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A Tracer Study on Senior High School Graduates of Narra District in Narra, Palawan

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study was conducted to assess the current status of Senior High School (SHS) graduates of Narra Districts from batches 2018 to 2020. The data were obtained through a researcher-made questionnaire. The responses were treated using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.The average age of the respondents was twenty-one years old, majority are female, single. and had taken the academic track. Out of four hundred (400) Senior High School (SHS) graduates-respondents, three hundred seventy-two (372) enrolled in the university and took Education, Engineering, Computer-related, Agriculture, Business, Social Science, Medical-related, and Culinary Arts courses. The remaining number of graduates was distributed to have undergone middle-level skills, landed a job or stayed at home. Graduates of Accountancy and Business Management (ABM), Humanities and Social Science (HUMMS), General Academic Strands (GAS), and Technology Vocational Livelihood (TVL) – Agri-Fishery Arts who pursued college education have enrolled in college courses which are aligned with their Senior High School tracks/Strands were Academic -Sciences, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), TVL-Home Economics, and TVL-Information and Communication. Technology were not aligned wit their senior high school tracks/strands. The Senior High School graduates perceived that the acquired skills from their Senior High School education were systems, foundations, interpersonal, thinking, and basic and technology skills, resource and information management. They further perceived that the Senior high School curriculum offers a balanced approach to learning, helps them acquire and master lifelong learning, responds to the community's needs and prepare individuals for higher education and employment.

Keywords: *Employability, Alignment, Postsecondary Pathways, Skills Acquisition, Curriculum Evaluation, Career Guidance*

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping human capital, fostering social mobility, and sustaining national development. In an era marked by rapid globalization, digital transformation, and technological innovation, education systems are increasingly expected to produce graduates equipped not only with foundational knowledge but also with higher-order competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and adaptability. These competencies are widely regarded as essential for participation in modern labor markets characterized by shifting occupational structures and evolving skill demands (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019; World Bank, 2019).

Globally, concerns persist regarding the mismatch between educational outcomes and labor market requirements, particularly in developing economies. High rates of graduate unemployment and underemployment signal structural gaps in education-to-work transitions and raise questions about the relevance and effectiveness of existing curricula (McGrath et al., 2020). Research has consistently emphasized that schooling systems must move beyond content mastery toward employability-oriented and life-relevant skill development to remain responsive to societal needs (Binkley et al., 2012).

In response to these challenges, the Philippine government undertook one of the most comprehensive education reforms in the country's history through the enactment of Republic Act No. 10533, otherwise known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. This reform institutionalized the K to 12 Basic Education Program, expanding the basic education cycle and strengthening curriculum frameworks to align Philippine education with international standards and workforce requirements (Luistro et al., 2013). Central to this reform is the introduction of Senior High School (SHS), which serves as the terminal stage of secondary education and is designed to prepare learners for higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, or middle-level skills development.

Senior High School offers learners four major tracks—Academic, Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL), Sports, and Arts and Design—each with specialized strands intended to align students' interests and competencies with future educational and occupational pathways (Department of Education [DepEd], 2015). The Academic Track includes strands such as Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM); Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS); and the General Academic Strand (GAS). The TVL Track encompasses Agri-Fishery Arts, Home Economics, Industrial Arts, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and Maritime specializations, among others (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2012). Track and strand offerings vary across schools depending on community needs, resources, and local labor market demands.

The graduation of the first cohort of K to 12 learners in School Year 2017–2018 marked a critical juncture in Philippine education reform. Since then, increasing attention has been directed toward evaluating whether the program has achieved its intended outcomes, particularly in terms of graduates' employability, college readiness, skills acquisition, and alignment between SHS specialization and

postsecondary trajectories. Internationally, tracer studies are recognized as a robust evaluation tool for examining graduates' transitions, competencies, and perceptions of curriculum effectiveness, thereby providing empirical evidence for policy refinement and institutional improvement (Schomburg, 2016).

Within this evaluative framework, localized tracer studies are especially important in contexts where socioeconomic conditions, educational access, and employment opportunities vary significantly across regions. The Municipality of Narra, Palawan, presents a relevant case for examining the outcomes of the SHS program due to its mixed rural–urban characteristics and diverse educational and employment pathways available to graduates. Understanding how SHS graduates in this locality transition into higher education, employment, or skills training—and whether their SHS tracks and strands align with these pathways can provide valuable insights for curriculum planning and local education governance.

Accordingly, this study aimed to trace the post–Senior High School status of graduates from the Narra Districts, Palawan, covering batches from 2018 to 2020. Specifically, it examined the graduates' socio-demographic characteristics, postsecondary educational pursuits, employment status, acquired skills, and perceptions of the K to 12 Curriculum. It further investigated the alignment between graduates' completed SHS tracks/strands and their current college programs or occupations. By generating empirical evidence at the local level, this study contributes to ongoing national discussions on the effectiveness, relevance, and responsiveness of the K to 12 reform.

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the post-graduation status of Senior High School graduates from the Narra Districts, Palawan. Specifically, the study aimed to describe the socio-demographic profile of the graduates in terms of age, sex, civil status, and Senior High School track or strand specialization. It further sought to determine the proportion of graduates who pursued higher education and to identify the degree programs in which they were enrolled, as well as those who engaged in middle-level skills development and the specific courses undertaken. In addition, the study examined the employment status of the graduates and explored the extent to which their completed Senior High School tracks or strands aligned with their current college programs or occupational roles. The study also identified the skills acquired by the graduates during their Senior High School education and assessed their perceptions of the effectiveness and relevance of the Department of Education's K to 12 Curriculum in preparing them for postsecondary education, employment, and skills development.

The findings of this study provide evidence-based insights into the outcomes of the Senior High School program in the Municipality of Narra, Palawan. By examining alignment between SHS specialization and postsecondary pathways, the study contributes to evaluating the relevance and effectiveness of the K to 12 Curriculum at the local level.

For DepEd officials and policymakers, the results may serve as a basis for curriculum review, policy enhancement, and the development of context-responsive SHS offerings. For school administrators and teachers, the findings may inform improvements in career guidance, instructional strategies, and student support mechanisms. For students and parents, the study offers empirical guidance on informed track and

strand selection. Finally, for researchers and future scholars, this study adds to the limited body of localized tracer research on SHS graduates in the Philippines and may serve as a reference for comparative and longitudinal studies.

This study focused on Senior High School graduates from the Narra Districts, Narra, Palawan, who completed SHS between 2018 and 2020. It examined graduates' socio-demographic profiles, postsecondary status, acquired skills, perceptions of the K to 12 Curriculum, and alignment between SHS tracks/strands and subsequent educational or occupational pathways.

The findings are limited to the specified cohorts and locality and may not be generalizable to all SHS graduates in the Philippines. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to recall bias and response subjectivity.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in the two educational districts of the Municipality of Narra, Palawan, namely Narra del Norte and Narra del Sur. Narra is one of the major municipalities in southern Palawan, characterized by both rural and semi-urban communities and served by several public secondary schools offering Senior High School programs. The locale was purposively selected due to its relevance to the implementation of the K to 12 Curriculum and the accessibility of respondents. The researcher's residence within the municipality facilitated efficient coordination with schools and local education authorities, enabling timely data collection and contextual understanding of the educational environment.

The study employed a quantitative research approach utilizing a descriptive–correlational research design. The descriptive component aimed to document the socio-demographic profile of Senior High School graduates, their post-graduation status, acquired skills, and perceptions of the K to 12 Curriculum. Meanwhile, the correlational component examined the relationship and alignment between the graduates' completed Senior High School tracks or strands and their current college degree programs or occupational engagements. This design was deemed appropriate as it allowed for systematic description of graduate outcomes while also determining the extent of alignment between educational preparation and postsecondary pathways without manipulating any variables.

The respondents of the study were Senior High School graduates from all public secondary schools in the two school districts of Narra, Palawan, who completed their Senior High School education during School Years 2018 to 2020. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that only graduates who had completed the K to 12 Senior High School program and were eligible for postsecondary education, employment, or skills training were included in the study. This sampling method was considered appropriate given the tracer-study nature of the research, which requires respondents with specific characteristics relevant to the study objectives.

Data for the study were gathered using a researcher-developed questionnaire designed to elicit information relevant to the objectives of the study. The instrument consisted of four major parts. Part I gathered data on the respondents' socio-demographic profile, including age, sex, civil status, and Senior

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High School track or strand specialization. Part II focused on the respondents' post-graduation status, such as college enrollment, middle-level skills training, and employment. Parts III and IV consisted of five-point Likert-scale statements that measured the graduates' acquired skills and their perceptions of the K to 12 Curriculum, respectively.

The items in Part III were adapted from the Employability Skills Survey developed by into Careers of the University of Oregon (2014), ensuring that the skills assessed were aligned with internationally recognized employability competencies. To establish content validity, the questionnaire underwent expert validation by specialists in education and curriculum studies. The instrument was subsequently pilot-tested on thirty (30) Senior High School graduates who were not part of the target respondents. Feedback from the pilot test was used to refine item clarity, structure, and reliability prior to actual data collection.

Data collection followed a systematic and ethical process. Initially, formal permission to conduct the study and access school records was sought through written requests submitted to the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent and the School Principals of the participating schools. Upon approval, a list of eligible Senior High School graduates was obtained, from which respondents were selected.

Given the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, both face-to-face and online modalities were utilized in the distribution and collection of questionnaires. Selected respondents received either printed questionnaires or electronic survey forms, depending on accessibility and prevailing health protocols. Prior to administration, the researcher provided clear instructions to ensure that respondents understood how to properly accomplish the questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were collected, checked for completeness, and prepared for analysis.

The data gathered were coded, tabulated, and subjected to appropriate statistical analyses. Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and post-graduation status. Means and standard deviations were computed to analyze responses related to acquired skills and perceptions of the K to 12 Curriculum. The results were presented in both tabular and narrative forms to facilitate clarity, interpretation, and discussion of findings in relation to the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 ***Demographic Profile of Senior High School Graduates (n = 400)***

Characteristic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)		
18 and younger	40	10.00
19–20	173	43.25
21–22	152	38.00
23–24	30	7.50
25 and older	5	1.25

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Characteristic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Mean age	*21 years*	
Sex		
Male	89	22.25
Female	311	77.75
Civil Status		
Single	391	97.75
Married	9	2.25
Senior High School Track		
Academic	268	67.00
Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL)	123	30.75
Arts and Design	7	1.75
Sports	2	0.50
Academic Strand (n = 268)		
Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM)	33	12.31
General Academic Strand (GAS)	160	59.70
Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS)	62	23.13
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)	13	4.85
Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Strand (n = 123)		
Agri-Fishery Arts	22	17.89
Home Economics	58	47.15
Information and Communications Technology	29	23.58
Industrial Arts	14	11.38

Note. *Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding. Subgroup percentages were computed based on the total number of respondents within each category.*

The respondents' socio-demographic profiles such as age, gender, civil status, and the Senior High School track and strand they took were presented in Table 1. Result revealed that many (43.25%) of the respondents were 19 to 20 years old; 152 (38%) were 21-22 years old; 40 (10%) 18 and younger, 30 (7.5%) were 23-24 years old; and 5 (%) were 25 and older. The mean age of the respondents was 21 years old.

The findings revealed that graduates would have been at the appropriate educational level had they not stopped studying. The age distribution was expected because most of the SHS students will be between the ages of 17 and 19 when they graduate from SHS. As a result, the respondents were gener4ally 21 years old at the time of the survey/data collection for this study. This coincides with the study findings of Liwanag (2021), wherein it found that the mean age of the respondents is 21.25.

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For the gender, 311 (77.75%) of the respondents are females and 89 (22.25%) are males. In termsof civil status, 391 (97.75%) were single and only 9 (2.25%) were married. This implies that there was a disparity in the respondents' gender and civil status since the females and singles are dominant in terms of number. This is in consonance with the case in the national scenario where females have always been outperforming males in terms of pursuing education while the number of married respondents is way a lower than the number of Filipinos who married by age 20 in 2017 (Philippine Statistics Authority PSA and ICF, 2018).

In terms of the respondents' chosen track in their Senior High School, 268 (67%) took Academic Track; 123 (30.75%) took Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Track; 7 (1.75%) took Arts and Design Track and only 2 (.50%) took Sports track.

This suggests that Academic Track, regardless of the strands, was popular among SHS graduates, thus, implying that students were more likely to enroll in a career-specific track such as an Academic (Quintos et.al., 2021). Moreover, Arts and Design and Sports Tracks were unpopular among SHS students due to the fact that they required an inclination to arts and sports in order to get interested in such (CIIT Philippines, 2020).

Of 268 who took the Academic Track 160 (59.70%) chose General Academic Strand (GAS); 62 (23.13%) chose Humanities and Social Science (HUMMS); 33 (12.31%) Accountancy, Business and Management (ABM); and 13 (4.85%) Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Furthermore, among the 123 TVL graduates, 58 (47.15%) of them specialized in Home Economics, 29 (17.89%) specialized in Information and Communication Technology, 22 (17.89%) specialized in Agri-Fishery Arts, and only 14 (11.38%) specialized in Industrial Arts. It means that very few took the specialization that requires physical strength such as Carpentry, Electrical Installation and Maintenance, and Agri Crop Production to name a few.

The result that very few took the specialization that requires physical strength such as Carpentry, Electrical Installation and Maintenance, and Agri Crop Production. This suggests that when picking their senior high school courses, students examine the factors that would affect them after graduation. Only a small percentage of graduates pursue higher education as a means of furthering their abilities obtained in senior high school, and only a small percentage of graduates engage in entrepreneurial activity (Padios, Jr., et al., 2021).

Table 2 ***Distribution of Senior High School Graduates Enrolled in Higher Education and Degree Programs Taken (n = 372)***

Category	Degree Program / Track	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Senior High School Track of Enrolled Graduates			

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Category	Degree Program / Track	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Academic Track		248	66.67
Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track		115	30.91
Arts and Design Track		7	1.88
Sports Track		2	0.54
Education Programs			
Bachelor of Elementary Education		169	45.43
Bachelor of Secondary Education		23	6.18
Bachelor of Physical Education (BPEd)		3	0.81
Engineering Programs			
BS Agricultural Engineering		1	0.27
BS Chemical Engineering		1	0.27
BS Civil Engineering		4	1.08
BS Electrical Engineering		3	0.81
BS Marine Engineering		3	0.81
BS Petroleum Engineering		1	0.27
Agriculture and Fisheries Programs			
BS Agriculture		28	7.53
BS Agricultural Science		6	1.61
BS Agribusiness		8	2.15
Culinary Arts		1	0.27
Business and Management Programs			
BS Accountancy		2	0.54
BS Business Administration		6	1.62
BS Entrepreneurship		35	9.41
BS Tourism Management		22	5.91
BS Hospitality Management		28	7.53
BS Hotel and Restaurant Management		12	3.23
Computer-Related Programs			
BS Computer Science		6	1.61
BS Information Technology		2	0.54
Social Science Programs			
BS Social Work		3	0.81
Health and Medical Programs			
BS Medical Technology		2	0.54
BS Nursing		3	0.81

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Note. *Percentages were computed based on the total number of respondents who pursued higher education (n = 372). Minor discrepancies in totals may occur due to rounding.*

The distribution of respondents who enrolled in the university and degree programs taken are presented in Table 2. It showed that there were 372 SHS graduates who enrolled in the University, of which 248 (66.67%) were Academic Track graduates, 115 (30.91%) were Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Track graduates, 7 (1.88%) were Arts and Design Track graduates, and 2 (0.54%) were Sports Track graduates.

The graduates were enrolled to the different courses in college such as; Education courses in which many (45.43%) of the respondents took Bachelor in Elementary Education; Engineering courses; Agri-fishery courses; in which 28 (7.53%) of the respondents took BS Agriculture; Business Management courses in which the graduates opted to enroll in BS Entrepreneurship (5.91%), BS Hospitality Management (7.53%), BS Tourism Management (5.91%), there were graduates who enrolled in Computer related courses and Medical related courses.

This data deduce that Senior High School graduates were more inclined to pursue a college education as reflected in the percentage of college enrollment data. This is in contrast with the previous data that showed only around of the higher school graduates proceed to college after graduation (Mateo, 2018). It can also be construed that there are college courses or programs that are popular among the SHS graduates such as education and business courses. This agrees with the study findings of Ghaz (2019) where Business, Education, Engineering, Information technology, and Agriculture emerged as the top five known courses in the Philippines.

Table 3 ***Distribution of Senior High School Graduates Enrolled in Middle-Level Skills Training and Courses Taken (n = 114)***

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Senior High School Track of TESDA Enrollees		
Academic Strand Graduates	58	50.88
Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Graduates	53	46.49
Arts and Design Track Graduates	1	0.88
Sports Track Graduates	2	1.75
TESDA-Accredited Courses*		
Agricultural Crop Production	26	20.31
Animal Production	3	2.34
Bartending	6	4.69
Beauty Care / Barbering	8	6.25
Bookkeeping	7	5.47
Bread and Pastry Production	15	11.72
Caregiving	3	2.34
Commercial Cooking	3	2.34

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Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Computer System Servicing	13	10.16
Contact Center Services	1	0.78
Cookery	12	9.38
Driving	15	11.72
Electrical Installation and Maintenance	12	9.38
Events Management Services	1	0.78
Food and Beverage Services	12	9.38
Front Office Services	1	0.78
Furniture and Cabinet Making	1	0.78
Housekeeping	9	7.03
Massage Therapy	3	2.34
Organic Agriculture	7	5.47
Shielded Metal Arc Welding	2	1.56

Note. *Percentages were computed based on the total number of respondents who pursued middle-level skills training (n = 114). Multiple responses were allowed; therefore, totals may exceed 100%.*

As for the graduates who enrolled in the middle-level skills development and the TESDA courses were shown in Table 3. There were 114 out of 400 graduates who enrolled in TESDA. The majority (50.88%) were graduates of Academic Track, 53 (46.49%) were graduates of Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Track, 1 (0.88%) was an Arts and Design Track graduate, and 2 (1.75%) were Sports Track graduates. The courses they enrolled in TESDA were distributed to the following: Agriculture Crop Production (20.31%); Bread and Pastry Production and Driving (15%); Computer System Servicing (13%); and cookery, Electrical Installation and Maintenance, Food Beverage Service (12%).

The number of SHS graduates who pursued middle-level skills development in various TESDA courses or qualifications could mean that the graduates were able to understand the importance of technical skills or middle-level skills presented and discussed with them during their SHS education. It can be noted that even graduates of Academic, Arts and Design, and Sports Tracks underwent to middle-level skills development. These findings only imply the need for strengthening the Technical-Vocational Livelihood (TVL) Track in the SHS program. Also, having TVL specializations could be made as an elective on the General Academic Strand.

Table 4 ***Distribution of Senior High School Graduates Who Are Employed by Senior High School Track (n = 54)***

Senior High School Track	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Academic Track	25	46.30
Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track	27	50.00
Arts and Design Track	1	1.85

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Senior High School Track	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sports Track	1	1.85

Note. *Percentages were computed based on the total number of employed respondents (n = 54). Minor discrepancies may occur due to rounding.*

Table 4 shows the number of graduates who were employed after SHS graduation. It can be seen that 25 (46.3%) of the Academic track graduates; 27 (50%) TVL; 1 (1.85%) from Arts and Design and Sports rack were employed. Since some of the SHS graduates seem to enter the world of work after graduation, it is imperative to make them work-ready as Abas and Imam (2016) mentioned, employers are constantly on the lookout for employable graduates who are not only keen to demonstrate employability skills but also qualified to use those abilities to create a productive work environment.

Consequently, a major element of high-quality training is the quality of graduates. This will ensure that graduates have the essential knowledge, skills, and values to work in their chosen industries (Palafox et al., 2018). Furthermore, a person who is considered work-ready has the qualities that will help the company succeed (Borg et al., 2017). Although graduate attributes influence how they enter the workforce, forming the kind of contributions graduates can make in their careers and as citizens are relatively important (Bridgstock, 2009; Van Schalkwyk et al., 2010).

Table 5 ***Alignment of Senior High School Track/Strand with College Course Enrolled (n = 372)***

SHS Track / Strand	Number of Graduates	Enrolled College Course	Aligned with SHS Strand/Track	Not Aligned with SHS Strand/Track
Academic Track				
ABM	31	Frequency	16	15
		Percentage (%)	51.61	48.39
HUMSS	58	Frequency	44	14
		Percentage (%)	75.86	24.14
GAS	149	Frequency	124	25
		Percentage (%)	83.22	16.78
STEM	13	Frequency	5	8
		Percentage (%)	38.46	61.54
Sports Track	2	Frequency	-	2
		Percentage (%)	-	100.00
Arts and Design Track	7	Frequency	-	7
		Percentage (%)	-	100.00
Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track				
Home Economics (HE)	57	Frequency	9	48

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SHS Track / Strand	Number of Graduates	Enrolled College Course	Aligned with SHS Strand/Track	Not Aligned with SHS Strand/Track
		Percentage (%)	15.79	84.21
Industrial Arts (IA)	10	Frequency	-	10
		Percentage (%)	-	100.00
Agri-Fisheries Arts	19	Frequency	14	5
		Percentage (%)	73.68	26.32
Information & Communications Technology (ICT)	26	Frequency	1	25
		Percentage (%)	3.85	96.15

Note. Alignment refers to whether the college course enrolled corresponds to the knowledge and competencies of the graduate's completed SHS track or strand.

The completion of a specific track/strand in high school does not guarantee that a student will continue in that track after graduation. Table 5 present the percentage of alignment of the respondents' current college courses with their Senior High School track/strand.

It can be viewed that more than half of the respondents who took TVL-Agri-Fishery Arts (73.68%), Academic-GAS (83.22%), Academic-HUMSS (75.86%), and Academic-ABM (51.61%) have enrolled in college courses aligned with their SHS Tracks/Strands. Meanwhile, the respondents whose SHS Tracks/Strands were Academic-STEM (38.46%), TVL-Home Economics (5.79%), and TVL-Information and Communications Technology (3.85%) have posted a low percentage of college courses and Senior High School (SHS) Track/Strand alignment. On the other hand, college courses enrolled by those who took TVL-Industrial Arts, Arts and Design, and Sports Tracks were not aligned with their SHS tracks/strands.

It can be noted that out of the 372 SHS graduates, 213 (57.26%) of them have enrolled in a college course aligned with their SHS Tracks/Strands while 159 (42.74%) were not. The results mean that the alignment is still evident in some of the SHS Track/Strands and the college courses they are enrolled. The same results were observed in the study conducted by Padios et al. (2021) where out of all the respondents enrolled in college, only one half have courses aligned to their SHS strands.

As stated in Department of education Memo No. 169, s. 2018, learners are given the opportunity to choose the curricular exits they will pursue after graduation, namely higher education, middle-level skills development, entrepreneurship, and employment, after attaining necessary knowledge, skills, and attitude. Whatever curriculum departure SHS graduates choose, it is the responsibility of the school and career advice advocates to assist them in making the best decisions possible. In light of this, career advice becomes an essential component of student development, as it tries to assist students in making more informed educational and professional decisions (Cabral & Abanto, 2020).

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Table 6 ***Alignment of Occupation with Senior High School Strand/Track (n = 54)***

SHS Track / Strand	Number of Employed Graduates	Aligned with SHS Strand/Track	Not Aligned with SHS Strand/Track
		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Academic Track			
ABM	4	3	75.00
HUMSS	8	1	12.50
GAS	14	1	7.14
STEM	1	1	100.00
Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track			
Home Economics (HE)	11	8	72.73
Industrial Arts (IA)	5	3	60.00
Agri-Fisheries Arts	7	0	-
Information & Communications Technology (ICT)	4	0	-

Note. Alignment refers to whether the respondent's current occupation corresponds to the knowledge and competencies of their completed SHS track or strand. Percentages were calculated based on the total number of employed graduates in each strand. A dash (-) indicates no respondents aligned in that category.

Table 6 shows the present occupation of the respondents as this study examines the alignment of the respondents' SHS Track/Strands and their occupation. It can be viewed that among the SHS graduates 54 sought employment after graduation. The respondents whose SHS Track/Strand were Academic-ABM (75%), Academic-STEM (100%), TVL-HE (72.73%), and TVL-IA (60%) have a high work alignment with their SHS Track/Strand.

On the contrary, the work of the respondents whose SHS Track/Strand are TVL-Agri-Fishery Arts (100.00%), TVL-Information and Communications Technology (100.00), Academic-GAS (92.86%), Academic HUMMS (87.50%) were not aligned to their Senior High track/strand.

The results mean that there is a high level of misalignment between the respondents' occupation or work and their SHS tracks/strands. Despite the misalignment, the fact that SHS graduates were able to land a job or secure work after graduation, is a good indication of educational success.

The small number of SHS graduates who opted and land a job, as can be seen in Table 6, is in accordance with the study conducted by Orbeta, Jr., and Potestad (2020) where it verified the findings of previously conducted studies that only a small percentage (just over 20%) enter the job force and the majority (more than 70%) continue their schooling. Furthermore, it is necessary to continue working with companies to inform and demonstrate what SHS graduates are capable of, with the goal of clearly establishing the proper niche for them in the labor market.

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Table 7 ***Perceived Skills Acquired by Senior High School Graduates (n = 400)***

Skill Domain	Mean	Descriptive Rating
Basic Skills	3.55	Agree
Thinking Skills	3.64	Agree
Foundation Skills	3.79	Agree
Resource Management	3.72	Agree
Interpersonal Skills	3.74	Agree
Information Management	3.60	Agree
Systems	3.81	Agree
Technology	3.70	Agree
Overall Mean	**3.69**	Agree

Note. Descriptive ratings were based on the following scale:
4.50–5.00 = Strongly Agree
3.50–4.49 = Agree
2.50–3.49 = Somewhat Agree
1.50–2.49 = Disagree
1.00–1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Identifying the skills acquired by Senior High School graduates is indeed necessary to properly assess how the program prepared them for higher education, middle-level skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship. Table 7 presents the skills acquired by the respondents from their Senior High School education. As shown, the top three skills that the respondents believed to have acquired are the Systems (3.81), Foundation skills (3.79), and Interpersonal skills (3.74). Through the respondents agree that they have acquired the basic skills (3.55) it has the lowest mean among the identified skills.

As per into CAREERS (2014), there are eight necessary skills that employees must possess namely Basic (ability to read, write, speak and listen well), Thinking (ability to make decisions and solve problems), Foundation (being responsible for own actions), Resource Management (ability to manage well time, money and other resources), Interpersonal (getting along with others well), Information Management (can find, interpret, communicate, and organize information), Systems (can understand social and business processes, and performances), and Technology Skills (able to find and use the appropriate tools need for the job).

The results below are in consonance with the study findings of Javillonar (2020) where the SHS students' perceived that they have not yet gained sufficient basic skills such as numeracy and literacy.

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Meanwhile, it contradicts the research findings of Palafox, et al. (2018), where communication and numeracy skills of Accountancy, Business, and Management students are above average.

Table 8 ***Perception of Senior High School Graduates toward the Department of Education's K to 12 Curriculum (n = 400)***

Statement	Mean	Descriptive Rating
Offers a balanced approach to learning	4.12	Agree
Students acquire and master lifelong learning skills	4.12	Agree
Prepares individual for higher education and employment	3.55	Agree
Responds to the needs of the community	3.92	Agree
Very practical and realistic	2.63	Somewhat Agree
Well implemented	2.93	Somewhat Agree
Not a burden to students and family	2.42	Disagree

Note. Descriptive ratings were based on the following scale:
4.50–5.00 = Strongly Agree
3.50–4.49 = Agree
2.50–3.49 = Somewhat Agree
1.50–2.49 = Disagree
1.00–1.49 = Strongly Disagree

It can be gleaned from the Table that the respondents have positively viewed the Senior High School program as they perceived that it "Offers a balanced approach to learning and students acquire and master lifelong learning skills (4.12); responds to the needs of the community (3.92) and prepares individual for higher education and employment (3.55). On the other hand, the respondents somewhat agree that the program is very practical and realistic (2.63) and it is well implemented (2.93). However, the respondents perceived that the program is a burden to students and family (2.42).

The demographic profile of the respondents provides important insights into the characteristics of Senior High School (SHS) graduates in the Narra districts. The majority of respondents were 19 to 22 years old, with an average age of 21 years, which aligns with expected graduation ages for SHS students in the Philippines. This suggests that the timing of educational progression is appropriate and consistent with national norms (Liwanag, 2021). The predominance of female graduates (77.75%) indicates gender disparity in SHS enrollment, which may reflect broader social patterns in educational participation and warrants consideration for policies promoting gender inclusivity in secondary education. The high proportion of single respondents (97.75%) further reflects the typical civil status of SHS graduates, indicating that marital responsibilities are unlikely to interfere with their post-secondary pursuits at this stage.

The findings on post-SHS pathways reveal that a significant number of graduates continue their education, enrolling in a wide array of college programs. Education, Entrepreneurship, Hospitality Management, Agriculture, and Tourism-related courses were among the most popular, highlighting the respondents' preferences for fields perceived to provide employability and livelihood opportunities. The enrollment in TESDA middle-level skills programs, particularly in courses like Agricultural Crop Production, Bread and Pastry Production, Driving, and Computer System Servicing, underscores the graduates' recognition of the importance of technical and vocational skills for employment or livelihood, consistent with the K to 12 curriculum's goal of preparing learners for multiple pathways (DepEd, 2013).

However, the alignment analysis presents critical implications. Only 57.26% of SHS graduates enrolled in college programs aligned with their SHS tracks or strands. While ABM, HUMMS, GAS, and TVL-Agri-Fisheries Arts graduates show relatively high alignment, graduates from STEM, TVL-Home Economics, and TVL-ICT, as well as those from Industrial Arts, Arts and Design, and Sports tracks, demonstrated minimal to no alignment with their college programs. This misalignment suggests potential gaps in career guidance, academic counseling, and the perceived relevance of SHS tracks to higher education choices. Additionally, the significant misalignment between graduates' employment and their SHS tracks—68.52% of employed graduates working in fields unrelated to their SHS strand—signals a need for stronger linkages between SHS curricula, labor market demands, and industry partnerships to ensure career-readiness. Regarding skills acquisition, respondents perceived strong gains in systems thinking, foundation skills, and interpersonal skills, which are critical for adaptability in higher education and the workplace. Conversely, lower perceived acquisition of basic skills, information management, and thinking skills highlights areas for curriculum reinforcement, suggesting that SHS programs should place greater emphasis on fostering analytical, technological, and information literacy competencies to better prepare graduates for 21st-century challenges.

Finally, while the respondents generally perceive the SHS program as balanced, responsive to community needs, and supportive of lifelong learning, concerns about the program being a burden to students and families indicate potential issues in curriculum implementation and workload. These perceptions imply that DepEd may need to review the instructional design, student support systems, and resource allocation to reduce stress and ensure equitable access to quality education. Collectively, these findings imply that while the K to 12 curriculum has successfully facilitated post-secondary education enrollment and skills development, there remain significant challenges in aligning SHS tracks with higher education pathways and employment outcomes. Strategic interventions, including enhanced career guidance, industry partnerships, targeted skill development, and workload management, are crucial for maximizing the curriculum's intended impact on graduate employability, academic readiness, and holistic development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

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1. *Post-secondary pathways.* Senior High School (SHS) graduates of the Narra districts were aware of the multiple exits provided by the K to 12 program. Most graduates opted to pursue higher education, enrolling in college or university programs, indicating a preference for academic advancement as the primary post-SHS pathway.
2. *Alignment with college courses.* While some alignment exists between SHS tracks/strands and the college programs pursued, a substantial proportion of graduates chose courses that were not aligned with their SHS specialization. This highlights a gap in the continuity between SHS education and post-secondary academic choices.
3. *Alignment with employment.* There is a notable misalignment between graduates' SHS tracks/strands and their current occupations. Nevertheless, the ability of SHS graduates to secure employment despite this misalignment demonstrates their general employability and reflects the foundational competencies gained from the SHS curriculum.
4. *Skills development.* The DepEd Senior High School Program effectively developed graduates' interpersonal, systems thinking, problem-solving, and managerial skills. However, respondents reported relatively lower acquisition of foundational skills, particularly in literacy, numeracy, and basic information management, suggesting areas where curricular reinforcement is needed.
5. *Overall perception of SHS program.* Graduates generally perceive the SHS program as effective in promoting holistic development, equipping them with 21st-century skills for higher education, middle-level skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship. Despite this, some graduates view the program as burdensome, particularly in terms of workload and its impact on family responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of the Senior High School program and support graduates' post-secondary pathways:

1. *Strengthen information dissemination***.** Schools should improve the communication and orientation on the four SHS curriculum exits to ensure students understand the academic and career opportunities available to them.
2. *Bridging programs in higher education.* Colleges and universities should develop bridging programs for students, whose intended degree programs are not aligned with their SHS tracks/strands, enabling smoother transitions and better preparedness for higher education.
3. *Enhance career guidance.* Career guidance initiatives in Junior and Senior High Schools should be intensified to help students make informed choices regarding tracks, strands, and future career paths. Students should actively engage in these programs to align their academic preparation with their career aspirations.
4. *Informed decision-making for college enrollment.* SHS graduates should evaluate key factors such as SHS track/strand, personal interests, abilities, ambitions, and family financial capacity before selecting college programs to ensure alignment with their goals.

5. *Comprehensive 21st-century skills development. Schools* should design and implement programs to strengthen the acquisition of essential 21st-century skills, ensuring that learners develop cognitive, technical, and interpersonal competencies simultaneously.
6. *Curriculum review and improvement.* The Senior High School curriculum and its activities should be periodically revisited to identify strengths and weaknesses, with improvements implemented to enhance program effectiveness.
7. *Industry-relevant track offerings.* SHS centers should offer tracks and strands aligned with the skill requirements of local industries. Strengthening technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial skills will better prepare students for employment and community development.
8. *Information and Education Campaign (IEC).* Intensify IEC initiatives to highlight the benefits of the SHS program, emphasizing its role in preparing students for higher education, employment, skills development, and entrepreneurship.

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