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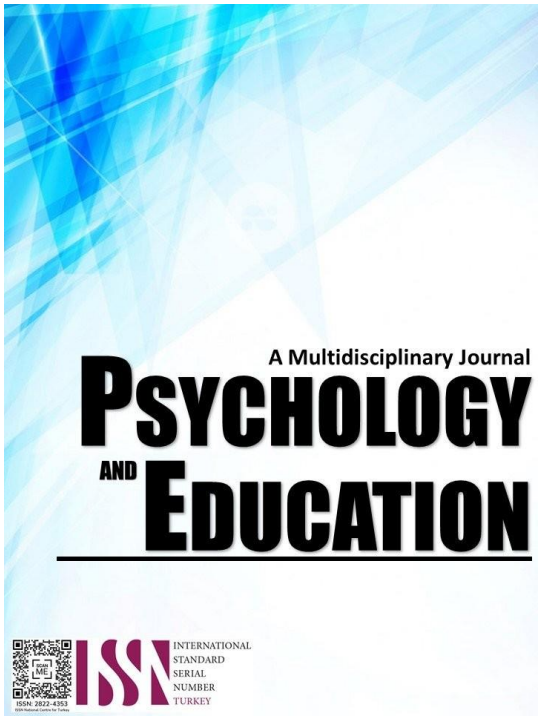

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Research Article

The Elusive Opportunities of Senior High School Graduates: A Phenomenology

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Abstract

Many senior high school graduates are struggling to land a job relevant to their area of specialization, which contradicts the promise of the K-12 curriculum. DepEd ORDER (2019) states that K–12 graduates should be equipped with the requisite skills right away to enable them to handle challenges and take advantage of possibilities presented by the 21st century. However, minimal attention was given to this phenomenon which is ironic because this should be given close attention as this has become rampant among Filipino senior high school graduates. In fact, according to Padios et al. (2021), more than half of the K-12 completers claimed that their jobs are not in line with the strand that they took when they were in school. In this study, the lived experiences of the chosen senior high school graduates as they applied for a job will be given a clear focus. This study utilizes the Phenomenology method, which is a systematic approach that enables us to be well-acquainted with the engagement of the samples in a phenomenon in a realistic way. A face-to-face interview with the participants was conducted following the standard protocols set by the barangay. The research subjects in this probe were chosen using a purposive sampling technique, which is the most suitable sampling technique allowing us to choose the subjects that meet the standards being set. A Modified Van Kaam Technique-based Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), made popular by Moustakas, was used in this investigation. The accuracy of this study was founded and strengthened through time bracketing done by the researchers. Furthermore, to ensure validity and reliability, the probable responses of the participants were already foreseen. The researchers yield the following themes: Theme 1: Disconnecting Lines, Theme 2: Debugging Negativities, and Theme 3: Directing to Possibilities. In conclusion, the K-12 curriculum contributed to the struggles faced by senior high school graduates, especially in looking for a job that is related to their strand. They are often discriminated against, stereotyped, and offered very limited job opportunities. Thus, this study recommends more research and a thorough reassessment of the K-12 curriculum to tackle the problems senior high school graduates encountered.

Keywords: *opportunity, employability, senior high school, k-12 curriculum, job hunting*

Introduction

Nowadays, it is tangible how senior high school graduates struggle to land a job related to their strand despite being a senior high school graduate, which should be making it easier for them to find one. The K-12 graduates should be fully equipped with relevant attributes such as technical competencies and emotional adequacy, which are important in confronting any hardships and taking advantage of the opportunities that the 21st-century offers (DepEd ORDER, 2019). According to Padios et al. (2021), more than half of senior high school completers responded that their work has no relevance to their strand. However, the underlying causes weren't unraveled and tackled. In this article, a great emphasis will be given to the struggles of senior high school graduates in finding a job that is related to their strand.

Job hunting is one of the challenges everybody encounters. Some people get hired directly. Meanwhile, others struggle to have one because of the required job qualifications. There is strong competition between college graduates and senior high school graduates in recruitment. However, most senior high school graduates are discriminated against. According to Carada et al. (2022), only a few employers in the country accept graduates of senior high school. Due to the high job qualifications, some proceed to college education to gain more qualifications and be more competent individuals. Others are discouraged and decided to start their own business such as owning small stores and stalls in the town, and online selling which is not in line with their strand.

Senior high school graduates are expected to be job ready. This is to make sure that even if they decide not to progress to higher education, they won't have difficulty looking for a job. In fact, as for senior high school graduates, schools coordinate with the Students Affairs Office (SAO) to organize job placement programs. Apart from that, there are also job openings for them. BPO, Industrial, and Manufacturing companies show their interest in senior high school applicants. According to Carada et al. (2022), in an inquiry to determine their competencies and readiness for a job position, participants transpire favorable practical attributes as well as mental and emotional maturity. This is proof that they are indeed career-ready, but despite this, many companies still

discriminate against them. According to Cabral & Abanto (2020), getting employed isn't the major issue among senior high school graduates, it is landing a reliable job that is relevant to them.

It is imperative that we conduct this study for it will help people, especially companies to have a better understanding of the learners and the graduates as well. According to Philippine Institute for Development Studies (2021), it was found that out of 26 employers who were surveyed, 22 believed that senior high school graduates lacked enough job readiness, which results in senior high school graduates having trouble getting into the workforce. With the help of this research, stereotype, and discrimination given to senior high school graduates will have been eradicated. In addition, this probe will clear out all misunderstandings and misconceptions towards senior high school graduates. According to Awi et al. (2021), some employers thought that the training period of the K-12 completers could not suffice for them to be holistically ready upon graduation. They will be given a new outlook and equal opportunities in the employment world. The Philippine News Agency (2018) reported that DepEd Secretary Leonor Briones gave assurance that K- 12 completers don't have to worry about a lack of work opportunities if they decide to get a job after graduation because some industries such as business, manufacturing, and commercial sectors are eager to try out their capabilities. Lastly, upon reading this article, employers might reconsider changing their perspectives toward their hiring qualifications.

According to Republic Act no. 10533 Sec. 10, aims to strengthen the educational standards and syllabus to develop graduates to be domestically and internationally competitive. Consistent with this provision, establishments to different affiliations are tied up for exposure and practical experience (DepEd Order no.40, s.2015). This engagement gives opportunities for learners to familiarize work environments and ethics, utilize their areas of specialization, and actual work simulation (DepEd Order no.30, s.2017). In line with these, the protection of learners that guarantees stable work facilities and modalities is given (Labor Advisory no.9, s.2017). All these simulations and additional two years for senior high school graduates guarantee employability whenever they decided not to continue their studies (Asis, 2020). However, companies observe the need for mastery among job applicants (Fajaryati et al., 2020). Most companies are looking for job applicants with technical qualifications who are emotionally stable (Carada et al.,2022). While educational institutions commit to reshaping their curriculum to survive competitiveness and employability, there are always consequential differences between employers' needs and their qualifications toward fresh graduates (Osmani et al., 2019).

The primary intention of this investigation is to understand the struggles of senior high school completers in their quest for a decent job that is in line with their field. Identify the problems they experienced after graduation and assess the requirements needed in job applications. This study aims to end the taboo regarding Senior High School graduates' readiness for a job position. Understand their strengths and weaknesses. And how likely they are, equipped with the same technical skills and emotional standards as a Senior high school graduate.

Research Questions

This study investigated the phenomenology of senior high school graduates as they embark on their journey in looking for a job. Moreover, this study gathered vital and relevant information by answering the following questions.

1. What did you do after graduation?
2. Did you apply for a job position? How many times did you try before landing a job?
3. What are the struggles you encountered when applying for a job?
4. What is the most important thing you learned while on a job hunt?
5. What lessons did you learn during the selection process and when you were selected?
6. Did you experience any discrimination while applying for a job?
7. Is your current job related to your program strand during high school?

Literature Review

This article focuses on senior high school graduates who have trouble finding a job that is relevant to their strand. Moreover, this article also probes into the reasons why they are experiencing this phenomenon. To further support this study, the researchers carefully chose scholarly articles, publications, and journals that are highly refereed and related to the scope of this study. This is in adherence to the inclusion criteria of the standard guidelines in administering the literature review.

The execution of the new curriculum has led to remarkable action plans that look forward to expanding and enhancing the transmission of fundamental education (Maravilla, 2020). A couple of school years were added to the old curriculum which

expounded the objectives of basic education to the preparation of higher education, skills development, entrepreneurship, and employment. However, according to Carada et al. (2022), how the Department of Education viewed and perceived senior high school graduates as serviceable may be deceptive. It is because even though they have the requisite skills and knowledge, they still have trouble entering the workforce due to application constraints.

According to Bacaling (2018), the new curriculum highlights making Filipino learners equipped and competent in their field of work. However, even though the said curriculum aims to bring out individuals who are prepared to take risks and opportunities that the 21st century brings, it has still brought major problems and concerns which need to be addressed immediately (Trance & Trance, 2019). According to Carada et al. (2022), it is evident that successful K to 12 completers was found to be holistically qualified for a job. This should be the basis of qualifications for senior high school graduates in their present and future employment.

In a tracer study conducted on ASCOT SHS by Padios et al. (2021), it was observed that the majority of those who completed senior high school gained specialization in Technical-Vocational-Livelihood and General Academic Strand. This observation has a similar report to the country's overall enrollment. It was also found that more students tend to enroll in these programs have a couple of reasons. First, most of the schools provide technical programs to address the necessity of the business and industrial sectors. Another factor is practicability which tends students to have employable skills soon. This is in response to the principle of this new curriculum and to have promising results to be prepared for work or take part in the business industry after they graduate. Different nations altered their educational curricula to meet the needs of globalization to generate competent graduates with functional, technical, and job-related abilities (Roxas, 2022).

In the educational system, molding learners with a critical mind and providing them with useful tools has been given more attention (Perez et al., 2022). This is to ensure that learners make the right choices and ask the right questions. As unequivocally stated in DepEd Memo No. 169, s. 2018 that have gained enough knowledge, competence, skills, and attitude, senior high school graduates are given opportunities to pursue higher education, entrepreneurship, and employment (Cariaga et al., 2022; Segarino et al., 2022; Ugbamen et al., 2022). According to Cabral & Abanto (2020), it is arguable that one of the major problems of Senior High School graduates is not searching for a job, but rather than that, they are looking for a stable and suitable job that best fits their needs, attitude, and capabilities. In connection with this, DepEd introduced Career Guidance Program (CGP) Modules for Grades 11 and 12. As stated in DepEd Memo No. 169, s. 2018, these modules are designed to use academic and employment readiness in work bases like On-the-job training (OJT) and mentoring and ascertain a clear direction after Senior High School Graduation.

But to penetrate all those learnings, opportunities like practical immersions and actual job training are introduced to the learners to promote perceived skills such as competency, reliability, adequacy, and professionalism (DepEd order no. 30, s. 2017). In 2021, few employers show their interest in senior high school graduates and may give them an entry-level position if they can exhibit specialized skills and satisfactory results during on-the-job training. But this is not always the case, many employers still prefer hiring college graduates, thus being unfair to senior high school graduates (Cabrera, 2018).

Job opportunities have become more elusive during the pandemic. More so for senior high school graduates that aim to get job opportunities to earn a living and help their families. According to Bird (2021), even though our economy will likely recover, the low employment rate will remain. This could mean a lower possibility for senior high school graduates. As schools and business sectors will gradually open, new graduates and experienced applicants will be congested (Carada et al., 2022). This could mean higher competition and lower chances for senior high school graduates.

Unfortunately, our country is struggling to recover from the pandemic to disastrous typhoons (Abucejo et al., 2022; Ando et al., 2022; Riconalla et al., 2022). This also means a steady or no movement of economic activity which added to the problem of senior high school graduates getting a decent job. While the new curriculum of additional two years promotes readiness for employability (R.A. No. 10533). And all parent's struggles drive the learners to strive hard to hone their skills in the hope to land a job after graduation. Frustrations affect their emotional skills which are established to be one of the factors for employability (Carada et al., 2022).

These pressing issues must be addressed to improve our new curriculum for senior high school learners. According to Salape & Cuevas (2020), applicants must be updated on the available job openings as well as

what the companies are looking for. If programs offered to senior high school learners are what employers want, then there must be an optimistic chance of getting a job after graduation. Moreover, Dimaunahan & Panoy (2021), explains self-efficacy in honing technical skills and graduation performance was substantial. Thus, the more learners have self-efficacy, the more chance to succeed in their work (Carada et al., 2022).

According to Custodio & Tumibay (2020), the students of the new curriculum are expected to be job and business-ready, as well as tertiary education ready (Amia et al., 2022). Simply put, this curriculum is structured to help the graduates take part in the employment world and prepare those who wish to step up to tertiary education right after graduation. However, they claimed that there could be an incompatibility between the student's strand and interest which could result in unsophisticated and unpolished graduates (Bahinting et al., 2022; Olleras et al., 2022). Consequently, competing in job applications and keeping pace with peers in college will be hard. Thus, in conclusion, the challenge is to make the new curriculum work efficiently to serve its purpose: to enable graduates to land the jobs they are prepared for.

Methodology

Research Design

This investigation made use of the Phenomenology method. A phenomenology is a systematic approach in which we thoroughly familiarize ourselves with the realistic involvement of the samples in a particular incident. The event that this investigation pointed out which is the elusive opportunities for Senior High School graduates can be analytically represented through their individual experiences.

Sampling Technique

To choose the research subjects, a purposive sampling technique was applied. It is a method of selecting the best subjects that meet the necessary standards. The qualifications are as follows; (a) the subject should be a graduate of Senior High School since 2018, (b) the subject should have no permanent job or has a job but not related to his/her strand, (c) the subject should be unemployed Senior High School graduates due to lack of sufficient qualifications set by companies that prefer college graduates.

Data Collection

A letter of intent to perform an evaluation will be given to the barangay captains in various areas in Dumanjug, Cebu. Upon acknowledgment, the participants will be given an advice letter by the researchers in performing a dialogue. After securing an agreement, schedules will be set to perform a meeting in a face-to-face manner subject to safety procedures stated by the local and national authorities. The evaluations will be documented with the approval of the participants. An organized examination with standard inquiry will be utilized in analyzing the individual experiences and struggles of the participants (Smith, 2019; Hartwell et al., 2019). The evaluation will be forwarded to the resource persons for acceptance and authentication (Cabello & Bonotan, 2020).

Research Rigor

To establish the study's rigor, the researchers made use of Whittemore et al. (2001). Moreover, these sets of standards investigated reliability and validity more, as necessity and honesty. The research accuracy was established and supported by the time bracketing carried out by the researchers (Cabello, 2022). Classifying plays, a very important role in imposing equality to prevent prejudices in the investigation (Alase, 2017). Participants' probable responses were already foreseen (Cabello et al., 2022). Thus, it ensures validity and reliability.

Ethical Consideration

This research applied ten fundamental ideas on ethical considerations by Bryman & Bell (2007). These are the following list of moral standards used in the conduct of the study: (1) it is visible that the participants are not compromised and hurt; (2) High regard for courtesy and respect for participants; (3) Consent is given voluntarily by participants without any harassment done; (4) Seclusion of any information from participants; (5) Data gathering from participants handled with the utmost confidentiality; (6) Anonymity of identity and personality involved in the conduct of the study; (7) Avoidance of any exaggerations and misinformation; (8) Disclosure of any financial reports, cash outflows, and inflows if applicable; (9) Participants are approach with integrity and honesty; (10) Observance of strict neutrality in the conduct of this study.

Data Analysis

In this probe, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) rooted in the Modified Van Kaam Technique, which was publicized by Moustakas, was utilized. There are seven tenets of analyzing the data. It started with horizontalizing, which is the sorting of the respondents' experiences. It was then followed by reducing the experiences into invariant constituents in which the researchers analyzed the highlights of the experiences. The third step was done by creating themes grouped to come up with their main theme. Comparing data sources that validated the invariant constituents commenced. And then, a construe of an individual analysis of its textural description was done. The next step was crafting the description of the composite structure of the data. And lastly, all the lived experiences of the participants were synthesized and summarized.

Results and Discussion

Following the data examination, the researchers developed three essential themes: Theme 1: Disconnecting Lines, Theme 2: Debugging Negativities, and Theme 3: Directing to Possibilities. The said themes showcased the struggles of senior high school graduates as they embarked on their journey in looking for a job.

Opportunities may be scaled by how much effort you put into them or by the number of support systems available in your circle. For some, job opportunities can be readily available, but for many, the real battle begins. According to Bustamante (2019), Senior high school completers are competent and equipped with practical skills gained during their actual work simulation from their final years as Senior high school learners. Implementing the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 and as mandated by DepEd Order No. 30, s.2017, giving work immersions to Senior high school learners before graduating can balance fundamental learning to practical application to compete and increase employability. However, this concept is not always applicable in some cases. Responses from participants collected by the researchers vary, and these can have more emphasis using the themes formulated rooted in the participants.

Disconnecting Lines

Carrying out the K- 12 curriculum amidst the pandemic has been very challenging for the teachers and the students. Students themselves were already having a hard time coping in face-to-face classes. And things became more difficult when the pandemic struck, for they would have to engage in online discussions, making them undetermined and discouraged. According to Siddiky (2021), there is rigorously substantial evidence linking the COVID-19 pandemic to the alterations in many students' mental states and demeanor. Furthermore, Selvaraj et al. (2021), mentioned that one of the largest issues with online learning continues to be the lack of face-to-face interaction between learners and teachers.

Participant #1 mentioned that,
"I chose to proceed to college after SHS graduation for me to be equipped soon. But I only studied for one year as the pandemic struck, I felt the online class was tiresome and later I felt disinterested. "

However, not all are lucky and privileged enough to advance their studies to tertiary education. Not everyone is suited and prepared for life in college after high school graduation (Carada et al., 2022). Others have a strong desire to continue studying, but the circumstances can't allow it. This urges them to wait for the next enrollment.

Participant #4 said,
"I tried my luck in enrolling in a university. However, I wasn't accepted for there were no more slots left for new students, so I took a break for a year. "

Similarly, some graduates wished to go to college as their way out of poverty but couldn't do so. Consequently, they resort to applying for a job because it's the only choice that they've got. According to (Orbeta & Potestad (2020), one of the departure options for graduates of senior high school is joining the workforce.

Participant #5 mentioned that,
"I applied for a job because it was difficult for me to continue studying."

Some, despite being senior high school graduates, aren't satisfied with the skills that they possess. They thought these skills were inadequate to qualify them for a job position. Several students admitted that they are not particularly optimistic that they will land a job upon graduation (Orbeta et al., 2019). Nevertheless, eventually, they were able to see the necessity of applying for a job.

Participant #1 said,
"At first No. I feel I don't have any skills to land a job even after graduating from SNHS. But later due to the need to find a job to feed my family, I applied twice before landing a job."

For those who chose to work instead of advancing to tertiary education, the irrelevance of their current jobs to their program strand is very evident. According to Marces & Maravilla (2019), most of the jobs of those graduates who chose to work have no relevance to the strand that they took when they were in school. The training and seminar they had that should work to their advantage in their current job, have gone to waste.

Participant #3 mentioned that,
"My current job isn't related to my program strand. I work for the Government Internship Program (GIP) in my municipality. I do whatever is assigned to me. For instance, I assist the office in photocopying documents, which is irrelevant to my strand which is Business Finance."

Debugging Negativities

Job hunting isn't a piece of cake for everyone in the process, you will meet a lot of negativities along the way. According to Meccawy et al. (2018), finding the ideal work is a difficult and frequently boring undertaking. In addition, in job hunting, you are assumed to be penniless. Thus, processing the requirements can be a struggle, too.

Participant #3 said,

"When I was on a job hunt I was having financial problems in terms of processing the requirements and transportation. "

Apart from that, a common intervention any job applicant can meet is when the employer is looking for someone who has relevant experience in the field. This is also true for senior high school graduates, which grants them zero experience

in the work, they're applying for. Moreover, another obstacle occurs when the interviewer asks whether an applicant is a senior high school graduate or a college graduate. The said question shakes the world of hopeful senior high school graduate applicants for they know that their college graduate co-applicants have an edge. According to Orbeta et al. (2018), despite having passed the National Certifications exams, they still assume that employers will choose to recruit those who have completed their tertiary education over them.

Participant #2 mentioned that,

"I struggle a lot when employers look for job-related experience. Though BPO companies accept SHS graduates, English proficiency skills are a big factor, and they always ask if the applicant is either graduated as SHS or College as college graduates have more chance of getting the job."

The K- 12 curriculum promises to produce senior high school graduates who are job ready. However, senior high school graduates are still being stereotyped as individuals who are not fit for jobs related to their program strands. They tend to be marginalized and perceived only as blue-collar workers and never a perfect fit to have a white-collar job.

Participant #1 said,
"Yes. Because I only graduated from SHS, they see me as unequipped or lack of skills for job entry. For example, SHS graduates like me can only have casual jobs like bagger, merchandiser, or sales representative. Except for BPO industries, other job offers for SHS graduates are limited. Second-level jobs like supervisor, manager, and administrative work are only offered to a college graduate applicant."

Directing to Possibilities

Having met the difficulties met during the job application and realizing how hard it is to get a job despite being senior high school graduates, the participants came up with work realizations. When you're fortunate enough to land a job, you should showcase your determination and dedication. For in this way, stereotyping among senior high school graduates may somehow be minimized if not eradicated.

Participant #5 mentioned that,
"The process was fast. Firstly, we need to take the job seriously. We avoid laziness and absence from work so we can get a job easily. "

In a job hunt, pleasing the interviewer is very important for there is a great chance that you will have a tough competition with other applicants. According to Lazear et al. (2018), one's chance of getting a job depends on both their abilities and those of other job seekers. For if you're one lousy interviewee, there could be a slim chance for you of getting hired. To do this, you've got to show the interviewer that you're confident enough with relevant skills and experiences that make you qualified and fit for the job.

Participant #4 said,

"In the process of selection, you should show your interviewer that you possess the necessary skills and experience. Moreover, you should be confident during the interview. Like in my case, I got pressured and

nervous, and when you're hired, you must prove to the management that you have the experience and necessary skills you mentioned during your interview." Having said how hard it is to apply for a job, one should remember to be thrifty. If you are still an applicant, you don't have the luxury of spending a lot because you've got the pertinent papers and requirements to consider. Thus, you've got to be a wise spender and resourceful.

Participant #3 mentioned that,
"I realized that applying for a job isn't easy. You should be thrift for you are still on a job hunt."

In addition, if you're on a job application, you ought to understand that job hunting isn't easy. According to Nielsen et al. (2017), the process of looking for and applying for a job can be a headache and intimidating. It requires a lot of hard work and perseverance. If you don't have one of these in your arsenal, you are likely to trip whenever you meet discouragements in the process and may end up not getting any job at all.

Participant #5 said,
"Finding a job is not easy. No matter how hard it is, we should keep going and never give up."

Conclusion

To conclude, the K- 12 Basic Education curriculum brought challenges to the students. Most Senior high school graduates were lucky to proceed to tertiary education with their strand. Others, however, had difficulty in doing such. Some of these were affected by the pandemic, which led them to have very little to no interest in continuing their studies and forced to find a job to assist their family. Few were reluctant to work because they thought they were insufficiently skilled to land a job yet left with no choice. Moreover, they offered limited and casual opportunities like bagger, merchandiser, or sales representative, different from what they took in the Senior high school curriculum. Furthermore, this study recommends more investigations to address the struggles encountered by most completers and suggests re-visitation and review of the Senior high school curriculum.

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