted that self-regulation and flexibility are also crucial in fulfilling education demands and career decisions. The average level of technical and fundamental challenges is consistent with previous studies that recommended that the lack of access to resources, career guidance and practical learning opportunities may hinder students' preparedness for future education and career paths (Siddiky & Akter, 2021; Utama et al., 2025).

Level of Career Path Preferences of SHS Graduates

The respondents expressed greater concern for employment prospects, personal interests and individual characteristics, than for family influence, to determine future educational and occupational pathways. When considering the dimensions of career path preferences, job opportunity received the highest rating, indicating that the graduates were considering employment prospects, career stability and future economic opportunities when making career choices. Interest and personality were also rated relatively high, indicating that personal dreams and individual traits were important determinants for career preferences. On the contrary, family and relatives were the lowest rated, implying that family influence, while still a factor, was less influential than the personal and opportunity-related factors.

The results support the Social Cognitive Career Theory of Lent et al. (1994) and show that learning experiences and perceived competencies influence career decision making. This finding is consistent with studies highlighting the importance of competency development and career-related experiences in forming students' career readiness and preferences (Sutiman et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

Relationship Between Career Path Preferences and Learning-Work Competencies and Relationship Between Career Path Preferences and Track-Strand Challenges

The results showed that there was a significant relationship between career path preferences and learning-work competencies and challenges during SHS, with learning-work competencies having a more significant relationship to career path preferences than challenges. This suggests that graduates with better interpersonal, cognitive, self-management, and technical competencies are more likely to have clearer career preferences. This finding is consistent with the Social Cognitive Career Theory of Lent et al. (1994) emphasizing the significance of learning experiences, self-efficacy, and perceived capabilities in career decision making. Students with higher competence are more likely to confidently evaluate career options and choose career paths that match their interests and abilities. This finding supports previous research that highlights the significance of employability skills, self-efficacy, and competence development in career decision-making and readiness (Sutiman et al., 2022; Levin et al., 2024).

The positive correlation between challenges and career choices suggests that educational challenges affect career choices through the promotion of self-awareness, adaptability, and resilience. Challenges, whether academic or personal, can lead to increased awareness of strengths, weaknesses, and future aspirations, which guides career choices (Wang et al., 2024).

Predictors of Career Path Preferences of SHS Graduates

Multiple linear regression analysis revealed learning-work competencies was found to be the strongest predictor of SHS graduates' career path preferences. This finding implies that the competencies acquired from learning experiences, work immersion, and competency-based instruction can significantly affect students' career choices and future aspirations. The result is aligned with the position that learners with higher levels of interpersonal, cognitive, self-management, and technical competencies are more likely to make informed and purposeful career decisions. This is consistent with previous studies that have validated the need for competence development, self-efficacy and experiential learning in order to improve career readiness and to help learners in making informed career decisions (Sutiman et al., 2022; Ho et al., 2023; Levin et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

In addition, the track-strand challenges predict career path preferences, but not the other preferences. The track-strand challenges experienced during the Senior High School level are not hindrances to career progression but rather chances to build resilience, adaptability, and reflective decision-making in the presence of proper support systems. This is consistent with prior research showing how educational support, coping mechanisms, and engaging learning activities assist students in overcoming academic hurdles and developing resilience, adaptability, and career readiness (Bacaling, 2018; Siddiky & Akter, 2021; Wang et al., 2024).

The regression model explained 20.1% of the variation in career path preferences, indicating that the learning-work competencies and track-strand challenges jointly influence the career decision-making process of graduates. Even though the variance explained can be considered small, this finding aligns with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994), which states that an individual's career choice is the result of an intricate interplay between personal attributes, learning experiences, self-efficacy beliefs, and environmental influences. The results of prior investigations also corroborate the assertion that career preferences are shaped by a blend of personal skills, social support, family impact, career exploration activities, and perceived job opportunities (Fernandez et al., 2023; Pham et al., 2024; Puson et al., 2024). Therefore, the remaining unexplained variance can be attributed to other personal and contextual factors not considered in the present study. Nonetheless, the significant contribution of learning-work

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competencies and track-strand challenges highlights the role of competency development and educational experiences in shaping SHS graduates' career path preferences.

Overall, the findings confirm that competency development has a stronger influence than educational challenges in shaping the career path preferences of SHS graduates. This suggests the need to improve learning experiences and opportunities for competency development to inform career choices and successful transition into postsecondary pathways.

CONCLUSION

Learning-work competencies and track-strand challenges significantly predict the career path preferences of Senior High School graduates in Capiz Province. Among the predictors, learning-work competencies were the most powerful predictor of career path preferences, implying that the higher the interpersonal, cognitive, self-management, and technical competencies of the graduates, the more they are inclined to develop clear and informed career choices. Track-strand challenges also significantly contributed to career path preferences but with a weaker influence. Results show that competency-based instruction, experiential learning, work immersion, and enhanced career guidance programs are important in helping SHS learners make informed and sustainable career decisions.

RECOMMENDATION

After considering the results of the study, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Students may engage in experiential, competency-based, and career-aligned learning experiences to develop skills and make informed educational and career decisions.
2. Teachers, guidance counselors, and parents may collaborate to provide competency-based instruction, career counseling, and informed support to help students align their interests, competencies, and career aspirations.
3. School administrators and the Department of Education may continue to enhance instructional resources, school facilities, career guidance services, professional development programs, and policies that support effective SHS implementation and equitable access to learning opportunities.
4. Higher Education Institutions may enhance articulation and bridging programs to support the successful transition of SHS graduates to higher education, employment, and other postsecondary pathways.
5. Future researchers may replicate this study in other contexts and explore other variables that may influence career path preferences and other SHS outcomes.

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