

WHAT NOW? THE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES' CURRICULUM EXIT

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the curriculum exit of the three batches of the SHS graduates in the Philippines, which was criticized by the different sectors in the country for implementing the K-to-12 curriculum in basic education despite the encouragement of the Department of Education that emphasized the great benefits to the learners' future careers. With one thousand respondents, a cross-sectional retrospective survey method was employed in this study. They have also given their comments about their experiences in their senior high school education, which was thematized in this study. Considering the dearth of literature on the status of the SHS graduates in the country, this study has successfully accounted for the dynamics of the productivity of the SHS graduates in the country where the K-to-12 system is relatively new to the whole basic education system compared to other countries.

Keywords: curriculum exit, SHS graduates, K-to-12 education, Philippine Basic Education

INTRODUCTION

There have been four batches of Senior High School (SHS) graduates since the K to 12 curriculum was implemented in the Philippines in 2016 in compliance with RA 10533 or otherwise known as an act enhancing the Philippines Basic Education System by strengthening its curriculum and increasing the number of years in basic education. The new basic education program has been scrutinized by the public – stakeholders, industries, and parents who would invest another two years in their children's education. The notion about having professionals in the country who have not undergone additional years for their secondary education yet have been successful in their fields is confronted by the substantiality of the K-to-12 curriculum. The K-to-12 system in the Philippines has always been in question especially in terms of its effectiveness of the curriculum, readiness, and employability of the graduates. There are only a few works of literature that have attempted to study the status of the graduates (Padios et al., 2021; Orbeta et al., 2018; Santos et al., 2019; Mamba et al., 2020; Baber et al., 2019; Pajares et al., 2018) despite Department of Education's call for a study of the graduates through regional memoranda across the country way back 2018 for the first batch of graduates. Thus, this study adds to the body of the

literature to help substantiate and highlight the dynamics of the status of the Senior High School graduates in the Philippines through the case of Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manila since it is one of the first schools in the country that incorporates the specialized courses of one strand to another and study-to-employment curriculum to offer varied and wide choices to the students as they embark on either tertiary education or pursuing employment.

Senior High School (SHS) students in the Philippines can choose a strand that will introduce them to their preferred career path. Suppose one opts to join the workforce immediately. In that case, the senior high school offers a faster way to earn Certificate of Competencies (COCs) and National Certificates (NC) from Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) that can be used to apply for both local and overseas jobs that require a particular set of skills.

Furthermore, this paper examines the curriculum exit of the SHS graduates through exploring their career decisions. This study also examines if their SHS strands are aligned to the programs they take up in their tertiary education. Specifically, this explores the experiences of the graduates in their senior high school education to determine the quality of education that the school offers and the impact of the new basic education system in the country. This article would

recognize the strength of the Philippine SHS curriculum in terms of sufficiency, excellence, and the pre-service training's relevance to the competencies needed in the labor market and academe, as well as addressing its weaknesses.

Readiness and Employability: K-to-12 Curriculum in Question

Based on nascent works of literature about the Senior High School graduates in the Philippines, most of the graduates regarded pursuing higher education as their way to improve their skills acquired in the senior high school studies, and only a few would take on entrepreneurial activities and employment (Padios et al., 2021). Concerning pursuing higher education, the alignment of strands is significant not only to the readiness of the students but also to the relevance of the curriculum of the K-12 program as part of educational reform in the country. Prior to SHS, junior high school students must take the National Career Assessment Examination (NCAE) to guide them in choosing their specialization in SHS and making future career choices. However, NCAE results were not the primary consideration in selecting the SHS track and strand. Some students revealed that they did not take the examination seriously since they could not rely on the results (Orbeta et al., 2018). Thus, NCAE results are not reliable on the interests of the incoming SHS for their track and strand. In the case of SHS students who are planning to pursue higher education, misalignment of the strand to the college course of the SHS graduates happens due to the following factors: ease of subject, employment prospect, possible financial outcomes, contemplation of self-image, parents' choice, cost of education, gender, peer pressure, entrance examinations, scholarship offered, and unavailability of the desired course (Santos et al., 2019).

In terms of the college readiness of the SHS graduates, the Philippine Basic Education is not promising since DepEd needs to strengthen the instructional quality in all learning areas, most especially Science and Mathematics, to boost the college readiness of the K-12 graduates (Mamba et al., 2020). College readiness focuses on the knowledge and skills essential to pursuing college (Baber et al., 2019). Thus, the K to 12 program stakeholders have delved into how to adequately prepare learners in transitioning from high school to higher education with the goal of succeeding in chosen careers. Moreover, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported that the Philippines ranked 79th

in reading skills with an average of 340 points against the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average of 487 points. Filipino students obtained low ratings in mathematics and science with 353 points and 356 points against 489 points by OECD (Paris, 2019 as cited in Mamba et al., 2020). Furthermore, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (2020) reported that some Filipino senior high school students failed to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills, particularly English language skills, making students have difficulty producing research outputs. Thus, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) created College Readiness Standards as the principal framework in ensuring the quality and preparedness of post-secondary students to embark on tertiary education.

On employability of the SHS graduates, Tech-Voc students can take National Certificate Examinations (NCII and NCIII) under TESDA based on the course requirements of the strand. For example, HE students may take certification for Food and Beverage Services, Barista, and Bartending as these certification programs are offered as their specialized courses. ICT students can take NCII and NCIII for Animation and Computer Servicing, respectively. On the other hand, for the Academic track, ABM students can take NCIII for Bookkeeping and NCII for Events Management. The K-12 Curriculum also includes a Work Immersion program wherein students may be deployed to different public or private agencies to get work experience in their field of specialization. Notably, the minimum requirement of 80 hours for the "on-the-job training" could equip them with the skills they need to be employed. SHS graduates may be hired in entry-level positions.

In 2018, JobStreet reported that 41 percent of employers were unsure about hiring SHS graduates, 35 percent of the employers were blunt about not having SHS graduates in their company, and 24 percent said they were willing to hire. However, those employers who were unsure and indefinite about hiring SHS graduates need to evaluate the readiness of the company and the available positions that can be offered to the said graduates. Additionally, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies also reported that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who used JobStreet are the most reluctant to recruit SHS graduates. Their unwillingness to hire K-12 graduates may be related to the report that HR personnel may not be knowledgeable about the K-12 system (Orbeta et al., 2018). However, in the study conducted in the province of Cebu, they found out that most of the graduates of the senior high school programs shall not be readily employable in their

respective districts because their programs and skills do not match (Pajares et al. 2018).

The Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) has expressed concerns about the readiness of the SHS graduates to work in a professional workplace. Thus, this concern has raised the reluctance of the employers for the graduates may have lacked the necessary skills and training those companies and industries need. These companies also believed that the required number of hours for SHS students' on-the-job training is not enough to be equipped with the necessary skills once they graduate. The Department of Education should address the senior high school programs' goals to provide the skills and competencies that will make the graduates employable and become more productive and relevant members of society (Pajares et al., 2018). However, business process outsourcing (BPO) companies, manufacturing, professional service, and retail are willing to hire graduates of the K-12 system since the available jobs were entry-level administrative work, customer service, and sales (Orbeta et al., 2018). However, the Philippine Business for Education (PBED) presented a positive view on the alacrity of the companies in recruiting SHS graduates. As expounded by the advocacy group for education, readiness and openness are two different things. The readiness of the companies to hire SHS graduates depends on the availability of their facilities and entry-level positions, while openness is about their willingness.

under each track such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) strand, Accountancy, Business and Management (ABM) strand for Academic Track, and Home Economics (HE) strand, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) strand for Tech-Voc track. As a Catholic institution, Letran SHS graduates have the following graduate attributes: a) equipped with understanding and mastery of the fundamental knowledge and skills required to a particular discipline for effective professional practice; b) competent in the creative use and application of information and communications technology in education essential for 21st century; c) prepared for life-long learning skills in quest of personal development and excellence in professional practice; d) capable of applying logical and critical thinking in providing solutions to discipline-related problems and have self-management skills that contribute to their personal satisfaction and growth; e) proficient in oral and written communication skills in a variety of contexts and modes; f) service-driven citizens capable of working independently and collaboratively within agreed frameworks; g) committed to the quality formation of integral human person in the noble tradition of excellence and ideal of its core values; and h) mindful of their role as global citizen by taking action and engaging others to make a positive difference for the common good.

The questionnaires used in the study obtained quantitative and qualitative feedback from the respondents about their strand and year they graduated, the course they pursued, and/or details about their employment/business. A researcher-made questionnaire was prepared using Google Forms. The questionnaires were distributed online via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and email addresses. The sampling technique used was convenience non-random sampling by using only the internet to distribute surveys due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All graduates of four (4) strands, namely Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM), Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Home Economics (HE), and Information Communication Technology (ICT) were included in the study. Among 1,677 graduates in all strands, only 1,000 or 59.63 percent were able to complete the survey, which still falls within the expected response rate of 30 to 60 percent recommended by Schomburg (2003) for graduate tracer studies. The research utilized the use of descriptive statistics like frequency counts and percentages to answer the research questions.

METHODOLOGY

Empirical Focus and Data Sources

A cross-sectional retrospective survey study design was used due to the population of graduates being asked at a one-time point only (Schomburg, 2003). This cross-sectional retrospective survey study was conducted last March 2021, which involved Senior High School graduates who completed their two-year senior high school education in Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Manila from SY 2017-2018 to SY 2019-2020. The researchers did not include batch 2021, for they were still not enrolled in tertiary level or had decided what path they would pursue during the conduct of this study. Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manila offers two tracks, namely, Academic and Technical Vocational Livelihood (TVL) tracks. The Colegio opens two strands

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Whereabouts: Curriculum Relevance, Alignment, and Undertakings

In the enrollment history of Letran SHS, academic track students always outnumbered the Tech-Voc track students. Based on the demographic profile of the respondents (Table 1), more than half of the population that answered the survey belong to the Academic Track, which number showed dominance against the Tech-Voc respondents, who are only composed of less than 15 percent of the population study. In terms of gender, more than half of the population study is female, which is consistently true to the number of female students according to the record of the exact enrollees from the past school years.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Profile

Strand	Female	Male	Total	%
ABM	226	102	328	33%
HE	24	30	54	5%
ICT	18	60	78	8%
STEM	244	296	540	54%
Total	512	488	1,000	100%

As indicated in Table 2, 44 percent of the respondents belong to the Batch 2020 since the students from the batch are still easy to reach in terms of connections and networks through their class advisers, similar to Batch 2019, which is composed of 42 percent of the total respondents. However, the ability to reach out to the first batch of Letran SHS graduates (14%) became challenging as their whereabouts have not been tracked since their graduation, not to mention

the changes in the roster of advisers over the past years, which affects the ability to reach the pioneering batch efficiently.

Table 2. Number of Respondents per Batch

Batch	Strand	Female	Male	Total	%
2018		68	70	138	14%
	ABM	34	16	50	
	HE	6	2	8	
	ICT		6	6	
2019	STEM	28	46	74	
		218	204	422	42%
	ABM	78	42	120	
	HE	4	10	14	
2020	ICT	10	8	18	
	STEM	126	144	270	
		226	214	440	44%
	ABM	114	44	158	
Grand Total	HE	14	18	32	
	ICT	8	46	54	
	STEM	90	106	196	
		512	488	1,000	100%

Based on the literature, most of the SHS graduates have regarded pursuing higher education after graduation, which is true in the case of the Letran SHS graduates since 2018 (Table 3). The majority or 90.2 percent of the respondents have pursued tertiary education right after graduation. Many of whom were STEM students, following are the students from ABM, while a few from the TechVoc track since they have been reported to have the least number of the population since the implementation of the K to 12 curriculum in the Colegio. Thus, students from the Academic Track are more likely to pursue higher education.

Table 3. Careers After Graduation

Batch	Strand	Employment	Entrepreneurship	Higher Education	Tech-Voc Career	Took a gap year	No Answer	Total	%
2018		4	4	130				138	13.80%
	ABM	2	2	46				50	
	HE			8				8	
	ICT			6				6	
2019	STEM	2	2	70				74	
		14	6	394	2		6	422	42.20%
	ABM	8	2	106			4	120	
	HE			12	2			14	
2020	ICT	2		14			2	18	
	STEM	4	4	262				270	
		18	6	380	18	8	10	440	44.00%
	ABM	12	6	136			4	158	
Total	HE			16	12		4	32	
	ICT	6		42	6			54	
	STEM			186		8	2	196	
	%	3.60%	1.60%	90.40%	2.00%	0.80%	1.60%		

To be engaged in business and entrepreneurial activities were one of the Letran Senior High School curriculum features. The applied or contextual subject, like Entrepreneurship, was offered across all strands. Thus, at least 1.6 percent of the respondents have pursued entrepreneurial activities in lieu of tertiary education.

Table 4. Employed Letran SHS graduates

Industry	Government	Private	Total	%
Architecture		2	2	5.0%
BPO		6	6	15.0%
Construction		4	4	10.0%
Food and Drink		5	5	12.5%
Manpower		5	5	12.5%
Marketing		2	2	5.0%
Media		5	5	12.5%
Pharmaceutical		3	3	7.5%
Public Safety	2		2	5.0%
Tax		2	2	5.0%
Transportation		4	4	10.0%
Total		38	40	100.0%

Although it was already reported that most of the Philippine employers or companies are reluctant from hiring SHS graduates, 4 percent of the respondents are currently employed. Reasons for employment are due to financial factors such as the capacity to support college education and

family orientations. The family greatly affects the decisions of the graduates to pursue education since not all families can afford to send their children to college. In place of education, graduates are encouraged to help their respective household's financial needs. However, some graduates are adamant about their living conditions and still pursue higher education and apply for scholarships or enroll in a state university and get a part-time job. Currently employed Letran SHS graduates (Table 4) are mostly working in the private sector, having entry-level positions.

Since most of the respondents are from Batch 2020, it shows that more than half of the employed Letran SHS graduates came from the batch, and they are currently working in construction, food and drink, marketing firms, media, pharmaceutical companies, and transportation services (Table 5). While 37.5 percent of the employed Letran SHS graduates are working in architectural firms, BPO companies, manpower services, and transportation services. Furthermore, 10 percent of the employed Letran SHS graduates are from Batch 2018 who are now working in government offices.

Table 5. Status of the Employed Letran SHS graduates

Batch	Industry	Casual	Contractual	Part-Time	Probationary	Regular / Permanent	Grand Total	%
2018				2		2	4	10%
	Public Safety					2	2	
	Tax			2			2	
2019						15	15	37.50%
	Architecture					2	2	
	BPO					6	6	
	Manpower					5	5	
	Transportation					2	2	
2020		2	5		5	9	21	52.50%
	Construction					4	4	
	Food and Drink					5	5	
	Marketing		2				2	
	Media				5		5	
	Pharmaceutical		3				3	
	Transportation	2					2	
Total		2	5	2	5	26	40	100%
%		5%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	65%		

On the contrary to the PCCI's report that SHS graduates may not be equipped with the necessary skills for a professional workplace, the respondents have shown that they can learn and perform the necessary skills. Their good performance could be translated into the number of years of service or their status of employment. Thus, the majority or 65 percent of the employed Letran SHS graduates have already acquired permanency in their respective occupations.

More than half or 52.5 percent of the employed Letran SHS graduates are composed of Batch 2020, and the majority who have permanent posts in their respective occupations come from Batch 2019. This may imply that during the survey, the graduates were already working due to the pandemic. Many have been financially affected, and students opted to temporarily suspend their education and work to extend aid to their respective households.

Table 6. College programs pursued by Letran SHS graduates

STRAND	Batch	Business	Multimedia and Digital Arts	Engineering & Architecture	Livelihood	Social Sciences	Information Technology	Pre-Med	Sciences	Sports	Total
ABM	2018	32			2	6	4		2		46
	2019	74		6		26					106
	2020	106		2	4	18	6				136
	Total	212		8	6	50	10		2		288
	%	73.61		2.78	2.08	17.36	3.47		0.69		100
STEM	2018	12		22		10	6	10	8	2	70
	2019	14	4	112		30	10	54	36	2	262
	2020	18		54		12	16	46	40		186
	Total	44	4	188		52	32	110	84	4	518
	%	8.49	0.77	36.29		10.03	6.18	21.23	16.22	0.77	100
ICT	2018						4		2		6
	2019			2		2	8			2	14
	2020	4		2		4	28			4	42
	Total	4		4		6	40		2	6	62
	%	6.45		6.45		9.68	64.52		3.22	9.677	100
HE	2018				2	4			2		8
	2019	6				6					12
	2020	8			4	2		2			16
	Total	14			6	12		2	2		36
	%	38.89			16.67	33.33		5.56	5.56		100
TOTAL	274	4	200	12	120	82	112	90	10	904	
%	30.31	0.44	22.12	1.33	13.27	8.85	12.39	9.96	1.11	100	

Table 6 shows the college programs currently taken by Letran SHS graduates. From the three batches of the ABM graduates, the majority or 73.61 percent, are taking up business programs, as expected of them. Moreover, 17.36 percent of the ABM respondents are taking up the Social Sciences program. This is followed by the IT program, Engineering and Architecture, and Livelihood courses. While less than 1 percent have pursued sciences programs.

STEM students can choose different fields of sciences, which explains the scattered number of STEM graduates in each program indicated in the table. From the three batches, the majority or 36.29 percent of the STEM respondents are in Engineering and Architecture, 21.23 percent are taking pre-med programs, 16.22 percent are in other sciences programs, and 6.18 percent of them are taking IT programs. However, there are quite a few from the STEM students who have taken college programs that are not related to their SHS strand; wherein 10.03 percent of the STEM respondents are in Social Sciences programs, 8.49 percent are in Business programs, and less than 1 percent who are in Multimedia Arts and Sports programs.

The Tech-Voc graduates, who have the least number in the population study, have also shown significant answers from the survey. The majority or 64.52 percent of the ICT respondents are currently taking up Information and Technology program in their tertiary education, while the rest of the ICT graduates are enrolled in each indicated program with less than 10 percent respectively. While for HE respondents, 38.89 percent in the business program, 33.33 percent in the Social Sciences program, followed by the Livelihood program, wherein 16.67 percent of them are currently enrolled. Moreover, a few of the HE respondents are taking pre-med and other sciences programs.

Tech-Voc graduates are showing a significant path from their SHS strand, like the graduates of Academic tracks. At strand level, the majority of the graduates of each strand are taking up undergraduate degrees that are aligned to their respective SHS strands. However, looking at a larger scale, 30.31 percent of all the respondents, across the three batches, are taking up business degrees, followed by Engineering and Architecture, where 22.12 percent of the respondents are currently enrolled in.

Graduates' Experiences in Senior High School Education

The graduates in this study gave their comments about their overall experience during their senior high school education. Highlighting the school experiences of the graduates may explain their decisions and actions as they embark on their tertiary education, employment, and entrepreneurial activities. Their decisions after graduation may have been considered on what journey to take after senior high school. Further, school experience may reflect on the strength of the curriculum to help determine the graduates' future and get hold of what awaits them as they exit the last stage of secondary level.

In Promoting a Positive Student Experience

The SHS graduates affirmed that their school has always promoted a positive student experience, which ensures all students maximize their potential and excel in academics while enjoying the extracurricular activities provided for them to explore their individualities and capabilities to collaborate with co-learners. Moreover, the role of the educators to maintain a positive and conducive learning environment is crucial as this determines the satisfaction, retention, and trust of the stakeholders.

Most of the respondents have expressed satisfaction and recalled good memories during their senior high school education, like, "It was great and the most memorable two years of my life." "It's a great institution where I had the best two years of senior high school." Their comments signify that their school was their best choice to venture into their senior high school education. In this regard, the graduates expressed their gratitude for what they have experienced during their senior high school education since they would not have experienced those fun and exciting experiences if not for the K-12 curriculum. They would not have been prepared for their college education if they were not properly trained and experienced tedious academic training through senior high school stint.

It is important to note that the student's academic journey should not only focus on academic hurdles, but it should also how they participate in extracurricular activities that are intended for their holistic development as students. The clubs and organizations, regarded as an alternative classroom learning experience, had provided the graduates to grow and explore themselves while they were in senior high school.

One said, "the club that I join in allowed me to explore my capabilities especially when we were assigned to organize a big event in school." Students' experiences always depend on the efforts of the institutions. Each institution has different strategies to keep the learners understanding the sense of community and collaboration to develop themselves. One respondent commented, "The institution brought out the best in me which I did not know I had until I studied here. The community felt like family, the professors were all endearing, and the school events were extremely satisfactory."

In having Competent Educators and a Sound Curriculum

As mentioned earlier, the educators take a crucial part in maintaining a positive environment for all students since they are considered as front liners in developing students' academic success through their competence and ability to provide senior high school students the right amount of knowledge for their higher education or any choices they will make eventually.

The SHS graduates may have been immensely elated based on their positive experience however, this would not be possible without the help of the educators and administrators who worked tirelessly to craft programs and activities to fulfill the promise of best education to the stakeholders. The respondents expressed satisfaction towards the performance of their educators and administrators as they are inspired to attend classes because of the supportive environment coming from them. One commented, "The teachers and staff were all great people. The teachers were excellent in their field of teaching."

The execution of the SHS curriculum greatly affects the experience of the students. It is how the educators manage to teach the most essential learning competencies that the students need to learn. Thus, SHS subjects have also helped during their college education. One said, "My experiences and learnings in the Colegio helped me adjust better when I started college. I have a strong background in my core subjects and specialized subjects such as biology, chemistry, and calculus since some of the topics were incorporated during my SHS years." The Letran SHS department also added a foreign language that specializes in Mandarin to all Grade 12 students. This was offered as part of the goal of the institution to have multilingual graduates, which would set them apart from other SHS students across the country. A

sound curriculum would not be effective if the educators executing it cannot deliver what should be delivered to the learners. Thus, it is important to note that the educators' role creates an impact on the learners' experience as they go along with their senior high school education. Their academic experiences could affect their learning in the later years. Hence, senior high school education is a good foundation for college education.

In Receiving a Quality Education

Since senior high school education is being regarded by the respondents as a strong foundation for their current choices, they also praised the known competence of senior high school educators. Additionally, the institutional system of their school is well received and perceived as healthy and conducive for learning and socializing. At the departmental level, the graduates see the staff, teachers, and administrators as people who have helped them establish growth and viewed the department as the ground where they were given enough space to express and explore themselves. Although some have expressed disappointments since they have not seen any improvements on how the institution expands its views for better teaching and learning. Senior high school students have diverse personalities and should be considered an important aspect to improve one's education structure. This is being seen by some graduates that need to be improved in such a way that graduates would exit their school with a positive outlook in life.

The facilities of the institution are well-maintained and are made sure to be utilized by the students. As students in a private institution, facilities are at par with the other facilities from the school they came from (i.e., computer laboratories, science laboratories, ICT), which explains the amount of tuition fee that the students are paying. Thus, some respondents have commented about tuition fee hike every school year. However, most graduates have given positive feedback towards the quality of education they receive from their school. One commented that "The Colegio served us, the students, with quality education and in here, they offer lots of activities where the students can enjoy themselves and learn stuff at the same time—and this will mark as my most memorable experience throughout my stay."

Apart from infrastructure, quality education is viewed on how the institution gives value to the holistic development of the learners by providing them with opportunities to build good relationships with co-learners and explore one's being

at an optimum level. One respondent expressed, "Years spent in my school were and will always be remarkable. It taught me lessons worth a lifetime, and the institution further strengthens your ability to adapt to a real-life setting. They were like these building blocks of who I am today. Truly, an embodiment of excellence with a balance of enjoyment."

Senior high school curriculum offers a work immersion program wherein learners experience real-life experience working in the industries where their strand best fits. This program helps the learners grow outside the four corners of the classroom and realize the tediousness and rigor of the reality of work. One graduate recalled, "The work immersion program of the Colegio for senior high students allowed me to assess what is the rightful path for me. I was able to experience and obtain knowledge at the same time because I was exposed to the different departments in the hospital." The senior high school department had collaborated and made a partnership with various industry and academic partners where the senior high students would be deployed once the work immersion program starts. Thus, quality education is perceived to be the institutions' ability to go beyond what is expected of them in developing the minds of the learners who have yet to decide which career path to take in the future. Moreover, institutions' educational strategies affect the quality of education especially in engaging the students with their plans and programs that would make the learners enjoy while discovering their potentials.

Career Decisions and Middle-skills Development

In this study, the majority of the Letran SHS graduates have pursued tertiary education right after their senior high school education while some opted to look for job opportunities using what they learned in their secondary education, and some ventured into entrepreneurial activities. It was studied by a few works of literature that most of the SHS graduates regarded having tertiary education as essential in their academic endeavors. Thus, pursuing college degrees is necessary (Padios et al., 2021; Mamba et al., 2020; Orbeta et al., 2018). In terms of college readiness among SHS learners, various key grade level is measured based on the Policy Guidelines on the National Assessment of Student Learning for the K to 12 Basic Education Program devised by the Department of Education. However, there is still a need to improve DepEd the quality of graduates with a special focus on science and mathematics (Mamba et al., 2020). Nevertheless, more universities had admitted more

college unready SHS graduates. Despite the negative result about the readiness of the SHS graduates, they are still entitled to choose what path they would take after senior high school education.

As the results show, most of the respondents per strand have pursued undergraduate degrees related to their SHS strand, but taking it as a whole, most of the respondents have taken up business degrees regardless of their respective SHS strands. Pantalone (2015, as cited in Santos, 2019) posits that some students decide their major based on the college that they are willing to attend. Further, he stated that the financial aspect needs to be considered when entering tertiary education. Some students wanted a major that could easily find them a job after graduation and have a great deal of responsibility (Santos et al., 2019). SHS graduates consider employment prospects and possible financial outcomes when they enroll in a course (Rudhumbu, 2017). Job sites have released the in-demand jobs in the Philippines, and among them are business degree courses. Hence, the business degrees flocked by most of the SHS graduates.

Students' desire towards his/her career path determines the degree they would take in tertiary education regardless of the SHS strand. However, it was recommended by the Department of Education (2017) that the future SHS students pick strands according to the career path of their likeness as it will help them hone their skills. The interest of the students plays a crucial role in strands and courses. Students join the curriculum which they have an interest in and work and study better when they are involved in something that they want (Ahmed et al., 2017). In the case of the senior high school curriculum in Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manila, some specialized subjects from HUMSS and GAS strands are incorporated in other strands since the said strands are not offered in the institution. The incorporation of these specialized subjects (e.g., Creative Writing, Disaster Risk Reduction, Trends, Networks, and Critical Thinking in the 21st Century Culture, Organization, and Management) to the curriculum of the present strands allows the students to take any college programs once they decide not to follow the career path intended for their SHS strand. These strands would serve as bridging programs for the SHS graduates if they decided to take unaligned undergraduate degrees in college. Thus, the Letran SHS graduates have taken undergraduate degree programs without asking them to take bridging courses in the receiving higher educational institutions. Although the Department of Education is giving leeway to the K to 12 graduates who want to pursue any

college programs, there are selected programs in some higher educational institutions requiring SHS students to take bridging courses once the desired program is unaligned to their SHS strand.

The Department of Education emphasizes that the Senior High School curriculum offers many benefits to the learners and one of which is that the graduates of the Technical Vocational and Livelihood track will be readily employable (Del Mundo, 2013; Bacarra, 2016). This suggests that the SHS graduates are equipped with the skills that will make them more productive (Patrinos & Samer, 2016 as cited in Pajares et al., 2018). In Letran SHS, the students of TechVoc and ABM are required to take national certification examinations under TESDA, which gives them an edge over other SHS graduates in the country. In this study, although only 4 percent of the respondents are employed, this also suggests that SHS graduates are employable in different industries regardless of the strands taken in their senior high school education. Whether their job is a mismatch to their SHS strand, this study shows that the graduates are still equipped with skills or might have learned the required skills during their employment, which makes them trainable and become productive members of society. Similarly, since the respondents opt not to disclose the nature of their entrepreneurial activities, this suggests that the SHS graduates are already adept at taking a leap in venturing outside the academic domain.

The three batches of the Letran SHS graduates have been productive and have shown diverse career paths after their senior high school education given their training and experiences in the institution. The unique SHS curriculum of Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manila has helped the graduates with their undertakings and guided them with their choices through their relevant training, exposure, and institutional programs implemented. Thus, the experiences of the students and their success depend on how the institution carries out what is best for its stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the K-to-12 curriculum exits of the three batches of the SHS graduates of Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manila and explored their experiences in their senior high school education to determine the quality of education

and the relevance of the SHS curriculum in their present endeavors. Remarkably, the majority of the SHS graduates are pursuing tertiary education, and most of them are taking undergraduate degrees in business and engineering, and architecture. Some have ventured into entrepreneurship and have opted to work after graduation. The majority of the students per strand have taken undergraduate degrees that are aligned to their SHS strand. However, there is a misalignment of the college programs taken by some of the SHS graduates, but it is important to note that the unique curriculum of Letran SHS allows the graduates to take any college programs for their tertiary education, and the graduates had been admitted to different higher educational institutions. In terms of employability of the graduates, the Letran SHS graduates' current employment status suggests that they are equipped with enough skills required by the industries they are presently employed in or might have been trained and developed the required skills during their employment, which implies that the SHS graduates are trainable and competent enough to work. Considering the dearth of literature on the productivity of the SHS graduates in the country, this study has successfully accounted for the dynamics of the productivity of the SHS graduates in the country where the K to 12 programs are relatively new to the whole basic education system compared to other countries. This study recommends that aside from periodic review of the curriculum for all institutions to further enhance the graduate outcomes and the academic endeavors of the SHS graduates, there is also a need to further study the status of the employed SHS graduates.

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