



SENIOR HIGH GRADUATES IN UNRELATED JOBS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of Senior High School (SHS) graduates from Makinhas National High School who are employed in fields unrelated to their academic strands. Utilizing in-depth, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the research examines how these individuals navigate career displacement and derive meaning from non-aligned employment. Driven primarily by socioeconomic necessity rather than career alignment, graduates initially faced struggles with confidence and feelings of academic detachment. However, they demonstrated significant resilience, developing unexpected versatility, early workplace maturity, and emotional strength. By adapting through grit and family support, participants reoriented their perspectives on achievement, redefining success beyond job titles and finding self-worth through their workplace contributions. Ultimately, they learned to reconcile unmet expectations and embrace present opportunities. To better prepare students for these flexible labor market realities, the study underscores a critical need for stronger career guidance, improved work immersion programs, robust industry linkages, and the integration of financial literacy and practical life skills into the SHS curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

Education serves as the cornerstone of personal and societal development, equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate academic pathways and professional careers. Globally, educational systems are designed to provide students with the competencies needed for diverse career trajectories, ensuring that learning outcomes align with workforce demands (UNESCO, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2021). Many nations, particularly in Asia, have restructured their high school curricula to integrate specialized tracks that bridge the gap between secondary education and employment or further studies. These reforms emphasize skill acquisition and industry alignment to enhance graduates' readiness for both local and international labor markets (Mokher, 2024).

In the Philippines, the implementation of the K-12 curriculum was a significant step toward aligning the country's education system with global standards. The program introduced Senior High School (SHS) tracks, including the Academic, Arts and Design, Sports, and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) strands, designed to prepare students either for higher education or immediate employment (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2022). To further strengthen this alignment, the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) was established, mapping SHS graduates' competencies to internationally recognized qualification frameworks such as the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Specifically, the PQF assigns Level 4 qualifications to SHS graduates in the TVL track, signifying their preparedness for mid-skilled occupations in various industries (Philippine Qualifications Framework, 2021).

Despite these structured efforts, challenges persist in bridging the transition from SHS to employment. While the PQF and SHS curricula aim to enhance workforce readiness, research suggests that many graduates struggle to secure jobs aligned with their specializations (Santos et al., 2021). A growing concern is the mismatch between educational training and labor market demands, with SHS graduates often employed in low-wage positions or fields unrelated to their track. The Philippine Business for Education (PBEd) reports that only 46% of surveyed companies currently hire SHS graduates, indicating a gap between the intended outcomes of the K-12 program and actual employment opportunities (Reimers & Weiss, 2024). These challenges highlight the need for continuous curriculum refinement and stronger industry-education linkages to ensure that SHS graduates are not only employable but also adequately equipped to contribute meaningfully to the workforce. As the Philippines continues to navigate the complexities of educational reform, assessing the effectiveness of the SHS program in meeting labor market demands remains crucial.

Research Questions

This study sought to explore and interpret the experiences of SHS graduates from Makinhas National High School who are employed in fields unrelated to their specialization. Using hermeneutic phenomenology, it sought to understand how these individuals perceive and make sense of their careers. The following research questions guide this inquiry:

1. What are the experiences of Senior High School graduate experience employment in fields unrelated to their specialization?
2. What meanings do they attribute to these experiences?

Research Design

In this study, I employed a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research design to explore and interpret the lived experiences of Senior High School (SHS) graduates from Makinhas National High School who entered jobs unrelated to their academic specializations. Grounded in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1927), hermeneutic phenomenology emphasizes the interpretation of lived experience to reveal deeper meanings embedded in individuals' life contexts (Lavery, 2021; Vagle, 2021). I found this approach particularly well-suited to my study's objectives, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of how these graduates made sense of their career trajectories and the decisions that led them to their current roles.

Drawing from Neubauer et al. (2022), I recognized the value of focusing on participants' meanings and lived realities, which enabled a richer understanding of how they navigate their circumstances. Through this lens, I was able to capture the broader social, cultural, and psychological influences on their career choices, aligning with Heidegger's notion of "being-in-the-world," which underscored how individuals' experiences are shaped by and embedded in their existential and relational contexts.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

This study focused on Senior High School (SHS) graduates from Makinhas National High School who were employed in jobs unrelated to their SHS specialization and had not pursued higher education. These individuals provide valuable insights into the experiences of graduates who entered the workforce without transitioning to college.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, guided by the following inclusion criteria: graduated from Makinhas National High School ensuring that the study captured the experiences of SHS completers from the same institution; currently employed in a job unrelated to their SHS specialization focusing on graduates whose current employment did not align with their SHS specialization; did not pursue higher education, emphasizing the perspectives of individuals who entered the workforce directly instead of enrolling in college or further studies.

There are five participants in this study who follow the criteria. This number is considered sufficient for qualitative phenomenological research. According to Creswell and Poth (2023), a phenomenological study could achieve depth and thematic saturation with approximately 5–10 participants, particularly when the sample was purposefully selected. This approach ensured the collection of rich, detailed narratives that aligned with the study's focus on the unrelated career paths of SHS graduates working in fields outside their SHS specializations.

Research Instrument

To gather rich and detailed data in alignment with the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, I employed an interview schedule, a recording device, and field notes. These instruments helped me capture the participants' lived experiences, ensuring the depth of understanding required for the study. I carefully selected each tool to support the reflective and iterative nature of hermeneutic phenomenology, making sure that the data collection process remained consistent with my study's objectives.

I used the interview schedule as the primary data collection tool. It contained open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to narrate their experiences in their own words. This flexible structure allowed me to explore their career decisions and trajectories while also

adapting to follow-up questions and deeper discussions based on emerging themes. Such adaptability was essential for engaging with participants' subjective realities and for supporting the iterative process of data interpretation in phenomenological research.

I also used a recording device to capture each interview in its entirety, preserving participants' words, tones, and inflections, which were critical for understanding the depth of their expressions. The recordings enabled accurate transcription and allowed me to revisit the conversations during the analysis phase, a key aspect of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. Additionally, recording the interviews allowed me to fully engage with the participants during our discussions, fostering authentic and responsive interactions.

Gathering of Data

To gather substantial data on this study, the following step-by-step procedure was employed which was categorized into three phases namely: preliminary activities, main activities and post activities.

Preliminary Activity

The data collection process began with securing the necessary approvals to ensure compliance with ethical standards and institutional protocols. First, a formal request was submitted to the Dean of the Franciscan College of the Immaculate Conception Graduate School for permission to conduct the study. Upon obtaining this initial approval, a letter of request was forwarded to the Schools Division Superintendent of the Schools Division of Baybay City to seek authorization at the division level. Once approved, the principal of Makinhas National High School was approached to obtain school-level consent. After securing institutional permissions, potential participants were identified, and their informed consent was obtained. A detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical safeguards was provided to ensure participants' understanding and voluntary participation.

Main Activity

Within the scope of his study, I focused primarily on conducting interviews while strictly following all ethical standards. I started each session by greeting the participants warmly and providing a clear explanation of the research's objectives and purpose. I assured at various points that all the information shared would be kept confidential, reinforcing that their responses would remain private. I develop rapport building and initiated general conversation, using an open-ended question to help participants feel more comfortable in the conversation and establish a relaxed environment for both of us.

Before formally beginning the interview, I informed them about the purpose, procedures, and potential risks of the research. This included reiterating the confidentiality of the discussion, highlighting the voluntary nature of their participation, and securing their consent for the use of audio recording. To establish clear communication and ease, I conducted the interviews in the participants' native dialect. I also informed them of the expected duration of the session to set proper expectations regarding their time commitment.

Throughout each interview session, I maintained a respectful, focused, and open-minded atmosphere, ensuring participants felt comfortable and secure in sharing their experiences



openly. I deliberately included pauses in the conversation to give participants enough time to reflect on their thoughts before responding. This mindful pacing encouraged deeper, more reflective narratives. I had been consistently observant of both verbal and non-verbal indications, adjusting my approach as needed to maintain a clear and relaxed environment. I relied on open-ended questions to guide the discussions, inviting participants to share their personal stories and experiences related to their employment in fields unrelated to their SHS specialization.

When participants became more comfortable, I gently encouraged them to elaborate on their experiences by asking questions such as, “How did you decide to take this job?” or “How did you feel working in a field different from your SHS specialization?” These prompts fostered richer, more detailed storytelling, gaining valuable insights into the participants' lived experiences. By developing a supportive and respectful environment, I was able to gather authentic narratives that captured the complexities, challenges, and personal meanings behind the career journeys of SHS graduates who ventured into employment unrelated to their SHS specialization.

To ensure adherence to ethical research guidelines, I provided each participant with the opportunity to review their interview transcripts, ensuring the accuracy of the recorded data and reinforcing trust in the research process. The semi-structured interview format also allowed for flexibility, enabling me to adjust questions based on the flow of conversation and the unique experiences each participant shared. This approach not only enhanced the depth and authenticity of the data but also respected the participants' time, dignity, and willingness to sharing their experiences.

The interviews were conducted in private, comfortable settings and carefully chosen to ensure that participants felt safe and at ease. Some of the interviews took place within Makinhas National High School, while others were held at mutually agreed neutral locations. The goal was to provide an environment free from distractions, fostering a space favorable to open and thoughtful conversation. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. The specific times were as follows:

Fe was interviewed on February 1, 2025, from 5:45 PM to 6:31 PM, for 46 minutes and six seconds, at their front porch. Jude was interviewed on February 8, 2025, from 2:30 PM to 3:18 PM, lasting 48 minutes and 37 seconds, at the Makinhas NHS Computer Laboratory room. On February 8, 2025, Tony was interviewed from 9:12 PM to 10:01 PM, lasting 49 minutes, in the same Computer laboratory room. Furthermore, Will was interviewed on February 15, 2025, from 10:25 AM to 11:11 AM, for 46 minutes and 17 seconds, in the same place. Lastly, Raine was interviewed on February 15, 2025, from 3:25 PM to 4:10 PM, lasting 45 minutes and 55 seconds, at the exact location.

Post Activity

Upon completion of the data collection, I transcribed the audio recordings and thoroughly reviewed them for accuracy. To ensure that the participants' perspectives were sincerely represented, I invited them to participate in a member-checking process, allowing them to review and validate their responses. This step strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness

of the study. As a gesture of gratitude for their time and openness, each participant received a small figurine as a token of appreciation. Additionally, all collected data including audio recordings, field notes, and transcriptions were securely stored following ethical standards and data privacy guidelines to uphold participant confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lived Experiences of Senior High School Graduate Employed in Unrelated Jobs

This section presents the findings derived from the exploration of the lived experiences of SHS graduates who are currently employed in jobs unrelated to their SHS specialization. Through a detailed analysis of the participants' narratives, there are six major themes, and 12 corresponding sub-themes were identified, reflecting the complex realities they navigate. These themes illustrate the interplay between personal, social, and economic factors influencing their career journeys.

One of the major themes that emerged was Navigating Unfamiliar Paths. Participants recounted how they adapted to new and unfamiliar work environments, often learning through hands-on experience. This theme is captured through two sub-themes: Learning by Doing in a New Environment and Struggling with Initial Confidence and Adjustment.

Another prominent theme was Career Displacement and Detachment, where a strong sense of disconnection was evident between participants' academic backgrounds and their current employment. This experience is articulated through the sub-themes: Disconnection Between Academic Background and Current Job and Perceived Irrelevance of SHS Training. The theme of Socioeconomic Push to Work also surfaced strongly, as economic pressures compelled graduates to prioritize immediate employment over career-aligned opportunities. This is reflected in the sub-themes: Economic Pressure Overriding Career Alignment and Prioritizing Immediate Income Over Long-term Goals.

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated versatility through circumstances, discovering and developing new skills outside of their formal education. This adaptive growth is highlighted through the sub-themes: Discovering Strengths Outside the Classroom and Gaining Workplace Experience Ahead of Peers.

Furthermore, the theme of Support and Sacrifice illustrated how family needs and expectations played a critical role in career decisions, often requiring participants to set aside their aspirations. This dynamic is captured in the sub-themes: Family as a Driving Force and Sacrificing Personal Aspirations. Lastly, the theme of Adapting Through Grit and Growth emerged, wherein participants demonstrated resilience and personal development as they faced the challenges of their roles. This ongoing adaptation is embodied in the sub-themes: Resilience in Facing Job Challenges and Building Confidence in Unexpected Roles.

Meanings of Experiences of Senior High School Graduates Employed in Unrelated Job

This section looks into the meanings of experiences of SHS graduates employed in jobs unrelated to their specialization, offering meaningful insights into how these individuals navigate the challenges of pursuing careers that differ from their educational paths. These experiences are not merely about facing job-related difficulties but also about redefining personal values, expectations, and identity outside the framework of formal education. Through a hermeneutic phenomenological lens, five emergent themes and ten sub-themes emerged, shedding light on the varied and complex meanings behind these graduates' work experiences.

The first emergent theme, *Redefining Success*, emphasizes how success is no longer defined solely by academic titles or credentials but by the ability to earn and live a fulfilling life. Sub-themes such as *Success is Earning, Not the Title* and *Happiness Beyond Academic Prestige* highlight how graduates recognize that real success lies in financial stability and personal satisfaction, rather than the prestige of a degree or career title.

The second theme, *Growth Beyond the Curriculum*, explores how real-life experiences in the workplace offer lessons that often surpass those learned in school. Graduates reflect on how becoming *Street-Smart* and *Emotionally Strong* are critical outcomes of their experiences, emphasizing the practical, emotional, and adaptive skills gained on the job.

Hope Anchored in Sacrifice is the third emergent theme, revealing how enduring hardships are a key motivator for many graduates as they strive for a better future. The sub-themes *Endurance for a Better Future* and *Delayed Gratification for Family Welfare* reflect the graduates' willingness to sacrifice immediate comfort for long-term family welfare and personal advancement, with a strong sense of hope driving their resilience.

The fourth theme, *Finding Identity Through Work*, delves into how work serves as a vehicle for building self-worth. The sub-themes *Self-Worth Built on Contribution* and *Emergence of Self-Reliance* capture how graduates begin to see their value in terms of their contributions to their families and communities, with many also developing a stronger sense of self-reliance as they navigate work environments independently.

Finally, the theme *Acceptance and Letting Go* reflects the graduates' journey of reconciling with career detours and moving beyond idealized career paths. The sub-themes *Making Peace with Career Detours* and *Letting Go of Idealism* highlight graduates' acceptance of their new realities, acknowledging the importance of flexibility and the need to release assumptions about career success and fulfillment.

Lived Experiences of Senior High School Graduate Employed in Unrelated Jobs

Navigating Unfamiliar Paths

This is the first theme of the lived experiences of senior high school graduates employed in unrelated jobs with two sub-themes, *Learning by Doing in New Environment* and *Struggling with Initial Confidence and Adjustment*. In this theme, it mainly describes the experiences of the participants from each transition from Senior High School to the workforce that presents significant challenges, especially for graduates employed in jobs unrelated to their field of specialization. This theme highlights the various obstacles they encounter and their ability to grow and adapt despite these difficulties. The participants' narratives reveal that while they initially struggled with unfamiliar roles, they gradually developed strategies to overcome these barriers and ultimately found ways to thrive in their respective workplaces.

Learning by Doing in a New Environment

This is the first sub-theme from the theme *Navigating Unfamiliar Path*. This sub-theme describes the transition from Senior High School (SHS) to the workforce, particularly into roles unrelated to one's field of study, and presents significant challenges for graduates. This section delves into the initial obstacles these individuals face and the strategies they employ to learn and adapt effectively on the job.

The lived experiences of the participants illustrate how being placed in a work environment unrelated to their Senior High School (SHS) specialization became a catalyst for experiential learning. Their narratives embody the process of learning by doing, gaining



knowledge, skills, and confidence not through formal instruction, but through daily engagement in unfamiliar tasks and roles.

Struggling with Initial Confidence and Adjustment

For many SHS graduates working in fields unrelated to their specialization, the transition into unfamiliar work environments is marked by a struggle with self-confidence and the need to adapt quickly. These initial experiences often evoke feelings of uncertainty, hesitation, and anxiety, particularly as they navigate roles that require skills and dispositions they were not formally trained for.

Many participants described their early employment experiences as marked by uncertainty, low self-esteem, and the overwhelming pressure of adjusting to unfamiliar roles. Despite having completed their Senior High School education, their jobs did not align with their field of specialization, which made the transition from school to work even more challenging.

Career Displacement and Detachment

This is the second theme identified in the lived experiences of Senior High School graduates employed in jobs unrelated to their specialization. This theme encompasses two sub-themes: *Disconnection Between Academic Background and Current Job* and *Perceived Irrelevance of SHS Training*. It primarily describes the challenges participants faced during their transition from SHS to the workforce, especially for those working in jobs that do not align with their SHS specialization. The theme underscores the obstacles these graduates encounter in bridging the gap between their education and job roles.

Disconnect Between Academic Background and Current Job

The misalignment between academic preparation and employment outcomes has become a recurring phenomenon, particularly among senior high school graduates entering the workforce without pursuing higher education. Many students, especially those from technical-vocational and humanities strands, find themselves taking on jobs unrelated to their field of specialization, suggesting a potential gap between educational pathways and labor market realities. This disconnect often stems from systemic factors such as economic necessity, lack of job opportunities aligned with one's strand, and limited career guidance during high school.

Perceived Irrelevance of SHS Training

Many SHS graduates perceive the training they received during their two-year specialization as disconnected from the actual demands of the workforce. This sense of irrelevance is particularly prevalent among those who enter jobs unrelated to their academic strand. Rather than applying the competencies they acquired in specialized tracks such as TVL or HUMSS, they often find themselves performing routine tasks that require no prior training, leading to a feeling that their education was more theoretical than practical.

Socioeconomic Push to Work

This is the third emergent theme that explores the powerful influence of economic factors on the career choices of SHS graduates employed in jobs unrelated to their specializations. This theme underscores how financial pressures often drive individuals to prioritize immediate employment rather than aligning their work with their long-term career aspirations. It is further examined through two sub-themes, Economic Pressure Override Career Alignment and Immediate Income Over Long-Term Goals. These sub-themes reflect the difficult choices faced by the participants, as they navigate the tension between securing short-term financial stability and pursuing career paths that match their educational background. Through their experiences, this theme highlights the significant role socioeconomic factors play in shaping career decisions and the compromises graduates make in response to financial realities.

Economic Pressures Override Career Alignment

In many developing contexts, financial necessity plays a dominant role in shaping career decisions, often overriding the alignment between educational specialization and employment. Economic pressures compel individuals to prioritize income over passion or alignment, forcing Senior High School (SHS) graduates into unrelated jobs just to support their families.

Immediate Income Over Long-Term Goals

The urgency of earning money right after high school has led many SHS graduates to prioritize short-term financial gains over the pursuit of long-term career aspirations. This trade-off between survival and future planning is often shaped by pressing family obligations and limited economic opportunities.

Versatility Through Circumstances

This is the fourth emergent theme that captures the adaptability and resilience exhibited by SHS graduates as they navigate jobs unrelated to their specialization. This theme consists of two sub-themes: Discovering Strength Outside the Classroom and Gaining Workplace Experience Ahead of Peers. It explores how participants, despite facing initial challenges and mismatches between their education and work, were able to leverage their experiences to acquire new skills and gain valuable workplace insights. These sub-themes illustrate how participants transformed unforeseen circumstances into opportunities for personal and professional growth, emphasizing their ability to thrive and adapt in environments that demanded flexibility and innovation.

Discovering Strengths Outside the Classroom

Senior High School (SHS) graduates who find themselves in jobs unrelated to their academic track often uncover hidden competencies and personal growth that formal education did not fully reveal. Individuals placed in real-world work situations develop adaptive strengths and soft skills such as communication, resilience, and emotional intelligence, which are not always cultivated within traditional classrooms. It emphasizes that non-traditional work settings offer unique opportunities for self-assessment and the discovery of practical talents that may not have been evident during formal education.

Gaining Workplace Experience Ahead of Peers

Entering the workforce immediately after Senior High School, even in fields unrelated to one's academic strand, enables graduates to gain valuable work experience earlier than their college-bound counterparts. These early starters develop practical insights into job expectations, professional routines, and interpersonal dynamics within the workplace, giving them a distinct experiential advantage.

Support and Sacrifice

This is the fifth emergent theme that explores the pivotal role that family plays in shaping the career decisions of Senior High School graduates employed in unrelated jobs. This theme is further divided into two sub-themes: Family as a Driving Force and Sacrificing Personal Aspirations. It underscores the significant influence of familial responsibilities and expectations in motivating graduates to seek employment and prioritize financial support for their households, often at the expense of their dreams and aspirations.

Family as a Driving Force

For many Senior High School graduates who entered jobs unrelated to their specialization, the role of family emerged as a powerful motivating force behind their employment decisions. Family responsibilities often influence young individuals to prioritize immediate work over continued education, viewing employment as a means to contribute to household needs. For low-income families, graduates are sometimes regarded as secondary breadwinners, pushing them to pursue jobs regardless of alignment with their academic background.

Sacrificing Personal Aspirations

The transition from Senior High School to employment in unrelated fields often entails a deep compromise, where personal dreams are set aside in favor of practicality. Many young graduates abandon their original career goals due to immediate socioeconomic demands, highlighting that the urgency to earn often overshadows long-term aspirations. Financial instability creates a mindset where survival takes precedence over passion, resulting in decisions that distance individuals from their chosen tracks.

Adapting Through Grit and Growth

This is the sixth emergent theme which encompasses two sub-themes, Resilience in Facing Job Challenges and Building Confidence in Unexpected Roles. This theme highlights how the participants demonstrated remarkable perseverance and personal growth as they navigated the difficulties of their current employment, despite being displaced by their SHS specialization. Through their stories, it becomes evident that their ability to overcome setbacks and develop newfound confidence in unfamiliar roles has played a crucial role in shaping their current outlook and success in the workforce.

Resilience in Facing Job Challenges

Resilience plays a pivotal role in helping individuals cope with the multifaceted challenges they face in jobs unrelated to their SHS specialization. As graduates navigate these positions, they exhibit an unwavering capacity to adapt, learn, and overcome obstacles, demonstrating not only perseverance but also emotional and psychological strength. Research indicates that resilience in the workplace is often shaped by both internal traits and external factors such as support systems and environmental conditions.

Building Confidence in Unexpected Roles

Despite working in fields unrelated to their SHS specialization, many graduates report a surprising gain in self-confidence as they adapt to roles they never anticipated. Initially confronted with uncertainty and self-doubt, these individuals often experience a transformation as they learn to navigate unfamiliar work environments and responsibilities. Confidence does not only arise from prior academic preparation but is deeply rooted in the lived experience of overcoming real-world challenges in the workplace. As graduates build competence through hands-on tasks, they gradually shed the insecurity tied to feelings of underqualification or misalignment with their initial career trajectories.

Meanings Of Experiences of Senior High School Graduates Employed in Unrelated Jobs

Redefining Success

For many SHS graduates working in fields unrelated to their specialization, the conventional definition of success often undergoes a significant transformation. Success, traditionally measured by academic achievements or professional alignment with one's degree, takes on new meanings when graduates find themselves in jobs that do not align with their educational background. In these instances, success is redefined through personal growth, financial stability, and the ability to overcome adversity. This growing understanding reflects a broader perspective on achievement, one that emphasizes resilience, adaptability, and the recognition of value in non-traditional career routes. As these individuals navigate unfamiliar work environments, they redefine success not as a static end goal but as an ongoing journey of self-discovery, skill development, and meaningful contributions to their communities.

Success is Earning, Not the Title

For many SHS graduates employed in unrelated fields, the definition of success shifts from traditional markers, such as job titles or academic prestige, to more tangible, immediate factors like financial stability and personal fulfillment. This shift aligns with recent studies that highlight how young individuals in non-degree jobs increasingly associate success with earning an income that meets their immediate needs and sustains their families. In their pursuit of stability, these individuals often prioritize the financial rewards of their work over the prestige typically linked to specific career titles, demonstrating a practical approach to success.

Happiness Beyond Academic Prestige

For many SHS graduates employed in fields unrelated to their specialization, happiness is increasingly derived from personal satisfaction and the fulfillment of immediate needs, rather



than the academic prestige or professional accolades that are traditionally associated with success. Recent research highlights how individuals who find themselves outside their degree paths discover happiness through work-life balance, personal growth, and the satisfaction of contributing meaningfully to their families. This shift suggests that happiness is more complex than simply achieving a prestigious career, as it encompasses a broader set of factors such as emotional fulfillment, financial stability, and a sense of purpose.

Growth Beyond the Curriculum

The lived experiences of the participants reveal that personal and professional growth often occurs outside the boundaries of formal education. While Senior High School provided foundational knowledge, it was in their unrelated jobs where they encountered transformative learning moments. This theme, Growth Beyond the Curriculum, encapsulates how these individuals cultivated new skills, adapted to real-world demands, and redefined their sense of self-worth not through academic achievement, but through everyday challenges and responsibilities in the workplace. Their stories highlight the powerful, often overlooked, learning that takes place beyond the four corners of the classroom.

Real-Life Lessons Trump School Lessons

Participants shared that many of the most valuable lessons they have acquired came not from their formal education, but from the day-to-day realities of working in fields unrelated to their SHS specialization. They emphasized that real-life situations such as dealing with customers, solving practical problems, managing time, and navigating unpredictable challenges taught them more applicable skills than those taught in the classroom.

Becoming Street-Smart and Emotionally Strong

The participants revealed that working in environments outside their academic preparation led them to develop practical wisdom and emotional strength. Many of them described how navigating unfamiliar work settings, dealing with demanding customers, managing personal safety, or adjusting to long work hours helped cultivate their ability to think on their feet and manage their emotions under pressure.

Hope Anchored in Sacrifice

Amidst the challenges of working in jobs unrelated to their high school specialization, participants shared stories marked by personal sacrifice, often trading comfort, time, and even aspirations for the sake of family and future stability. Yet, behind each sacrifice was a resilient sense of hope, serving as both a coping mechanism and a guiding force. This sub-theme explores how the participants' willingness to endure hardships is deeply tied to a hopeful vision for a better life, both for themselves and their loved ones.

Endurance for a Better Future

For many Senior High School graduates working in fields unrelated to their academic tracks, endurance emerges as a defining characteristic of their lived experiences. This



perseverance is not just physical but emotional and mental, sustained by the belief that present struggles are necessary steps toward a more stable future. Enduring unfavorable working conditions becomes bearable when it is framed as a temporary sacrifice for future goals, particularly when individuals perceive their jobs as stepping-stones rather than dead ends.

Delayed Gratification for Family Welfare

The willingness of SHS graduates to delay personal goals in favor of contributing to their family's welfare reflects a deeply rooted sense of responsibility and cultural obligation. Many young Filipinos entering the workforce choose to set aside their aspirations, such as pursuing higher education or personal advancement, to provide immediate financial support to their families. This practice, often referred to as “*utang na loob*” or filial duty, remains a powerful motivator in career decisions that prioritize family over self.

Finding Identity Through Work

Finding Identity through Work explores how Senior High School graduates, despite being employed in jobs unrelated to their academic specialization, come to understand themselves more deeply through their lived experiences in the workplace. As they navigate unfamiliar roles and responsibilities, these young individuals begin to shape a clearer sense of who they are, what they value, and what they can become. Work, though misaligned with their educational track, becomes a transformative space for personal growth and self-discovery.

Self-Worth Built on Contribution

The lived experiences of Senior High School graduate working in fields unrelated to their academic track reveal that their sense of self-worth is often anchored not in academic achievements but in the meaningful contributions they make through work. Despite the initial misalignment between their educational background and current occupations, many participants express pride and dignity in being able to support their families, meet personal needs, and be of service to others. Young workers find value and purpose when they perceive their labor as impactful, regardless of the prestige associated with the job. Contribution-based self-worth is reinforced when individuals witness the tangible results of their efforts, such as providing for their family or alleviating the burden on their parents.

Emergence of Self-Reliance

The transition of Senior High School graduates into unrelated jobs has often become a catalyst for the development of self-reliance. As they face unfamiliar environments and assume adult responsibilities earlier than expected, these young individuals gradually learn to depend on their decision-making, resilience, and problem-solving skills. Employment in unrelated jobs often compels youth to adapt rapidly, sharpening their capacity for independent thinking and financial autonomy.

Acceptance and Letting Go

In the face of unanticipated life paths and career detours, many Senior High School graduates who find themselves in unrelated jobs are compelled to embrace acceptance and the



art of letting go. This theme emerges from their recognition that life does not always unfold according to plans, and sometimes, personal peace is found not in resistance but in surrendering to present realities. Letting go of initial ambitions, perceived failures, or unmet expectations becomes a critical emotional milestone in their journey, allowing them to move forward with resilience, grace, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Making Peace with Career Detours

Career detours, especially those that lead individuals away from their academic backgrounds, often become pivotal moments of reflection, adjustment, and growth. For many SHS graduates employed in unrelated jobs, the journey involves learning to reconcile aspirations with reality. Rather than viewing these alternate routes as failures, individuals begin to see them as redirections, pathways that still lead to personal development, although in unexpected ways.

Letting Go of Idealism

Letting go of idealism is a critical turning point in the lives of Senior High School (SHS) graduates who find themselves in jobs unrelated to their academic strands. While many young individuals enter the workforce with high hopes rooted in their chosen specialization, reality often demands a recalibration of these ideals in favor of survival, practicality, and adaptability.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

The study uncovered the multifaceted lived experiences and meanings acquired by SHS graduates who are currently employed in jobs unrelated to their specialization. Participants described navigating unfamiliar paths, where they had to learn by doing things in entirely new environments, often struggling with initial confidence and adjustment. A recurring theme of career displacement and detachment highlighted a disconnect between their SHS training and current work, with many perceiving their education as irrelevant to their present roles. Economic realities played a significant role, as reflected in the theme of socioeconomic push to work, where financial pressures compelled them to prioritize immediate income over long-term career alignment.

Despite these challenges, the graduates exhibited versatility through circumstance, discovering personal strengths outside the classroom and gaining early workplace experience. Support and sacrifice also shaped their journeys, with family needs driving their decisions and prompting them to set aside personal aspirations. Over time, they managed to adapt through grit and growth, building resilience and confidence in roles they never initially imagined for themselves.

Beyond these lived experiences, the participants derived deeper meanings from their journeys. They spoke of redefining success, viewing it not by job title or academic achievement, but through the ability to earn and find personal happiness. They experienced growth beyond the curriculum, learning life lessons that surpassed what was taught in school and gaining practical, financial knowledge. Hope anchored in sacrifice emerged as they endured current hardships in the belief that their efforts would benefit their families in the long

run. In finding identity through work, their sense of self became grounded in contribution and independence. Ultimately, they reached a place of acceptance and letting go, making peace with their career detours and releasing former ideals in favor of realistic, meaningful progress.

Conclusion

Beyond these lived experiences, participants derived deeper meanings from their journeys. They spoke of redefining success, seeing it not through degrees or titles, but in their ability to earn and find contentment. Through growth beyond the curriculum, they gained practical knowledge and street-smart skills that formal education did not provide. Their stories reflected hope anchored in sacrifice, as they endured hardships for their families' future. In finding identity through work, they built self-worth through contribution and independence. Ultimately, acceptance and letting go marked a turning point, embracing career detours and letting go of past expectations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several specific recommendations are proposed to support better Senior High School (SHS) graduates who find themselves employed in jobs unrelated to their SHS specialization:

1. Enhance career guidance programs by offering more comprehensive orientation and counseling services as early as Junior High School. These services should help students align their interests and skills with realistic career opportunities and provide continued support for those who do not pursue higher education.
2. Strengthen work immersion and industry linkages by partnering more closely with local industries to ensure that students gain relevant, hands-on experience that increases their employability in both related and unrelated fields. Additionally, the curriculum must align with local industry and job market needs for better employability.
3. Integrate life skills and financial literacy into the SHS curriculum. Teaching students how to manage money, adapt to different work environments, and make informed life decisions will better prepare them for real-world challenges.
4. Provide alternative learning pathways through accessible and affordable technical-vocational training and certification programs, allowing graduates to shift or enhance their skills while already employed.
5. Offer scholarships, financial aid, or job placement assistance through local government units (LGU) and non-governmental organizations (NGO) to help graduates who wish to return to school or transition into more aligned careers.
6. Promote a culture that values non-linear career journeys. Schools and communities should affirm the worth of alternative paths, recognizing that success and personal growth can occur outside traditional academic or professional trajectories.

These recommendations aim to bridge the gap between SHS education and the realities of the labor market, empowering graduates to adapt, thrive, and find meaning in their chosen paths.

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