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## Factors Affecting High School Students' Career Preference: A Basis for Career Planning Program

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### Abstract

Unemployment rate in the country is commonly associated with the misfit graduates produced by universities and colleges and the workforce needed by different companies. The wrong choice of course taken by most of high school students adds to the unemployment and underemployment rate of newly graduate students. With this the study determined the factors affecting the fourth year high school students' career preference of University of Rizal System' Laboratory School in Morong Rizal. The relationship of the factors affecting students' preference of course to their career preference, Brainard's Occupational Preference Inventory (BOPI) results, academic achievement and their elective grades were considered. Frequency, percentage and chi-square were used as statistical treatments. The findings revealed that the availability of work after college is the first consideration of students in choosing a course in college. Most of the students prefer to take scientific related field courses, or the "popular courses" for Filipinos. The least preferred course are in the Agricultural field. The BOPI results showed that most of the student-respondents are suited to take professional courses. Students' preferred course is related to their BOPI result as well as to their father's occupation. Other factors such as mother's occupation, monthly family income, students' sibling position and students' third year general average grades are not related to the students' preferred course in college to their BOPI results. BOPI results are significantly related to the students' elective course grades.

Students' career success can be best attained if proper guidance is given in choosing the right course in college, suited to students' personality, ability and intellect.

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Helping student choose the career that suits them can be done by integrating career plan with the curriculum so that students can make good decisions in what course to take in college. Collaborative effort of the school administrations, guidance counselor and parents should also be made to come-up with better career plan for every individual students.

**Keywords:** career planning; course preference; school environment

## **1. Introduction**

It is that in January 2013, the Philippines has 7.1% unemployment rate, the highest in the countries from the Southeast Asian nations and from which, 16.9 % of which are college graduates [1]. Misfit graduates are one of the considered reasons why the country has high unemployment and underemployment rate. The reasons could be either that the produced course of graduates misfit the demand of the present economy, or the graduates do not poses the characteristics required by the industries in need. This could be due to the wrong choice of course taken by most of the college students brought about by unguided decision making in choosing courses. This is seen through reports that mentioned that high percentage of unemployment and underemployment in the country is attributed to the inadequacy of skills of some of the graduates and not meeting the competencies needed by companies [2].

To be able to find ways to lessen misfit qualification of graduates to the needed workforce of companies and institutions, the government, particularly the Department of Education finds ways to elevate the quality of graduates before even reaching the collegiate level. This is one of the reasons why the government implemented the K-12 program in the educational system.

One of the objectives of the Department of Education's K-12 program is to produce graduates who are equipped with knowledge and skills to be productive citizens and an additional work force to promote economic development in the even after high school [3].

There are many factors considered by school administrators aside from the school curriculum or the academics to promote student educational success. Other perspective which is characterized by a differentiated view of schooling that promotes students' success aside from student learning and academic engagement is the students' social engagement. Students' social engagement may require different resources such as the counselors [4].

One of the roles of guidance and counseling is to make it possible for an individual to see and explore his or her unlimited endowed options. Vocational guidance counseling, one of the major services of guidance and counseling is to come up with career development program which enables guidance counselors to assist individuals to identify and learn the skills by which they can be more effective in planning for and in choosing jobs, in making effective transitions and adjustments to work and in managing their own careers and career transitions effectively. He further added that the National Career Development Association (NCDA) in the United States in 1993 noted that "Helping individuals increase self-understanding of their abilities, interests, values and goals is a vital foundation of the career development process" [5].

Sad to say but very few studies are made to investigate success of career path used in the students of the Philippines, even the factors that affect the career choice of Filipino students. This provides us with limited information on how to help our students identify the proper career options and course choice they have to pursue in the future. Students are not properly oriented as to what course to choose out of their interest and skills but because of the thought that these courses will provide jobs in the future. More so, students are opt career they think will give better paying job in the future. As what [6] posits,

“What college education can we afford that can make you finish quickly, get a job, and start helping with family finances? In other words, their concern is not finding guideposts in a career path, but peso signs that would lead them out of poverty.”

Given that the Philippines cannot provide enough jobs to sustain an educated workforce, there are several challenges for career counseling in the Philippines today. First, the matter of choosing a career in the Philippines is a family affair. Filipino families firmly believe that an education is the “great equalizer.” Approaching education as the “great equalizer” presumes that the education system is based on a meritocracy in which ability, hard work, and “rugged individualism” can lead to success[7]; this, without underscoring the proper career path that will lead them to succeed.

This prompted the research to identify the factors that affects the choice of career of third year students in the Laboratory School of University of Rizal System in Morong, Rizal. The results of the study served as the basis in the construction of a career path program for laboratory school students.

## **2. Methodology**

The study utilized descriptive assessment method of research to describe the preferred course of the students and the determined factors affecting their course preference. Descriptive normative method of research was also employed since data on the suited course for the students were gathered with the use of BOPI and the records of students' grades in third year. The study also used descriptive correlational method of research since one of the objectives of the study is to determine factors related to the course preference and suited course of the students. The data were gathered with the use of a validated questionnaire checklist, Brainard Occupational Preference Inventory (BOPI) scale, and students' general grade and elective subject grades when they were in third year. The study was conducted in school years 2012-2013 using 69 fourth year student-respondents of University of Rizal System Laboratory School of Morong Rizal. Data were statistically analyzed through SPSS ver.19. The study is limited only to the determined alignment of the use of standardized test in career selection to the grades of students in different subjects. The data of the study is also limited to the availability of the senior students of one of the two laboratory schools in the province of Rizal. The descriptive data are also limited to the perception of students on the factors that affect their career preference.

## **3. Literature and Study Review**

There are different factors that affect students' choice of course in college. One of this is family related factors. Study revealed that Filipino immigrants and non-immigrants rely heavily on their family's decision-making.

Students cope by following their parents' advice. They also have to cope with an expectation of financially supporting the family upon completing their education. Studies from other Asian countries also show parents' impact in decision making of students when it comes to students' course preference [8]. Another study highlighted that parental involvement have positive impact on Hmong / Mong adolescents' education and career choice [9]. Furthermore, it is reported that parents are deeply involved and influential to their high-achieving children's college choices. The report also found open houses, dialogue with college friends, alumni, and admitted-student programs are extremely influential to students. The report claimed these sources are not well known, but very powerful to student's decision making for their college. The study also found 26% of sampled students paid a specialist or advisor during the college decision process [10]. The studies presented are important to the present study since the studies explain the importance of taking parents' advice and permission in choosing a college course.

Respect for family is one of the most influential factors that impact Filipino students' career decision. It is concurred that "Out of respect and loyalty, it may not be appropriate to express personal desires; rather, one may alter one's interests to maintain harmony." As a sign of respect, Filipino children want to do well for the sake of the family, follow parents' advice about choosing a job or major in college and lastly, make sacrifices for the family [12]. For practicality reasons, it is also reported that parents usually encourage careers that will not cost much money, but at the same time, are stable sources of income. Careers in nursing, accounting, and engineering are highly popular for Filipino families [8]. These writings discuss that the family decides in what college course students should take is also associated with the financial status of the family.

Aside from family related factors, economic factors which includes the employability and availability of job in the future is also considered by students. Employability, i.e., the realistic feasibility of being employed in a stable job, then becomes an important factor in career decision-making. Coming from a collective culture, immigrant parents and children seek careers that will support the whole family. Moreover, it is found that Asian American men and women tend to be more interested in technical fields, the physical sciences, and non-enterprising business positions over artistic, social, or socially interactive business careers [11].

Aside from economic factors, exposure of students to career related technical and academic subjects also known as elective subjects in the Philippines also helps in students' decision making in career choices in college. It was revealed that career technical Education (CTE) was perceived positively by middle school and high school counselors in Tennessee, and the need for career awareness should begin in a student's early years before high school. However, there was a difference in perceptions of CTE by middle school and high school counselors. Both middle school and high school counselors felt that CTE teachers should have knowledge, skills and a teaching license [12]. School counselors felt that they did not have enough time to provide career counseling to students. Being informed and ready to choose a career focus area in a student freshmen year could help make the transition from middle school to high school easier thus help prevent the student from dropping out of school before graduation. On the importance of integrating the academic curriculum in students' preparation for a college course choice, it is explained that academics should be integrated with career-focused courses so students can see practical application for the academic courses such as mathematics, science, reading and writing [13]. Personality and interest are not the only criteria for choosing a career. An individual's aptitude

and intellectual abilities are equally of great importance. An aptitude is a potential for success in an area after undergoing some training but a layman may define aptitude as a flair for something. The context in which people live, their personal aptitudes, and educational attainment are other things that do influence people's career choice [14].

The importance of having effective career planning is emphasized by SREB. It was found that students who receive help in exploring careers and planning programs of study related to their career interest are more likely to see school as meaningful. High Schools That Work recommended that students as early as the eighth grade develop a six-year plan for all four years of high school and two years after graduation. These students should work with their parents, teachers, and school counselors to develop high school courses and future goals. Students who see a direct link between school and the future are more definite in their career and postsecondary goals. Middle schools lay the foundation for career choices by getting students to explore career fields which interest them, and then in high school, counselors help students align the curriculum to the academic and industry standards of those careers [15]. The involvement of family, school administrators and guidance counselor to help students make good career choice in the future is emphasized in the study who mentioned that parents, teachers, and school counselors are all involved in students' career decision-making process [12]. The researchers suggested that the "American education career development plan" is to prepare students for the next formal learning experience with little opportunity in career development activities, and students are simply encouraged to attend school until they can go no further.

Continuity of career development program should be continuous and progressive. In 2001 it was mentioned that as early as the third grade, students are expected to acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions. In the middle school grades of six through eight, school counselors help students identify interests and abilities through self-assessment activities, comparing middle school with high school, and then use assessment results in academic and career planning. When students enter ninth grade, the school counseling and career guidance standards state that students should be able to assess the relationship between aptitudes and interests to develop a six-year academic plan, formulate long-term educational and career goals, and correlate courses of study to long-term goals. Students are expected to research their future options and investigate the world of work in relation to self knowledge and use that information to make informed career decisions. Then, in high school, students are expected to create strategies to achieve future career success and satisfaction by modifying their educational plans to support their career goals, to evaluate and update their career-planning portfolios, and to apply academic and employment readiness skills through programs such as work-based learning [16].

Furthermore, it was emphasized that a comprehensive and developmental view of education and career planning, especially in middle schools. Middle school counselors are instrumental in implementing effective education and career planning systems to help students with their educational and career development. Research shows that the choices middle school students make have a strong bearing on their educational and career development for decades to come, particularly academic choices [17]. Furthermore, it is mentioned that school counselors and school counseling programs play key roles in preparing students to successfully transition to the next level, whether it is some type of postsecondary education or joining the workforce [18]. To add with, it is

emphasized that education and career planning from a life-career perspective, with career development and planning encompassing education, work, and leisure [17]. Therefore, extracurricular activities, hobbies, civic participation, and cultural experiences should be part of middle school students' education and career planning .

**4. Result**

Table 1

Mean Value and Standard Deviation of the Factors that Affect Student-Respondents' Course Preference

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>
1. I consider my course choice to be an in-demand course	4.19	.772	Agree
2. I consider the financial status of family in choosing my course	3.86	.733	Agree
3. I consider the place of my future work in choosing my course	3.87	.969	Agree
4. I consider the work I will get after finishing my degree in choosing a course	4.41	.944	Strongly Agree
5. My choice of school affects my choice of course	3.71	.941	Agree
6. The availability of job in the future affects my choice of course	4.03	.840	Agree
7. My preferred course is my "childhood dream" work	2.96	1.143	Moderately Agree
8. My preference course is connected to my favorite subject	3.75	.976	Agree
9. My preference of course is my personal choice	4.28	.765	Strongly Agree
10. My preference of course is a reflection of my talent	3.54	.867	Agree

11. My friend's preference of course affects my decision in choosing a course	1.90	.894	With Minimal Agreement
12. My friend's choice of school affects my decision in choosing a course	2.22	.968	With Minimal Agreement
13. My parents are the ones who are choosing my course	2.25	1.143	With Minimal Agreement
14. Our family business is a factor in my choice of course in college	2.07	.944	With Minimal Agreement
15. The dominant profession in my family is also my preferred course	2.09	1.025	With Minimal Agreement
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.28</b>	<b>.9282</b>	<b>Moderately Agree</b>

Table 1 above presents the mean value and standard deviation of the factors affecting the fourth year students' course preference.

As depicted in the table, the students strongly agree that the availability of work after finishing college degree is the first consideration of students in choosing a course followed by choosing a course as a personal choice with mean values of 4.41 and 4.28 respectively. When the least mean value of factors that affects students in choosing a course is considered, peer's preference of course choice got the least mean value with a mean value of 1.90 with a verbal interpretation of "With Minimal Disagreement". Next to the least is the consideration of the students' family business with a mean value of 2.07.

Table 2 presents the students preferred course to be taken upon graduation.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage of the Fourth Year Students' Preferred Courses

Students' Preferred Course	Frequency	Percentage
Commercial	14	20.3
Mechanical	4	5.8
Professional	20	29.0
Scientific	28	40.6
Agricultural	1	1.4
Personal Service	2	2.9
Total	69	100.00

As shown in the table, most of the student-respondents preferred to take courses under Scientific filed with 28 out of 69 or 40.6% of the respondents prefer courses which include engineering courses, BS Statistics and BS Geology. Most number of preferred courses different kinds of engineering courses particularly civil and electronic engineering courses. The next highest course preferred by the students are the Professional courses with 20 out of 69 or 29.00% of the respondents prefer these course. Most of the courses preferred by the students under this category are medicine related courses such as BS Pharmacy, BS Nursing and Medical Technology course. Third of the most number of course preference of students are in the Commercial category with 14/69 or 20.3% of the distribution. Most dominant courses preferred by students under this category are Accountancy and Business Management courses. Next to the last preferred courses of students are courses under Mechanical category. Most of the courses preferred by students are Marine technology, Information technology and criminology courses. The least preferred by students are Agricultural related courses with 2/69 or 2.9% of the distribution.

Table 3 presents the frequency of the suited course for the fourth year students as revealed in their individual BOPI results.

As presented below, the results of the Brainard Occupational Preference Inventory showed that most of the student-respondents are suited to take Professional courses with 21/69 or 30.4% of the distribution. Occupations included in this category include courses related to medical work, legal and social work, educational work and personnel work. It is followed by Commercial Field which constitutes 23.2% of the distribution. This includes professions related to accounting, clerical work, selling and business management. Twelve out of 69 students are fitted to Scientific Field courses which may include courses related to statistical, physical, biological and chemical researches. Thirteen (13%) of the distribution are suited in Mechanical Field related jobs which performs machine design, machine operator jobs, fine manual work and building construction works. Those who are suited for the Agricultural Field constitute 6/69 or 8.7% of the distribution. This included job-related courses pertaining to farm and design, small animal raising, forestry and animal husbandry.

Table 3

Frequency and Percentage of Suited Courses for the Fourth Year Student-Respondents

<b>Students' BOPI Results</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Commercial	16	23.2
Mechanical	9	13
Professional	21	30.4
Scientific	12	17.4
Agricultural	6	8.7
Personal Service	5	7.2
Total	69	100.00



The least suited course for the student-respondents is in the Personal Service field which pertains to jobs on clothing, domestic, health and community services.

Table 4 below presents the result of the chi-square test on the significant relationship between students' preferred courses and the courses fitted to them as revealed by their Brainard Occupational Preference Inventory results.

Table 4

Chi-square value of the Significant Relationship between Students' Preferred Courses and their BOFI Results

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Course Preference vs. BOFI result	25	.038	Reject Ho

As shown, the chi-square value of .038 is less than the alpha value of .05 with the degrees of freedom of 25, thus rejecting the null hypothesis there is significant relationship between the preferred courses of student-respondents and the fitted courses for the student-respondents as revealed by their BOFI results.

The findings mean that the preferred courses of the students are in a way related to the course suited to them but it does not necessarily mean that all of the students' preferred courses are suited to their skills and abilities since the hypothesis is rejected only at 95% level of confidence but not at 99% level of confidence. Furthermore, students only agree that their preference of course is a reflection of their talent (Table 1).

Table 5 presents the chi-square value of the significant relationship of the factors that affects students' preferred courses and the courses suited to them as revealed in their BOFI results.

Table 5

Chi-square value of the Significant Relationship between the factors that Affects Students'

Preferred Courses and their BOFI Results

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Course Preference vs. Father's Occupation	30	.040	Reject Ho
Course Preference vs. Mother's Occupation	15	.679	Accept Ho
Course Preference vs. Monthly Family Income	10	.339	Accept Ho
Course Preference vs. Sibling Position	10	.582	Accept Ho
Course Preference vs. Academic Achievement	5	.673	Accept Ho

BOFI result vs. Father's Occupation	30	.248	Accept Ho
BOFI result vs. Mother's Occupation	15	.166	Accept Ho
BOFI result vs. Monthly family Income	10	.633	Accept Ho
BOFI result vs. Academic Achievement	5	.339	Accept Ho
BOFI result Vs. Sibling Position	10	.358	Accept Ho

As shown in the table, fathers' occupation is a factor significantly related to the students' preferred courses with a chi-square value of .040 that is less than the alpha value of .05. Other factors such as mother's occupation, monthly family income, students' sibling position and students' third year general average grades are not related to the students' preferred course to be taken in college.

When the factors affecting students' choice of course and the field of course suited to them as revealed by their BOFI results, no significant relationship is seen between the factors father's occupation, mother's occupation, monthly family income, sibling position and general average grade and their BOFI results. This entails that the above stated factors are not related to the suited courses for the student-respondents.

Table 6 presents the relationship of students' elective subject grades, students' preferred course and BOFI results.

Table 6

Chi-square value of the Significant Relationship between the Students' Elective Subject Grades and Students' Preferred Courses and their BOFI Results

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Course Preference vs. Elective Subject grade	10	.610	Accept Ho
BOFI result vs. Elective Subject Grade	10	.027	Reject Ho

As shown in the table, Brainard Occupational Preference Inventory results of the students are significantly related to their elective subject grades since the chi-square value of .027 is less than the alpha value of .05 which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. On the other hand, the students' course preference is not significantly related to their elective subject grade.

## 5. Discussion

The students' first consideration in choosing a course in college is the availability of possible work. This could be the common response of students since now-a-days graduates finds it difficult to find a job even if they have already finished well know courses such as nursing and education courses. The problem with using this factor as an option in choosing a course is that students may have a tendency to choose a misfit course on their ability and

skills. In the long run, student will find it difficult to find a job with his/her course, chosen out of the motivation that there are lots of workforce needed is that specific course, which are seasonal and gradually decreases when there are too much graduates produced in the so-called in demand courses. The possible course chosen that is not fitted to the students may also lead to their inability to qualify to the competencies needed by companies. This is because their ability is not suited with course they have taken, thus will not unleash their maximum potentials.

Peer factor is the least consideration of students in choosing a course in college. This shows that students are having independent decisions when it comes to choosing their desired course in college, not much affected by decisions of peer and family. But when considered closely, although with low mean value, highest standard deviation is seen the parents being the ones choosing the course and dominant profession in the family is the preferred course which entails that students have various response on this items, thus, family can also be considered a factor in choosing the college course for the few. The findings of the present study do not support the study that the course preference of Filipinos are mostly affected and influenced by the decision of their parents and family [8]. Reasons may vary depending on the family orientation of the study.

With respect to course preference of students, it can be noticed that most of the preferred courses of the students are the “popular” or well-known courses which include Engineering courses and the least is the promoted course of the government which are the Agriculture related courses. The result of the present study that most students prefer popular courses such as engineering, medical-related courses and accounting is in line with the writings that that nursing, accounting and engineering courses are highly popular for Filipino families [8]. This shows that students goes with trend on what they think is a good course more than what is economically feasible jobs in the future like agriculture-related courses and technical related courses.

The findings show that since most of the students are fitted to be professional and on commercial related jobs. When the initial finding on the preferred course of students, courses under scientific field is the most preferred courses of students more than the courses under professional field. Thus, preference of students on the career to take in the future is affected by other factors other than the skills and personalities they have. This may be because of the common idea of students that if you one wants to be employed in the future, one needs to take popular courses as [8]. Smaller number of students who are fitted to Agricultural field courses shows that less students are inclined to do manual work related to agriculture. This denotes that most students do not have much the skills and interest when it comes to manual work related to food production, a negation to the kind of country we have: an agricultural country. This could be due to the culture we have that agriculturally related field are not very good fields that can bring wealth to the family. Thus, we have low concept on agricultural-related jobs as a course for our children.

The determined relationship between preferred courses of student-respondents and the fitted courses for student-respondents as revealed in their BOFI results reveals that the preferred courses of the students are in a way related to the course suited to them but it does not necessarily mean that all of the students’ preferred courses are suited to their skills and abilities. Furthermore, students only agree that their preference of course is a reflection of their talent (Table 1). This is a negation of the purpose of the use of BOFI which is to distinguish the suited

courses for the students based on their skills and interest. Although suited course are measured based on the interest and personality of the students, other criteria relevant in choosing a career such as individuals' aptitude and intellectual abilities are equally of great importance [14].

The reason why father's occupation served as a factor of students' preference of course could be since fathers are typically the bread winner of the family, thus, provides the financial needs of the family. Since students' first consideration in choosing a course is the availability of job after college, the observed stability of the family's financial source which may pertain to the father's occupation is considered by the students in choosing a course.

Other family factors such as mother's occupation, family income, and sibling position are not considered factors considered by students in choosing a course, neither considered a factor of the suited course for the students, which in line with the initial finding that students' preference of course is a personal choice and not much affected by family or parents' decision (Table 1). Since the students themselves are the ones making decisions on the course they prefer, family related factors do not affect their choice of course to be taken in college. Furthermore, students' skills and interest are not family-related thus does not affect their BOFI results. The findings showing parents' occupation are not a factor in students' choice of course, a negation to the idea that parents have great impact on students' choice of course [8]. This could be due to the difference of place where respondents of two studies reside.

The findings further entail that the elective courses given by the school to the third year students are fitted to the interest and skills. Their experiences in their elective subject can be used as a basis in suited courses students can take after high school. This also means that students' performance in their elective subject is in line with the reflected ability and skills of the students reflected through their BOFI results. The findings of the present study are parallel to the idea that career technical education or an elective course are perceived positively by school counselors [12]. The implementation of elective courses as which is an integration of academics to career-focused courses is important [13]. Furthermore, BOFI results can be used as a basis in the elective subject to be taken by the students in preparation for their college degree.

## **6. Conclusion**

Students' career success can be best attained if the right course suited to their personality, ability and intellect serves as their guide in choosing the course they are to take in college. Experiencing the career suited to students by integrating career plan with the curriculum help students make good decisions in what course to take in college. Although elective courses are available to help students make decisions in course they are to take in college, it is also important to help students understand the important factors they have to consider in choosing a course like the economical importance of the course they would want to take at present and in the future. Collaborative effort of the school administrations, guidance counselor and parents should also be made to come-up with better career plan for every individual students.

The results of the study justifies that career plan for students must be made in a continuous manner and should start from an earlier grade level to help student identify thoroughly the suited course for them. Parents should

also be included in the career program development of students so that they themselves can understand and help students choose which course best fit their child's personality, interest and intellectual ability. In the future, further study on the basis of students' choice of their preferred course in college should be made using other factors aside from the ones used in the study as well as the course taken by students in college and its relationship to the preferred course and the suited course for students. The effect of elective subjects on the considered career of laboratory school graduates should also be considered.

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