

EXPLORING EXTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER CHOICES AMONG GRADE 12 STUDENTS IN WESTERN VISAYAS, PHILIPPINES

ABSTRACT

The right career choice for students in their professional field is critical, impacting their lives and achievements. Thus, this study investigated the multifaceted influences on career choices among grade 12 students during the critical transition from senior high school to college, anchored on Social Cognitive Career Theory. Utilizing quantitative design, specifically the descriptive and comparative approaches, this research explored the influence of various external factors, including family, peers, school environment, and societal culture, on students' decision-making. Two hundred thirty-three (233) grade 12 students from different strands were sampled. Results showed that the degree of influence of external factors on grade 12 students is moderate, with school environment as the highest and peer group as the lowest. Further, using an independent sample T-test and when grouped according to sex, a significant difference in the degree of influence of external factors in career choices is observed only in societal culture. Utilizing a one-way analysis of variance, no significant difference was observed in all external factors when grouped according to strand. The results of the study served as the basis for a proposed career awareness seminar for grade 12 students in collaboration with the Student Development and Placement Center (SDPC).

Keywords: External factors influencing career choices, Quantitative research, Career choices awareness, Grade 12 students, Senior high school

1. INTRODUCTION

Career choices are influenced by many factors such as family, teachers, peers, school environment, and the expectation of career outcomes significantly shape one's career path (Abe & Chikoko, 2020). The transition from high school to college is a pivotal period in a student's life, and one of the most crucial decisions they face is selecting a career path. Choosing a career path significantly impacts the development of young individuals. Moreover, it has been found to have positive and negative effects on the psychological, physical, and socioeconomic well-being that extend into adulthood (Robertson, 2014). Thus, one must value the importance of self-discovery, assess individual experiences, and pay attention to professional opinions (Pfarrwaller et al., 2023).

Family and friends can influence students' career choices by exerting pressure based on cultural, social, or economic factors while offering practical support, such as internships and networking opportunities (Kiran, 2021). Additionally, they can serve as role models, providing insights into specific career paths and the necessary skills and qualifications (Kiran, 2021). These relationships, encompassing family, teachers, peers, and societal culture, are pivotal in shaping students' career paths. To ensure that students develop a comprehensive career plan, parents must take the initiative to build a nurturing mentorship that can enhance the student's access to a supportive environment (Weiler et al., 2024). Moreover, students' values formation holds considerable sway over their career choices (Laga, 2017). As a result, students consider their

anticipated career outcomes when making crucial career decisions (Abe & Chikoko, 2020).

As the path students choose shapes their future careers, the Department of Education implements a program offering guidance to students. Career Guidance Program (CGP), implemented by the Department of Education (DepED) in 2021, is aimed at guiding students to make well-informed career decisions and provide them with effective skills that will enable them to become productive and valuable members of society (Llego et al., 2021). Through this program, the students are expected to have career choices aligned with their knowledge, skills, experiences, and passion. The K-12 program was also introduced to reduce the gap between graduates' skills and job market demands, aiming to build and enhance the skills and abilities required for middle-level skill development, higher education, entrepreneurship, and employment (Palabrica & Ferolino, 2023). Since career development programs are crucial in guiding youth toward fulfilling careers contributing to nation-building, identifying the ideal career path aligned with their interests and skills is vital. This alignment clarifies an individual's potential for future success and long-term sustainability (Palabrica & Ferolino, 2023).

As observed in recent years, the landscape of career choices among Senior High School (SHS) students, especially in a Catholic university in Western Visayas, has undergone notable transformations, influenced by many external factors. These factors include societal norms, educational environment conditions, peer dynamics, and familial expectations. In this evolving context, students are increasingly exposed to diverse career options and are encouraged to explore unconventional paths. Consequently, they are often challenged to reconcile personal aspirations with external expectations, leading to more deliberate and individualized decision-making processes. This phenomenon reflects a broader cultural shift towards prioritizing personal fulfillment and autonomy in career decision-making.

Numerous studies have explored various aspects of career decision-making. Some studies, such as those conducted by Gaviola et al. (2023), Abe and Chikoko (2020), Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018), Sharif (2019), and Kiran (2021) have focused on external factors that shape individuals' career aspirations. Laga (2017) and Aliyev et al. (2021) have examined internal factors, including personal values and motivations. It is clear that cultural norms and societal expectations significantly influence the types of careers people consider appropriate and the importance they place on work in their lives. For example, in some cultures, career decisions are made collectively, considering what brings the most honor to the entire family (Khare, 2018). In addition, social factors such as the surrounding environment, educational experiences, and problem-solving skills can significantly affect the career choices of young people (Ajayi et al., 2023). While previous studies have explored the external factors influencing career choices, none have specifically focused on Grade 12 students. As a result, this study was conducted to address this gap in existing literature.

The significance of understanding these factors lies in the potential to guide Grade 12 students in making informed career choices that resonate with their interests, personalities, and experiences. Thus, this study explored external factors influencing career choices among grade 12 students. The findings from these studies provide valuable insights into the various influences on students' career decisions, emphasizing the importance of considering factors such as parental influence, peer influence, societal culture influence, and school environment. The results of the study served as the basis for a proposed career awareness seminar for grade 12 students in collaboration with the Student Development and Placement Center (SDPC).

2. METHODOLOGY

Research design. This paper employed a quantitative research design to provide a numerical analysis of population trends, attitudes, opinions, and relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The study specifically utilized descriptive and comparative methods to examine external factors and assess the significant differences in their influence on career choices when categorized by sex and strand.

Respondents and sampling technique. The study involved 233 senior high school students from a Catholic university as respondents. These students were chosen through stratified random sampling from the entire student population. The selected respondents represented various academic strands, including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics - Engineering and Information Technology (STEM-EIT); Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics - Allied Medical Health (STEM-AMH); Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS); Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM); and Technical-Vocational Livelihood - Home Economics (TVL-HE).

Research instrument. The researcher employed a modified survey questionnaire as the research instrument from the study of Chukwu et al. (2022), which was structured into five sections. Part I covered the respondents' demographic information, while Part II focused on parental involvement in career decisions. Part III addressed the impact of societal culture on career choices, Part IV examined peer group influence, and Part V explored the influence of the school environment on Grade 12 Senior High School students. Additionally, the questionnaire featured closed-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to express their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements provided: (5) Strongly Agree, (4) Agree, (3) Neutral, (2) Disagree, and (1) Strongly Disagree.

To ensure the test's validity, the instrument was evaluated against the criteria for assessing questionnaires established by Carter V. Good and Douglas B. Scates and reviewed by three experts. Based on responses from 30 sample students, the reliability of the test was then determined by examining its internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha. The resulting Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.701 indicated that the questionnaire was reliable and suitable for testing.

Data gathering procedure. Before administering the survey, the research instrument underwent validation and reliability testing. Following this, a formal request was sent to the gatekeeper for permission to survey senior high school students. An orientation was then held to introduce to the respondents the study's objectives and ethical guidelines. Informed consent and parent's ascent were then secured from the respondents and their respective parents, which they gave back immediately after agreeing to participate voluntarily in the study. The respondents were given ample time to complete the provided physical survey questionnaire. The data collected were tabulated and sent to the statistician for data analysis. Every response in the given questionnaire was encrypted, stored in a folder, and deleted after a certain period.

Data analysis procedure. The data were analyzed to assess the extent to which external factors influence the career choices of Grade 12 Senior High School students and to identify any significant differences based on sex and strand. Descriptive analysis was conducted using mean and standard deviation. For comparative analysis, an independent samples t-test was employed for grouping by sex, while a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied when grouping

participants by strand. This was after testing for the normality of data distribution using Anderson-Darling.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the respondents' degree of influence of external factors on the career choices in terms of parental involvement, societal culture, peer group, and school environment of the grade 12 students when grouped according to sex and strand. Overall, the degree of influence of external factors ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.65$) is moderate, with societal culture as the highest in mean ($M=3.32$, $SD=0.58$). At the same time, the peer group has the lowest influence with the lowest mean ($M=2.59$, $SD=0.64$).

Societal culture highly affects a person's career choice because they are often expected to choose a career that is commonly associated with their society and can benefit not just themselves but others. On the other hand, peer group results are low because they eventually grow, and their interest is more dominant in making decisions rather than being influenced by their peers. Societal culture is more influential to students when they choose a career based on sex and strand, while peer group is the least influential.

Culture is the customs and habits that characterize a certain society or nation, and an individual's decision to choose a particular career might be influenced by cultural values (Calitz et al., 2022). It is clear that cultural norms and societal expectations significantly influence the types of careers people consider appropriate and the importance they place on work in their lives (Khare, 2018). Additionally, life fulfillment comes from good career planning, but it was proven that cultural legacy can influence and create youths' personal choices (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). On the other hand, peer pressure can have significant and lasting impacts on career decisions, potentially leading to difficulties in adapting to the chosen path, resulting in incompetence and low self-confidence (Kashyap, 2023). Moreover, peers can also give negative information about a certain course, leading to discouragement and fear (Langer & Jain, 2023).

Regarding sex, male grade 12 students obtained a higher degree of external influence ($M=3.02$, $SD=0.64$) than their female counterparts. This means that male students are more susceptible to influence because they shoulder greater responsibilities as they are anticipated to be the primary providers of their future families. Since choosing a career is a complex process, men with higher familial obligations often seek advice from external sources to establish a competent career and build valuable connections they can use in the future. This also aligns with the gendered occupational landscape where men are more likely to be found in lucrative fields such as criminology, justice, electronics, technology, and engineering. The pressure given by external factors such as family, peers, societal cultures, and educational institutions drives male students to pursue a more pragmatic field, often mirroring the field taken by their fathers.

Managerial expectations in today's society appear to be quite traditional in the older age group, and it is suggested that males have a high level of ethical beliefs that show how men are more susceptible to external factors (Peterson et al., 2016). Most males are given more opportunities by society as they are more capable of doing labor work; thus, males have a lesser percentage of psychological distress than females, which indicates job dissatisfaction and loneliness that make them more adaptable to a sudden change in the environment (Viertiö et al., 2021). Moreover, men are more

affected by environmental changes, such as how the school environment integrates their academic perspectives (Finklea, 2023). In essence, it is suggested that society must encourage boys and girls to support egalitarian gender role attitudes as it can help increase equality in our society (Taraszow et al., 2024).

In terms of the strand, STEM-AMH obtained the highest degree of influence of external factors in career choices (M=2.96, SD=0.73), while TVL obtained the lowest mean (M=2.76, SD=0.58). This means that STEM-AMH programs are influenced by rapid technological advancements and global economic pressures, necessitating continuous updates in both educational and industrial practices. The reliance on external funding, government policies, and international collaborations further accentuates this influence. Additionally, global health trends, such as pandemics, greatly affect health-related STEM education and practices. In contrast, TVL programs are designed to meet localized, stable industry needs, focusing on established vocational skills. This makes them less susceptible to rapid changes and results in more predictable external influences, leading to a lower degree of impact from these factors.

The teenage period is crucial in setting objectives in any field of life. However, it was proven that STEM students are likely to be influenced by external factors, which is why it is essential to find the cognitive and motivational aspects that increase the chance of STEM employment in the future when it comes to the medical field and robotics (Wang & Degol, 2017). Thus, our society must nurture the importance of developing next-generation STEM leaders, emphasizing the collaboration needed to motivate and drive people into leadership positions beyond their technical capabilities to represent diversity from a global perspective (Al Hamad et al., 2024). On the other hand, the TVL program is designed for learners who are doubtful about their ability to go on with their post-high school education or whether they start working immediately (Vergara, 2023). The practical application of skills and knowledge in home economics is used to gauge the preparedness and competency of Home Economics graduates. Thus, their areas of employment illustrate how well the K–12 curriculum prepares students' minds and abilities toward vocational skills (De Guzman & Cristobal, 2021). Essentially, employers' assessments of students' preparedness for the workforce suggest that certain areas should focus on additional study to improve students' abilities (Alejandro & Bucad, 2024).

Table 1

Degree of Influence of External Factors on the Career Choices of the Grade 12 Students

Variables	n	Parental Involvement			Societal Culture			Peer Group			School Environment			As a whole		
		M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int.	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Sex																
Male	75	2.81	0.68	M	3.43	0.54	M	2.68	0.66	M	3.16	0.67	H	3.02	0.64	M
Female	158	2.72	0.7	M	3.26	0.59	M	2.55	0.62	M	3.1	0.68	H	2.91	0.65	M
Strand																
ABM	28	2.72	0.47	M	3.39	0.45	M	2.52	0.47	M	3.08	0.63	H	2.93	0.51	M

HUMSS	25	2.87	0.66	M	3.17	0.62	M	2.49	0.59	L	3.28	0.71	VH	2.95	0.65	M
STEM-AMH	86	2.74	0.8	M	3.31	0.61	M	2.62	0.74	M	3.15	0.76	H	2.96	0.73	M
STEM-EIT	86	2.78	0.63	M	3.37	0.58	M	2.62	0.59	M	3.04	0.62	H	2.95	0.61	M
TVL	8	2.22	0.84	L	2.98	0.37	M	2.57	0.66	M	3.25	0.43	VH	2.76	0.58	M
As a whole	233	2.75	0.69	M	3.32	0.58	M	2.59	0.64	M	3.12	0.68	H	2.95	0.65	M

Note: 4.50-5.00= VH, 3.50-4.49=H, 2.50-3.49=M, 1.50-2.49=L, 1.00-1.49=VL

Table 2 sought to identify whether there was a substantial difference in the influence of external factors on career choices when grouped according to sex. T-test independent samples were used to determine the significant difference in the degree of influence of external factors on career choices in terms of parental involvement, societal culture, peer group, and school environment of the grade 12 students when grouped according to sex. The difference was not significant in the degree of influence of external factors on the career choices in terms of parental involvement, peer group, and school environment of the grade 12 students when grouped according to sex, for p-values obtained are 0.369, 0.121, and 0.516 which exceed 0.05. On the other hand, the difference was significant in terms of societal culture, with a p-value of 0.039*.

It has been demonstrated that there is no substantial association between the external factors in terms of parental involvement, peer group influence, and school environment. In contrast, it was shown that societal culture has a significant influence on students' career choices when grouped according to sex. This indicates that despite the bearing of different beliefs, practices, and values, it was proven that men are more likely to be influenced by the existing societal cultures. This would mean that career choices are more likely to be influenced by the development of society and the rise of society's level of technological advancement, most especially with males. According to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015), 1 in 4 young people, particularly women, lack education or training. This can indicate unequal opportunities for men and women, producing societal prejudice.

Individuals from various cultural backgrounds have unique expectations, traditions, and values that can influence their professional choices (Jahan, 2020). Career choices, especially for high school students, require careful consideration due to their significant impact on one's future (Mtemeri, 2020). However, there is a contrasting gender disparity in academic fields. Ma et al. (2024) noted that female doctors are more likely to pursue graduate school but will be less likely to be employed by higher institutions. With this, society must address gender-related challenges and promote quality by giving opportunities to help any gender reach their fullest potential (Kuteesa et al., 2024).

In general, women tend to encounter biases more often than men. These biases include likability biases, where success is associated with negativity for women but the opposite for men; maternal biases, assuming women struggle to balance work and family, and fewer advantageous networking chances (Lent & Brown, 2013). On a positive note, however, work-life balance positively correlated with the preference for controllable lifestyle specialties in both men and women (Kawamoto et al., 2016).

Table 2

Difference between the Degree of External Factors on the Career Choices of the Grade 12 Students when Grouped according to Sex

	Sex		t	df	p
	Male	Female			
Parental Involvement	2.81 (0.68)	2.72 (0.70)	0.901	231	0.369
Societal Culture	3.43 (0.54)	3.26 (0.59)	2.077	231	0.039*
Peer Group	2.68 (0.66)	2.55 (0.62)	1.558	231	0.121
School Environment	3.16 (0.67)	3.10 (0.68)	0.651	231	0.516

Note: the difference in the means is significant when $p \leq 0.05$

One-way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the significant difference in the degree of influence of external factors on the career choices in terms of parental involvement, societal culture, peer group, and school environment of the grade 12 students when grouped according to strand. The difference was not significant in the degree of influence of external factors on the career choices in terms of parental involvement, societal group, peer group, and school environment of the grade 12 students when grouped according to the strand for p -values obtained are 0.229, 0.219, 0.875, and 0.542 which exceed 0.05. The post hoc test revealed that all respondents classified by strand obtained a similar degree of influence of external factors on their career choices in terms of parental involvement, societal culture, peer group, and school environment.

The results in Table 3 suggest that regardless of the specific academic strand the grade 12 students were in, external factors had a similar moderate degree of influence on their career choices. The findings indicate that these external factors did not significantly sway the students in any direction when deciding their future careers. This lack of significant difference across different academic strands implies that students may rely more on internal motivations than external influences when choosing their career paths. The study's results could suggest that the students are more driven by personal interests, values, and aspirations rather than heavily influenced by external factors such as societal expectations or economic considerations.

Since K-12 is new in the country, most tracks and strands are not followed properly until college. Thus, students' career paths may differ from what they had in mind throughout their high school years (Fernández et al., 2023). Furthermore, the pressure to succeed academically is

particularly evident during the senior year of high school, mainly due to increased competition for university entrance (Roca et al., 2020). In general, school-related problems are among the most reported sources of stress for adolescents (Fernández et al., 2023). Moreover, young people in the Philippines, contrasted with Western human progress, might face challenges that can make them not settle on their own choices consistently, particularly when picking professions, given the shifts of trends in society. When they are confused, they cannot have the option to conclude their senior high school experiences according to their choices (Fernández et al., 2023).

Table 3

Difference between the Degree of External Factors on the Career Choices of the Grade 12 Students when Grouped according to Strand

Variables	Strand	n	M	SD	F	df	p
Parental Involvement	ABM	28	2.72a	0.47	1.418	4	0.229
	HUMSS	25	2.87a	0.66			
	STEM-AMH	86	2.74a	0.80			
	STEM-EIT	86	2.78a	0.63			
	TVL	8	2.22a	0.84			
Societal Culture	ABM	28	3.39a	0.45	1.447	4	0.219
	HUMSS	25	3.17a	0.62			
	STEM-AMH	86	3.31a	0.61			
	STEM-EIT	86	3.37a	0.58			
	TVL	8	2.98a	0.37			
Peer Group	ABM	28	2.52a	0.47	0.304	4	0.875
	HUMSS	25	2.49a	0.59			
	STEM-AMH	86	2.62a	0.74			
	STEM-EIT	86	2.62a	0.59			
	TVL	8	2.57a	0.66			
School Environment	ABM	28	3.08a	0.63	0.776	4	0.542
	HUMSS	25	3.28a	0.71			
	STEM-AMH	86	3.15a	0.76			
	STEM-EIT	86	3.04a	0.62			
	TVL	8	3.25a	0.43			

Note: the difference in the means is significant when $p \leq 0.05$, and the mean that shares a letter was not significantly different.

4. CONCLUSION

The investigation underscores the diverse influence of external factors on career decisions among grade 12 students. Furthermore, it finds support in the Social Cognitive Career Theory by Lent et al. (1994), which provides a valuable framework for understanding the intricate interplay between external factors and individuals' career choices as it emphasizes the importance of environmental influences, such as family, peers, and socioeconomic background, in shaping career decisions. Additionally, incorporating SCCT principles into career counseling and guidance

programs enhances students' career development, career exploration behaviors, and goal setting, ultimately facilitating more satisfying and fulfilling career outcomes for youth.

While parental involvement, peer group, and school environment moderately shape choices, the societal culture influence emerges as the dominant influencer. This shows that society has one of the biggest responsibilities of guiding students in choosing their careers in the future. In essence, the study implies that society must employ changes that can influence both genders' adaptability in the development and the rise of new technologies. While emphasizing the importance of parental, peer, societal, and school support, the study recognizes that individual students also exhibit independence in shaping their future career paths. Overall, the findings of the study highlight the complex interaction between sex dynamics, societal influences, and academic pathways in shaping individual's responses to their environment.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following suggestions are offered:

Students: The researchers advocate for students to actively engage in discussions with professionals across various fields. This engagement can yield valuable insights into industry trends, job market dynamics, and real-world experiences, enriching their knowledge base for making well-informed career decisions.

Guidance counselors: The researchers encourage guidance counselors to incorporate information to provide students with individualized help, plan relevant workshops, and lead discussions with students. This strategy encourages a more efficient and personalized approach to career counseling, eventually improving counselors' capacity to direct students onto aligned and rewarding career pathways.

Parents and guardians: The researchers recommend that parents and guardians actively participate in their child's career exploration process. This enables them to provide valuable insights, foster informed decision-making, and contribute to a supportive environment that empowers students to make well-informed and fulfilling career choices.

Peers: The researchers emphasize the importance of peers being aware of each other's interests, values, and aspirations to create an environment conducive to sharing insights and experiences. This awareness enables peers to offer valuable perspectives, resources, and encouragement during decision-making.

Educators: The researchers recommend that educators maintain open dialogue with students about their career aspirations, contributing to a supportive educational environment that prepares students for well-informed decision-making.

Future researchers: The researchers suggest that future researchers may conduct further studies exploring external factors influencing students' career choices. They can include additional potential factors that may affect students' choices, enhancing the depth and scope of research findings for further improvement and verification.

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Ethical considerations

This paper follows the ethical guidelines set forth by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB). It upholds the core principles of respect for individuals, beneficence, and justice to ensure the study's ethical integrity.

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