



**CAREER PATHING OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING
AND MATHEMATICS (STEM) GRADUATES: BASIS FOR
POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

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ABSTRACT

This study used a descriptive-qualitative research design under phenomenology to formulate policy recommendations on the career paths of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) graduates. Twenty-five (25) participants, who graduated from 2017-2018 to 2021-2022, were selected through purposive sampling. An interview guide, validated by experts, was used to gather data. The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis. The study found that most STEM graduates pursued college degrees, often based on family and friends' suggestions. Fifteen (15) took courses aligned with their STEM strand, while nine (9) pursued unrelated fields, and one (1) chose to stop after graduation. The findings suggest a need to reassess senior high school program objectives and implement proper orientation to ensure career path alignment.

Keywords: *Career Path, STEM Graduates, Policy Recommendation*

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INTRODUCTION

The Philippine educational system underwent a major reform in 2012 with the K–12 Basic Education Program, later institutionalized by Republic Act No. 10533. This transition added two years of Senior High School (SHS) to better prepare students for higher education, employment, and entrepreneurship. While designed to bridge the gap between secondary school and professional life, the early implementation was often met with confusion regarding the program's long-term utility.

Compared to neighboring Southeast Asian nations, the Philippines' K–12 system is a recent development. It requires students to complete both Junior and Senior High School for university eligibility. A core feature of SHS is the "tracking" system, which requires students to choose a specific strand—such as STEM—based on their interests and career goals (Enderun, 2025).

This specialized structure aims to foster more informed academic and professional decision-making (Cueva, 2022). The STEM strand specifically serves as a primary pathway for careers in medicine, engineering, and technology (Rin et al., 2021). Beyond individual success, these pathways are intended to drive national social and economic progress (DepEd, as cited in Rin et al., 2021).

The shift toward a strand-based curriculum was also intended to reduce the skills mismatch that has long plagued the Philippine labor market. By allowing students to specialize early, the Department of Education aimed to create a more seamless transition from the

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classroom to high-value technical sectors. This alignment is crucial not only for the global competitiveness of Filipino graduates but also for the internal stability of the country's developing economy, which increasingly relies on innovation and scientific expertise.

However, a disconnect often exists between the program's design and graduate outcomes. While the STEM curriculum focuses on science and technology, many graduates eventually pursue non-aligned degrees, enter the workforce immediately, or face educational delays due to financial or personal constraints. These non-linear paths suggest a significant gap in the efficacy of the current system, indicating that academic preparation alone may not be sufficient to overcome external socio-economic pressures or shifting personal priorities during the transition to adulthood.

Moreover, external factors like family expectations and peer pressure often complicate career choices, sometimes overriding the specialized training received in Senior High School. Such deviations challenge the sustainability of the K-12 tracking system and the adequacy of existing career guidance. Analyzing these shifts is therefore vital to determine if mismatches stem from systemic gaps or naturally evolving student interests.

This study investigated the 2017-2022 career trajectories of STEM graduates in Iloilo to bridge the gap between policy and practice. By analyzing academic choices and work experiences, the research aimed to provide data-driven recommendations for improving career guidance and support systems for future graduates.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology, including the research design, sampling design, participants, data gathering procedures, research instruments, validity, and data analysis used in the study.

Research Method

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative research method within a phenomenological framework, aiming to understand the meaning and experiences of human involvement in the context of STEM graduates' career paths.

Research Design

Developed by Sandelowski (2000) and studied by Hall, S and Leibenberg L. (2024), Qualitative Research Design is a methodological approach that provides a comprehensive summary of events or experiences. It differs from other qualitative methods like phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography, as it focuses on the 'who, what, and where' of experiences without deep theorization or recontextualization (Hall, S and Leibenberg L. (2024).

The researcher employed a descriptive qualitative research design to carry out this study. This approach involves the collection and analysis of complete narrative and visual (non-numerical) data to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon of interest (Hall, S and Leibenberg L. (2024).

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To gather detailed information, the researcher conducted one-on-one, in-depth interviews with the participants, providing them the opportunity to openly share their experiences, perspectives, and insights. This method aimed to collect rich and comprehensive data directly from the participants' responses.

Participants of the Study

The total number of participants in this study were twenty - five (25) Senior High School, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) graduates and five from the school year 2017-2022 of Iloilo City and Iloilo Province were taken purposely in this study.

A total of fourteen (14) males and eleven (11) females were identified as the participants of the study that represented the whole STEM graduates from the school year 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and school year 2021-2022.

Sampling Design

This study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, to select participants. In other words, individuals were "deliberately" chosen based on a reasoned selection process. This method involved selecting specific participants or cases "based on a specific goal and not at random" (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

Specifically, five (5) STEM graduates from each school year between 2017 and 2022 were deliberately chosen due to their relevance to the study's objectives, resulting in a purposeful selection of participants from Iloilo City and Iloilo Province.

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Specifically, 5 STEM graduates from each school year (2017-2022) were chosen based on their relevance to the study's goals, totaling a deliberate selection of participants from Iloilo City and Province.

Research Instrument

The study used a researcher-made questionnaire as the research instrument, consisting of two parts: Part 1 gathered participants' personal data and Part 2 contained interview guide questions to collect data for the study.

Validity of the Research Instrument

The questionnaire used in this study was first reviewed and modified by the adviser, then forwarded to the panel of experts for the validation. All comments and suggestions relative to the validation of the tool were revised and considered.

Data Gathering Procedure

After obtaining approval from the Graduate School's Dean and Research Adviser, the researcher identified the study participants and prepared a letter of intent to conduct the research.

The letter was signed and approved by the proper authorities and submitted to the School Principal. Upon approval, the researcher obtained a list of STEM graduates from 2017-2022.

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A confidentiality agreement was prepared and given to each participant, and consent forms were distributed personally or electronically. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews, email (Google form), private messages, or other media.

The researcher compiled, categorized, and interpreted the data. Of the 25 participants, 20 chose face-to-face interviews, and 5 opted for Google forms. Seven participants wished to remain anonymous, while the others agreed to be named but not recorded.

With participant consent, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews using an interview guide and recorded the conversations (with permission). Proper health protocols were observed during face-to-face interviews. After completing the interviews, the researcher consolidated the data using a thematic approach.

Data Analysis

The information gathered and interpreted was analyzed using a thematic approach.

The thematic analysis is a procedure in distinguishing patterns in qualitative data. In the studies of Maguire and Delahunt (2017), thematic analysis objectives is to distinguish themes, such as data patterns, that are relevant or engaging and later utilize these to connect the findings or results about the problem. It is a synthesis, analysis and interpretation of the data collected and to give meaning to them.

This method of thematic analysis is often used for group of printed work, such as an interview and transcript. The researcher carefully analyzes the figures to associate common themes: recurring topic, scheme, and patterns of meaning.

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From the different approaches in conducting topic analysis, the most common form is based on a six-step process: data entry, coding, topic generation, topic navigation, topic definition as well as naming, and writing. Conducting this procedures aids in avoidance of the bias confirmation when stating an analysis (Caulfield, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated the career paths of STEM graduates from Iloilo City and Province, spanning five batches from 2017-2022.

Using a descriptive-qualitative approach under phenomenology, the researcher gathered data from 25 STEM graduates through interviews and thematic analysis.

This study explores the career paths of STEM graduates from Iloilo City and Province, batch 2017-2022, including their college choices, work experiences, and reasons for choosing their careers.

The study found that most STEM graduates pursued higher education and part-time jobs to support their studies. Out of 25 participants, 16 proceeded to college, while 8 looked for jobs to support their families. The majority of participants chose courses aligned with the STEM strand.

The reasons for choosing their careers were influenced by course alignment, family, friends, and personal choices. Most participants aspired to earn a degree and pursue higher education.

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However, some participants took different paths, such as stopping schooling to find a job or losing interest in studying. Nevertheless, it can be inferred that SHS graduates generally consider their career paths and courses after graduation, often aligning with their SHS strand.

The study found that out of the STEM graduates from five batches (2017-2022), sixteen (16) pursued college education to earn a degree, while eight (8) opted to find employment to support their studies and families.

Senior High School graduates more specifically the seventeen (17) out of twenty-five (25) participants aligned their courses to STEM strand, the remaining eight (8) chose their course not aligned to the strand which they graduated from. And one (1) participant chose to stop from schooling or did not proceed to college due to lost of interest after graduating in Senior High School.

After graduating in Senior High School, most of them realizes that they can't easily find a job in which from the beginning of the program they thought this could help them for self-fulfillment.

Since friends and family (parents and closest relatives or guardian) influence the decision making in choosing what career path to take, they need also to be enlightened with the rationale or objectives of the said program. This will help or aid the graduates in the near future in the chosen career or field.

Career guidance program plays a very important role in the decision making of Senior High School especially when choosing a course to take when entering to college and what to

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do after graduation for which it is an aid for them to guide which strand best suit for their chosen courses. Thus, it need to be more strengthen and parents should be involve in the implementation of career pathing of senior high school graduates.

Conclusion

This study recommends reassessing the objectives of the Senior High School program, particularly in its different strands.

Although the program aims to prepare students for college and equip them with global competencies, the findings show that 9 out of 25 STEM graduates chose courses not aligned with their strand.

To improve the program, it is suggested that career guidance be emphasized, enabling students to make informed decisions about their career paths before entering college. A more comprehensive approach to crafting objectives and designing programs that align with the senior high school program's goals is needed.

The study also recommends an enhancement program for teachers, career advocates, and guidance counselors on implementing career guidance programs. The DepEd policy on career guidance should be strengthened and aligned with the senior high school program's objectives.

Comprehensive training and seminars should be provided to equip educators with the skills to guide students in developing their capabilities and exploring career opportunities.

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Career guidance plays a vital role in students' decision-making, and parents should be involved in the implementation of career pathing for senior high school graduates.

The study highlights the importance of external factors, such as family, in influencing students' career decisions.

It is recommended that families be involved in the implementation of career guidance programs in schools. This would aid in guiding students in choosing their career paths and aligning their courses in college.

Furthermore, future research could replicate this study on a wider scope, considering other related variables to provide more comprehensive insights.

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