

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE NON-PREFERRED STRAND

Aldin M. Naquila¹, Romulo G. Doronio²,

¹Student, Educational Administration, Assumption College of Nabunturan, Philippines

²Professor in Master of Arts in Education, Educational Administration, Assumption College of Nabunturan, Philippines

ABSTRACT

This research explored the lived experiences of senior high school students enrolled in a non-preferred academic strand. The study delved into their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms, shedding light on the impact of this choice on their academic journey and personal development. By analyzing these experiences, the research aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of how students navigated educational pathways and made decisions in the context of a non-preferred strand. Through qualitative research, a total of 12 students were interviewed who had experience choosing a non-preferred strand. In gathering the data, in-depth interviews were used to gather relevant information. The findings of this study contributed to the existing literature by expanding our understanding of the educational paths chosen by senior high school students and the consequences they faced when pursuing a non-preferred strand. The results showed that placing heavy weight on these students, their assessment results, and attendance have been affected. Thus, it created stress with relation to their emotional and physical attributes. With this dilemma, students thought that school can be stressful and overwhelming to student regardless of the academic level. Many students, who abandon the idea of studying, can succumb to the method of academic cheating. Therefore, the teachers should cater the needs of this kind of students and simplify their teaching instructions and activities. They should develop instructional materials which are appropriate for the students' abilities as well, and which hone their mismatch skill to the strand they are enrolled for them to stay and love the track they chose.

Keyword: *Non-Preferred Strand, Experiences, Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, Phenomenological Study*

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally K-12 is used to describe the years of publicly funded elementary and secondary education that are offered in the US and Canada is an acronym for kindergarten through twelfth grade, used worldwide. This is comparable to government-funded school grades in several other nations, including Australia, Canada, China, Ecuador, Egypt, and India, as well as the Philippines, South Korea, and Australia (Glavin, 2024). In the US, views on K-12 education range from fully satisfied to utterly dissatisfied on a four-point scale. Lack of resources for schools or kids is the second most often mentioned theme, brought up by 23% of respondents. Mentions of low-income students' unequal access to high-quality education or racism are the most common (8%). Some point to understaffing (4%), low teacher pay (4%), lack of qualified teachers (4%), overcrowding (2%), and inadequate funding for schools (6%) (Saad, 2023).

In the Philippines, the higher school graduates' poor course selection contributes to the underemployment and unemployment rates of recently graduated students. With this information, the study identified the variables influencing the University of Rizal System job preferences of fourth-year high school students (Pascual, 2014). When asked about the operational issues they encounter, public schools cited inadequate facilities (433.1%), a teacher shortage (28.6%), and application processes to be able to provide different SHS tracks (17.5%). Conversely,

the primary obstacles faced by private schools were also inadequate facilities (12.7%), application restrictions to offer multiple SHS programs (13.2%), and a lack of student demand or enrollment (32.9%).

Bagong Silang National High School exclusively offers the General Academic Strand (GAS) as its single program of study at present. In Grade 11, this strand consists of 54 students, while in Grade 12 it has only 47 students enrolled. Importantly, out of these 54 students, only 21 would like to take up GAS from grade XI while in the XII grade, only thirteen out of forty-seven learners prefer this avenue. This therefore implies that a large number of the student population prefers the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) track. Bagong Silang National High School is chosen by a majority of students because no other choice exists since it is farthest away from the town center or Maragusan National High School which has more academic strands on offer.

1.1 Research Question

1. What are the experiences of senior high school students who are enrolled in a non-preferred strands?
2. What are the challenges encountered by senior high school students who are enrolled in a non-preferred strand?
3. How do senior high school students in a non-preferred strand cope with the challenges they encounter?
4. What are the insights of the senior high school students enrolled in a non-preferred strand?

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design and utilized a phenomenological approach. The choice of qualitative research was made to comprehensively comprehend individuals' perceptions of the world around them (Tenny, 2022). This involves delving into the experiences of individuals to understand a particular phenomenon. When crafting the methodology for qualitative research, it is crucial to detail the approach and elaborate the decisions made for data collection and analysis (Bhandari, 2022).

The primary objectives of phenomenological research design are to investigate the content of human experiences and to understand the meaning that people ascribe to them. It seeks to identify the essential components and underlying patterns of these experiences without imposing preconceived notions or interpretations (Delve, 2022).

2.1 Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is a valuable entity to be taken into account in the successful pursuit of investigation of any social phenomena. In this study, the researcher was highly inclined and qualified to pursue this investigation because he had been a senior high school teacher himself. Besides, the researcher had been a listener to students who confessed the hardships and dilemmas they faced while enrolling in the strand that they did not preferred in.

2.2 Research Participants

Through purposive sampling, 12 participants of the study were selected specifically for In-Depth Interviews (IDI). The participants were senior high school students, typically aged between 16 to 19 years old, and enrolled in the senior years of high school, specifically in Grades 11 or 12. Besides, these selected students were enrolled in the Senior High Schools of Maragusan district in the Division of Davao de Oro, located five kilometers away from the town's high schools.

The students who admitted to being enrolled in a non-preferred strand were the target participants. This study was carried out at National High School Bagong Silang. A total of 12 Senior High School students were chosen to partake in the research. There were already sufficient participants for the in-depth interview to give information on the chance to determine and develop the case topics. In a qualitative study, having fewer than 20 participants made it easier for the researcher to establish and maintain a strong relationship, which enhanced the

candid and open sharing of information. Additionally, this lessened some of the risks to validity and bias that come with doing qualitative research.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

To obtain authorization to conduct the research, the researcher first wrote and mailed letters to the superintendent of the schools division and then to the principal of each school.

Second, the individuals were identified using the purposive sampling approach. Along with their parents, they had to sign an informed consent form stating that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they were willing to lend their expertise as needed.

Third, as a way of gathering data, the participants were requested to take part in in-depth interviews (IDI) after receiving an orientation to the project. The procedure began with an orientation when the researchers introduced themselves, explained the goal of the conversation, and established the boundaries of the interview, including its duration and confidentiality. In a group discussion, the researchers also took some time to explain why they planned to record the interview and what kinds of technical concerns this posed (especially when speaking one at a time).

2.4 Data Analysis

Three coordinated processes made up data analysis: reducing data, displaying data, and coming to conclusions and verifying them. Data reduction is the process of coding, condensing the codes, and transforming the collected data into figures, tables, or a discussion. Reducing the amount of data was necessary to make it easier to access and comprehend. Data reduction made it easier and more effective to communicate findings. A common phrase for this sorting and filtering of data was "thematic analysis." Thematic analysis was a method of understanding qualitative data as well as a coding procedure. Information was presented, but it also hinted at how the information was connected, allowing for the making of conclusions

3. FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the results of the interview conducted as part of the research for this study. The categorization of the data includes the tables of the translated responses as important concepts to generate emerging themes. As our main methods for gathering data, I used in-depth interviews (IDI).

The responses were subjected to content analysis where the themes across all responses were drawn. In keeping with the research ethics for qualitative research, codes had been used in order to hide the identities of the research participants. The presentation of the result was done according to the order of specific research questions used in this study.

3.1 What are the experiences of senior high school students who are enrolled in a non-preferred strand?

What are your experiences relative to the motivation to pursue the strand you are enrolled in? The responses generated six themes: difficulty adapting to new environment, interesting and fun learning, motivation in finishing school and no other school.

Experiences Relative to the Motivation to Pursue the Strand Enrolled

The themes in this section were coming from the specific research question 1.1; 'What are your experiences relative to the motivation to pursue the strand you are enrolled in? The responses generated six themes: difficulty adapting to new environment, interesting and fun learning, motivation in finishing school and no other school.

Difficulty Adapting to New Environment. This is the foreseen barrier that hinders the participants to adapt to change of school or environment. Also, a new environment might have a different set of values, beliefs, and

customs than what the participant is used to. This difference can cause anxiety, confusion, and frustration, commonly known as culture shock. Participant 1 said,

Akong motivation is maglisod kog adapt sa new environment sa lain nga strand ug iskwelahan.
(My motivation is thinking that it is harder for me even though I study the strand I prefer because of a new environment.)

This was supported by Informant 3 who stated,

Lisod na mobalhin ug layo-layo ba. Lisod na pud mo balhin ug lahi nga strand kay mag adjust na pud ka dili lang sa mga subjects pati na sa mga classmates nako ug teachers.
(Transferring to another strand for me is hard because I have to adjust everything since I will have new classmates and teachers too.)

Positive Experiences Gained in Enrolling the Strand not Preferred.

The themes in this section were coming from the specific research question 1.2; ‘What positive experiences have you gained while enrolling in the strand you do not prefer?’ The responses generated five themes: convenience and motivation, easier compared to other strand, plenty of applicable lessons, learning computer-based subjects and friendship and upskilling.

Convenience and Motivation. Convenience influences motivation to learn the skill students are not interested about. Once students have enough amount of motivation, they can be able to get discipline and good habits that lead them to pursue their studies. Thus, Informant 1 voiced out that,

Daghan man. Ang isa na didto kay kanang di na ako need mamasaha ug kanang mamasaha. Di na kaayo gasto kay igo raman baktason ang skwelahan. So, duol ra, di kaayo gasto, tas kanang nindot man pud ang kanang GAS nga kanang strand kay general naman ang iyang i-tackle.
(There are a lot. One thing is that I will not spend for fare since the school is just near. GAS is also a good strand since this strand tackles everything in general.)

Besides, accumulating rewards is a form of extrinsic motivation. A student is motivated to do tasks successfully to get rewards after such as certificates, medals and higher grades. Also, Informant 12 announced that,

Ang positive lang sa akoa ha, ang positive bisan dili nako siya preferred na strand naka-kuha gihapon kog mga award gani kanang mga honors bisan dili nako siya preferred na strand.
(The positive idea is even though GAS is not my choice, I still receive awards because I am an honor student.)

Informant 9 viewed this drive as maintaining his/her grades in the strand,

Kanang na maintain nako ang tag-as na grado, bisan pag kanang lisudan ko sa mga subjects ani na mga strand.
(I still maintain my high grades even in the difficult subjects in GAS strand.)

Factors Affecting Academic Performance in Enrolling a Non-preferred Strand

The themes in this section were coming from the specific research question 1.3; ‘How does enrolling in a non-preferred strand affect your academic performance?’ The responses generated: experiencing positive effect, being not affected, learning theories and practice, and not interesting instructional content.

Experiencing Positive Effect. This elaborates how these students cope with the challenges under their non-preferred strand choice. This foretells that even in the new set of environments, they tend to change their negative mindset to positive which allows them to move forward and embrace the learnings they experience. Thus, Informant 2 explained that,

Good effect man ang epekto sa ako aning strand nga GAS. Diri nako na experience ang tanan. General man gud siya Sir mas dali ug gaan-gaan lang ang mga subject kumpara atong specific nga mga subjects sa usa ka strand, parehas na lang sa STEM nga dapat imung foundation sa science ug mathematics pag junior high school is solid para maka apas ka sa mga lessons. Wala kaayo lang na apektohan akong academic performance Sir kay general knowledge raman siya murag di lang layo sa junior high school, in upgraded form lang siya.

(There is a good effect in GAS – General Academic Strand. I experience everything because it is considered general track. The subjects are easy for me compared to STEM since it requires a good foundation in science and mathematics during junior high school. My academic performance is not affected because it is just an upgraded level of junior high school.)

Moreover, the positive experiences and practical application of the students' theoretical knowledge casually change the unfavorable thoughts to GAS – General Academic Strand to reliable learnings. Hence, Informant 8 supported the statement that,

Naka-apektu man pud siya sa akong ug good through experience is, kanang murag maka-decide pud diay ko sa ako, murag through ana maka-decide ko sa akong kuhaon.

(It has a good affect on me because I experience how to decide on my own.)

The positive impact of good experiences among students enrolled in the non-preferred strand tend to improve their skills. Just as Informant 11 concluded that,

Positive kaayo iyang effect bisan dili jud siya akong preffered na strand, murag mas na enhance pa akong writing skills, wala nako gi expect.

(There is a positive effect for me even if this is not my preferred strand because it enhances my writing skills that I did not expect to happen.)

3.2 What are the challenges encountered by the senior high school students who are enrolled in a non-preferred?

The questions were intended to gather information on the understanding of the research participants regarding: challenges encountered in enrolling a non-preferred strand, difficulties in performing tasks in non-referred strand, and factors affecting overall academic performance at school.

Challenges Encountered in Enrolling a Non-preferred Strand

The themes in this section were coming from the specific research question 2.2: 'What are the difficulties you encountered in performing the tasks in a non-preferred strand?' The responses generated five themes namely: lacking teaching-learning content, overwhelming required tasks, unrelatable subject content, and unfamiliarity with the subjects and insufficiency of school facility.

Unrelatable Subject Content. An understanding on the content helps children build vocabulary, learn about the world, and understand complex concepts. However, if students cannot relate to the topics given, they will not be interested anymore and it lowers their interest in learning the strand they are enrolled. In addition, Informant 4 stated that,

Kanang like for example, katong sa entrep jud na challenge jud ko ato kay dili man jud ko ingon nga into business kanang business minded murag na challenge ko didtua kay kanang general naman gud akong gikuha na strand, na challenge ko didtua.

(For example, in entrepreneurship, I was challenged because I am not business minded and the strand I took tackles general. I am a challenged.)

It is also connected to Informant 9 statement that said,

Paris sad anang subject na entrepreneurship dili man jud ko business minded kanang ma-lisudan ko.

(I am not business minded that the subject entrepreneurship is difficult for me.)

Difficulties Encountered in Performing Tasks in a Non-preferred Strand

The themes derived from the responses of the research informants to the specific research 2.1 ‘2.1 what are the difficulties you encountered in performing the tasks in a non-preferred strand?’ are presented in this section. The themes were: overcoming content gap, writing essay and navigating computer works.

Navigating Computer Works. This is the unfamiliar navigation of the computer software. Sometimes, students’ performance on a certain subject is contingent on having access to required tools especially computers. Informant 10 reported that,

Mga research sir, mag sige gunit ug computer layo lang jud sa SMAW.
(Research sir, very different from SMAW – Shielded Metal Arc Welding and keep on holding a computer.)

With this gap, students were not familiar with computer works. Informant 12 affirmed that,

Sa practical sa computer naa na silay na hibalan sa about atong sa mga typing ako wala pa naka try ato kay naa silay pa tabon-tabon ato sa ilang mga mata and then mag type sila sa computer so didtua ko nag lisud kay wala ko kabalo unsay first na himuon basta mag open ka sa computer.
(On the practical exam in computer, my classmates are knowledgeable enough that they know how to type the computer blindly, while I have not even tried doing that. I do not even know how to start up work after opening a unit.)

Factors Affecting Overall Academic Performance at School

The themes derived from the responses of the research informants to the specific research ‘2.3 how these difficulties affect your overall academic performance at school?’ are presented in this section. The themes were: lack of participation and getting low grades.

Getting Low Grades. This is a substandard performance in an activity, usually academic, in which an individual is graded on. Informant 2 said that,

Usahay gagmay akong scores sa mga exams or quizzes.
(Sometimes my score in exams and quizzes are low.)

There were reasons students get poor grades, such as the subject matter is too difficult, the teacher’s discussion is hard to understand. Informant 3 made clear that,

Ang epekto gyud aning di ka makakuha sa imung gusto nga strand ba kay ang mga grado gyud. Maglisod kog kuha ug mga dagko nga grado.
(Grades are affected when you take up the strand that you do not prefer. It is hard to obtain high and good grades.)

Getting low grades could affect students’ motivation to learn the strand they were enrolled in. So, Informant 9 said that,

Kanang kuan syempre, mugamay ang grado sa mga dili nako ganahan na mga subject.
(Of course, I do not get high grades on subjects I am not interested with.)

The idea was supported with informant 4 realization that,

Naka-apekto siya labi na sa kanang PR na subject kay mobo jud akong grado didtua.
(It was affected especially in PR – Practical Research subject where my grades are low.)

When students' performance is low even though they already doing best, is frustrating for them. It was attested by the narratives of Informant 7,

Kanang kuan, mag-buhat jud ug mga lisod na project tas dili matarong ug grado. Gamay ra akong grado.

(When making tough projects and they do not get rated properly, I would get small grades.)

3.3 How do senior high school students in a non-preferred strand cope with the challenges they encounter?

Three specific research questions were used to gather data and information for this major research question. The questions were intended to gather information on the understanding of the research participants regarding: lived experiences, challenges and difficulties, and coping mechanisms.

Coping Mechanisms with the challenges Encountered in Non-preferred Strand

The themes derived from the responses of the research informants to the specific research '3.1. How do you cope with the challenges of enrolling in a non-preferred strand?' are presented in this section. The themes were:

Ask Help from Friends. By asking friends for help, students were demonstrating that they respect others and skills and that they were comfortable being open with them too. Besides, Informant 1 said,

Akong coping mechanism is akong mga friends. Matabangan ko nila.
(My coping mechanism are my friends. They will help me.)

This also implies that students need help with something specific sometimes that was why Informant 12 affirmed that,

Na-cope nako ang challenges kay with the help of my friends' pud.
(I was able to cope up with the challenges because of my friends' help.)

3.4 What are the learning insights of Senior High School Enrolled in a Non-preferred Strand?

This section presents the results to the 4th major research question; 'what are the learning insights of senior high school students enrolled in a non-preferred strand?' One specific research question was used to gather data and information for this major research question. The question was intended to gather information on the understanding of the research participants regarding their insights and thoughts about enrolling to a non-preferred strand.

Learning Gained while Enrolling to a Non-preferred Strand

The themes derived from the responses of the research informants to the specific research '4.1. What are your learnings and realization while enrolling to a non-preferred strand' are presented in this section. The themes were: socio-economic status of parents, parents' job opportunity, and personal interest.

Socio-economic Status of Parents. This deals with the level of income of parents. Poor academic performance is associated with children who come from low socioeconomic classes. However, this challenged students to choose economically convenient. Thus, informant 5 said that,

Kanang mas duol raman among balay dire sa iskwelahan maong makaingon ko nga mas sayon sa ilaha kay dili na sila kailangan mo kanang maggahin pag pang pamasahi nako.

(Our school is just near that is why I could say that it is also easier for my parents to provide my needs since they won't spend for fare.)

To study near their household creates convenience to students compared to choosing their preferred strand in distant school. It allows parents to perform their responsibilities. Informant 4 reported that,

Mas maatiman man ko nila, mas sayon nga adire ko ni skwela kay kong naa koy kinahanglan ma duol ra dayon nako sila. Convenient sa akoang part, sa akong ba. sa ilaha pud diay.

(My parents can take care of me. It is easier for them if I just study here. If I needed something abruptly, they can provide easily since I live nearby. It is convenient for me as well for them too.)

This is also supported with informant 3 statement,

Dili gasto para sa ilaha nga magpamiliti kay duol lang man, mga pangbaon og paniudto kay mag uli raman ko para mag lunch.

(I would not spend money for fare and lunch since I live nearby.)

Having less finances will let parents find accurate resources to help these students succeed academically.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Enrolling in a non-preferred strand is a sign of mismatch. It is elaborated in most studies that there is major mismatch between students' educational needs and the skills demanded for them to develop.

Despite the fact that senior high school (SHS) is designed to meet students' needs. Additionally, students often have opportunity to improve their acquired academic skills and competencies in this two-year high school. Pupils can select a specialism depending on their interests and abilities. This may have an impact, though, as it also takes into account the institutions' ability to provide a range of specializations. Furthermore, by giving these pupils a lot of weight, their attendance and evaluation scores have suffered. As a result, it caused tension about their physical and emotional characteristics. Students believed that regardless of their intellectual ability, education may be unpleasant and burdensome due to this conundrum. A lot of pupils who give up on learning may fall victim to academic dishonesty.

Therefore, the teachers should cater the needs of this kind of students and simplify their teaching instructions and activities. They should develop instructional materials which are appropriate for the students' abilities as well, and which hone their mismatch skill to the strand they are enrolled for them to stay and love the track they chose. Moreover, the school should modify the curriculum that tend to provide the needs of the students.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors offer heartfelt appreciation to their families for the unwavering support, the Department of Education Head of Offices who give an early response to conduct a study, experts' guidance, and to all respondents.

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