

Knowing the Right Path: Correlation of Grade 10 Learners' Academic Performance on Their Occupational Fields of Interest and Its Alignment to Personal Preferences in College Studies, Basis to A Strategic School-Initiated Career Guidance Program

1Joey R. Cabigao, PhD, 2Maricris DC. Salamoding, 3Nanlie DC. Vacunawa

1Department of Education - Philippines, Schools Division of City of Malolos and La Consolacion University Philippines
joey.cabigao@deped.gov.ph and joey.cabigao@email.lcup.edu.ph

2Department of Education - Philippines, Schools Division of City of Malolos, Region III
maricris.salamoding@deped.gov.ph

3Department of Education - Philippines, Schools Division of City of Malolos, Region III
nanlie.vacunawa@deped.gov.ph

Abstract: *This study utilizing mixed methods concurrent triangulation design primarily aims to determine the alignment of Grade 10 learners' academic performance and occupational fields of interest to their personal preferences in college studies to come up with a strategic school-initiated career guidance program. The study is anchored on Trait & Factor Theory (1908) and adopted the Input-Process-Output model to operationalize its variables. The assumptions of the study are: (1) Learners' academic performance poses a significant impact on their recorded areas of occupational interest and (2) A strategic school-initiated career guidance program is necessary to ensure learners' alignment of recorded areas of occupational interest to their preferred courses in college. The 187 Grade 10 learners from the four junior high schools in the DepEd City of Malolos served as the respondents which were chosen through random stratified sampling. Findings of the study revealed that: (1) learners' academic performance, in general, is only satisfactory level; (2) their NCAE occupational interest rating is generally in moderate preference level; (3) academic performance significantly impacts their recorded fields of occupational interest; (4) general preferences of learners in college are courses on personal services, professional services, engineering courses, military and law enforcement, and business and finance/commerce; (5) their common reasons in choosing a college course are their personal choice/ line of interest, the influence of others, present financial conditions of the family, and employability to work local and/or abroad; and (6) their preferred courses in college are aligned to their recorded potentials/inclinations based on NCAE but only to a moderate preference level. The study recommends: (1) the implementation of appropriate interventions for learners to improve their academic performance in each learning area; (2) the conduct of effective orientation and reorientation programs on NCAE not only to learners but also for teachers and parents/guardians; (3) instituting a strategic school-initiated career guidance program to assist learners to come up with a sound decision in choosing what line of studies or occupations to pursue in the future.*

Keywords— Academic Performance; Occupational Fields of Interest; Personal Preferences; Strategic School-Initiated Career Guidance Program

1. INTRODUCTION

Learners are always the center of the teaching-learning process and the government is continuously doing its best to provide all forms of assistance in ensuring the delivery of quality education in the country, thus developing productive citizens in the future who are nationalistic and globally competitive in various fields of human interest.

With the signing of Republic Act (RA) No. 11206 otherwise known as the Secondary School Career Guidance and Counseling Act on February 14, 2019, Filipino learners in basic education are now expected to make better career decisions than before. The law stipulates the creation of a National Secondary and Counseling Program (CGCP) which shall start at the Grade 7 level to help each learner decides which college course best fits them [1].

For the previous years, the Department of Education (DepEd) is administering the National Career Assessment

Examination (NCAE) through its suboffice, the National Education Testing and Research Center (NETRC) to guide learners in assessing their competencies and inclinations for future studies or line of works. The NCAE was first given in January 2007 during the administration of DepEd Secretary Jesli A. Lapuz purposely to assist learners to determine which courses they should study in college and what sort of career they are best suited for. Similar to the old National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), NCAE is a general scholastic aptitude test (GSAT), and what makes it different from NCEE are the following: (1) NCAE includes scientific ability as an area in GSAT; (2) still recommendatory – without a cut-off score; and (3) includes technical-vocational aptitude, logical reasoning ability, occupational interest inventory, and aptitude on academic tracks.

NCAE is a paper and pencil test using multiple choices format, on scannable answer sheets which can be checked electronically. NCAE also measures learners' potentials or inclination in such areas as general scholastic aptitude (GSA),

technical vocational aptitude (TVA), entrepreneurial skills, nonverbal ability, and occupational interest. The test components are (1) Scientific Ability; (2) Mathematical Ability; (3) Reading Comprehension; (4) Verbal Ability; (5) Manipulative Skills; (6) Clerical Ability; (7) Non-Verbal Ability; and (8) Entrepreneurial skills.

NCAE result is a requirement in college but still recommendatory. As to date, there is still no passage of a law that makes the NCAE mandatory before enrolment in college/university. NCAE results will give the learners and the parents an idea of the career path most suited to the graduating students thus, allowing for a better decision on their choice of courses. Usually, results are releases 3 to 4 months after the examination date. Specifically, NCAE aims to (1) minimize indiscriminate wastage of manpower and other resources which otherwise could be directed towards more productive ventures, i.e. supplying manpower needs of vocational, agricultural, technical, and entrepreneurial fields; (2) assess the abilities of the learners has developed through the years which are essential for a successful college or becoming an entrepreneur; and (3) serve as a basis for the selection of beneficiaries in the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) scholarship program.

According to Ross (2019) [2], one of the reasons the NCAE was developed was to address the issue of unemployment due to workers getting mismatched with the wrong careers. The hope is that by determining which careers they are ideally suited for, learners can plan a course of study that will give them the skills and education they will need for their ideal careers. However, the author reiterated that NCAE test results are only one part of the bigger picture in determining the best career fit for an individual. Learners shouldn't make major decisions based on NCAE results alone for their entire school career as well as their own goals and interests should be considered when deciding on a course of study and a career.

According to DOLE (2010) [3], job skills mismatch is a major challenge in the Philippines. Local studies revealed that a large number of trained graduates are left unemployed or underemployed because they do not fit the requirements of the job market (Lapus, 2002) [4]. This fact led to joblessness and an excess supply of college graduates in a white-collar job sector while there are limited numbers of available members' workforce who have the skill needed by the employer.

In a study conducted by Ferrer and Dela Cruz (2017) [5] on NCAE results in the City of Manila, a significant relationship was established between performance in Science, Mathematics, and English to their Grade 10 and Grade 11 grades. This fact affirmed that NCAE results have a significant impact on the academic performance of the learners and are good predictors of academic performance in the succeeding years.

Schools are mandated to guide their learners on the path that will maximize their full potentials as individuals. According to Escudero (2016) [6], helping learners to

determine their field of expertise and interest is a good help in matching the skills appropriate to them, and one good way is to utilize the NCAE results which suggest the choice of career of students. The four domains of NCAE generally provide an assessment to graduating learners that serve as a career guide on whether they should go on after high school, either to go to higher studies, to choose a technical-vocational course, or to opt for entrepreneurship.

To further analyze the impact of NCAE results on the academic performance of Grade 10 learners and help them align their preferences of studies after high school, this study entitled Knowing the Right Path: Correlation of Grade 10 Learners' Academic Performance on Their Occupational Fields of Interest and Its Alignment to Personal Preferences in College Studies, Basis to a Strategic School-Initiated Career Guidance Program came into being.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on Trait & Factor Theory, which was initiated in 1908, popularly known as Parson's Theory, named after the first known Father of the Vocational Guidance Movement, Frank Parson. This theory primarily states that various factors are taken into consideration in choosing a future career, which includes analysis of one's skills, values, interests, and personality, that the better the fit between the individual and the occupation, the better the satisfaction and success.

According to Giobbi (2018) [7], Parson's Theory is widely used by career and guidance counselors in assisting an individual in selecting a vocation. Though several Trait & Factor sub-theories exist now, all just share one basic premise, which is the use of personal traits in matching an individual with an occupation. Traits are generally stable and enduring patterns of how people think, feel, and behave. Traits are quantifiable in various forms such as aptitude, achievement, personality, and interests. On the other hand, factors are constellations, or patter of traits, present in people's overall thinking, feeling, and behavior. With the aid of psychometric testing, vocational counselors can determine the occupation suited to an individual's personality factors.

In the conduct of this study, the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model was employed to operationalize the available variables. IPO is a functional graph that identifies the inputs, outputs, and required processing tasks required to transform inputs into outputs. The model is said to sometimes configured to include any storage that might happen in the process as well. The inputs represent the flow of data and materials into the process from the outside. The processing step includes all tasks required to effect a transformation of the inputs. The outputs are the data and materials flowing out of the transformation process (Schembri, 2012) [8].

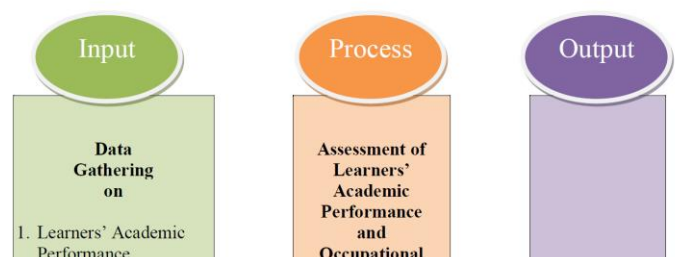


Fig. 1. *Conceptual Model of the Study*

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The general question answered in this study is: How do Grade 10 learners' academic performance and occupational fields of interest aligned to their personal preferences in college studies?

To find an answer to the general question, the researchers sought answers to the following specific questions:

- a) What is the level of learners' academic performance in terms of their final rating in each learning area for the previous school year?
- b) What is the learners' occupational interest in terms of the rating they obtained in the National Career Assessment Examination (NCAE) in terms of:
 - b.1. the average rating of the proficiency level of learners in each area of occupational interest; and
 - b.2. the number of learners in each area of occupational interest across proficiency levels?
- c) Does learners' academic performance significantly impact their recorded areas of occupational interest?
- d) What are the learner's preferred courses to take in college?
- e) What are the learner's common reasons for choosing a course to take in college?
- f) Are learners' preferred courses to take in college aligned to their recorded potentials/inclinations based on NCAE results?

- g) What strategic school-initiated career guidance program for learners may be developed based on the findings of the study?

4. ASSUMPTIONS

This study was anchored on the following assumptions:

- a) Learners' academic performance poses a significant impact on their recorded areas of occupational interest.
- b) A strategic school-initiated career guidance program is necessary to ensure learners' alignment of recorded areas of occupational interest to their preferred courses in college.

5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

For the optimum success of each Filipino learner, RA 11206 explicitly states in its objectives the mandate of the state in providing appropriate career guidance to every learner, to wit: "to equip secondary education students with the capability to make educated career decisions and expose them to relevant labor market..." (Section 3, Paragraph b.) [1]

With the humble initiative of the researchers to conduct this study on the Grade 10 learners' academic performance and occupational fields of interest and their alignment to personal preferences in college studies as a basis in the development of a strategic school-initiated career guidance program, cited are the group of individuals who are expected to be benefited from this study.

DepEd Officials. The findings of this study hope to pose important considerations to education officials on the continuous effective development and administration of NCAE that will truly capture the necessary results in guiding the Filipino learners on what career choice fits them best based on their recorded competencies.

School Heads. This study aims to give school heads a current perspective on how to initiate a research-based career guidance program that will utilize the DepEd's assessment program results for the maximum development of the learners in their future chosen field of studies. With this program, DepEd objectives in the administration of various assessment programs will have a concrete use in the field and not just stored in the sleeping cabinet of the records section.

Career Guidance Counselors and Advocates. Results of the study will encourage more career guidance counselors and advocates to scrutinize the extent of the utilization of NCAE results in implementing school programs that generally intend to align the learners' choice of career to their recorded competencies. Other considerations aside from what the NCAE results recorded might be of great help in continuously improving the school's initiative of helping each learner reach his/her dream.

Teachers. As the DepEd personnel with the greatest contact to the learners, teachers can communicate the importance of NCAE to their respective learners. They can

have time to explain the rationale and the statistical reliability and validity of the said examination, and likewise, motivate learners to take the examination seriously as it serves as the department's gauge of identifying learners' aptitude for appropriate progression in the academic ladder.

Learners and Their Parents. As the direct beneficiaries of NCAE, learners will be able to realize the importance of choosing a career path based on multi-faceted considerations such as aptitude and skills, and not solely on personal choice. This study also hopes to reiterate to parents and learners the importance of taking the examination seriously, with mental and physical readiness, as it generates results that will guide them for future career growth.

DepEd Researchers. As its advocacy of continuous improvement, people in DepEd, across positions and offices, may conduct parallel studies that could explore and discover other variables that might lead to another effective career guidance program in assisting our learners to choose an appropriate career path for their future.

6. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This study focused on the select Grade 10 learners of the four (4) junior high schools of DepEd Schools Division of City of Malolos as respondents. The study ran from August 2019 to March 2020 to determine if Grade 10 learners' academic performance and occupational fields of interest are aligned to their personal preferences in college studies. The findings of this undertaking served as primary research-based foundations in crafting a school-initiated career guidance program for learners and all other learners in both junior and senior high school and to somehow generate an additional contribution to the vast literature regarding the research variables of the study.

7. METHODOLOGY

This study employed the mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design (Creswell, 1994) [9] to attain its primary objective of investigating the relationship of Grade 10 learners' academic performance and occupational fields of interest on its alignment to their personal preferences in college studies. In this specific research model, researchers collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data separately on the same phenomenon, and then the different results are converged by comparing and contrasting the different results during the interpretation (Mertens, 2005 [10] & Stangor, 2011 [11]).

Quantitative analysis was utilized in the following data: (1) level of learners' academic performance in terms of their final rating in each learning area for the previous school year; (2) learners' occupational interest in terms of the rating they obtained in the National Career Assessment Examination (NCAE) in terms of the average rating of the proficiency level of learners in each area of occupational interest and the number of learners in each area of occupational interest across proficiency levels; (3) impact of learners' academic performance on their recorded areas of occupational interest;

and (4) alignment of learners' preferred courses to take in college to their recorded potentials/inclinations based on NCAE results. On the other hand, qualitative analysis was used in processing: (1) learner's preferred courses to take in college and (2) learner's common reasons in choosing a course to take in college. Both results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses done were considered in crafting an action plan for a school-initiated career guidance program for learners.

7.1. Respondents

Grade 10 learners from the four (4) junior high schools were the respondents of this study. From the total of 367 registered Grade 10 learners, 187 or 51.37% of the population served as the respondents.

In determining the sample size of the study, the researchers employed the Qualtrics Sample Size Calculator to come up with the ideal sample size of 187, putting into consideration a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error at 5%. This online provision gives an ideal sample size from a given population in an instant, concerning the pre-set confidence level, the actual population size, the pre-set margin of error, and the standard deviation. The researchers used a 0.5 margin of error which is considered the most stable figure for such a purpose and it likewise ensures the sample will be large enough.

7.2. Sampling Method

To determine the number of a sample from the given population, the study employed stratified random sampling. Stratified random sampling (Lynn, 2016) [12] is a type of probability sampling technique to ensure that there is an equal chance (probability) of selecting the representative of Grade 10 learners from within a particular stratum (schools included in the study) of the population when creating the sample. Proportionate stratification was considered where the sample size of each of the stratum (school) is proportionate to the population size of the same stratum.

7.3. Sources of Data

A two-way model of data gathering was used in this study. For the first mode, upon due permission of the school heads and considering the highest level of anonymity, school records were used as the source of important primary data for the variables academic performance and results of the NCAE. The second one was a survey form which was utilized to gather the respondents' personal preferences of what courses to take in college and their reasons for choosing such. An interview with the respondents was conducted during the retrieval phase of the questionnaires to validate their responses and hear their thoughts directly from their mouths.

7.4. Instruments

This study utilized the following data source to capture the necessary variables.

School Form (SF 10). Otherwise known as the Learner’s Permanent Record, this document was used to determine the academic performance of the Grade 10 learners for the previous school year.

NCAE Rating Result. This form presented the level of the occupational interest of the Grade 10 learners when they took the assessment last school year.

Survey Form of College Course Preference. This survey captured the respondents’ preferences on what courses to take in college. It will also cover their reasons on why choosing the said courses. This form also served as the interview guide for the respondents of the study.

7.5. Data Collection Procedure

Right after approving to conduct the study, the researchers presented the approval letter from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of DepEd SDO City of Malolos to the school heads of the target respondents in distributing the survey forms to the randomly selected and coded Grade 10 learners to determine their preferred course to take in college and the reasons for choosing it. The necessary data for the respondents’ academic performance and NCAE results of the previous year were requested to the school’s record section. Two weeks were given for the respondents and for the record section of the participating schools to prepare the necessary data. Random interviews of the select respondents were done during the actual collection of accomplished questionnaires to validate their responses. Their responses were recorded and underwent quantitative and qualitative analyses.

7.6. Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, the researchers adhered to the salient provisions of Republic Act 10173, otherwise known as Data Privacy Act of 2012, which is generally the “free flow of information to promote innovation and growth” (Chapter 1, Section 2) while protecting the users’ fundamental rights to privacy [13].

Some variables of the study are included in the classifications of sensitive personal information per RA 10173 and such shall only be acquired with the consent of the concerned respondents. Consent of the data, per RA 10173, Chapter 1, Section 1, is defined as “any freely given, specific, informed indication of will, whereby the data subject agrees to the collection and processing of personal information about and/or relating to him or her.” The law further states that the consent shall be evidenced by written, electronic, or recorded means, and it may also be given on behalf of the data subject by an agent specifically authorized by the data subject to do so.

The anonymity of the respondents was taken into consideration. Respondents were given the options to join or not join the study, when some of the learners opted not to participate in the study, the researchers conversed with them to present the significance of their participation to realize the objectives of the study but reiterated that they have the final

decision whether to participate or not. In this scheme, the genuine willingness of the Grade 10 learners included in the study was given utmost respect.

7.7. Data Analysis

The data gathered for the study were tallied and computed using Microsoft Excel. The statistical treatment of the data was processed using the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) Version 20. Learners’ reasons for their preferences in college studies were listed and group according to their varied responses. The following statistical measures were utilized in analyzing and interpreting the data.

1. The level of academic performance of the respondents was evaluated based on frequency counts, percentages, and arithmetic averages, and was quantified using the following description:

Scale	Range	Descriptors	Grading Scale	Remarks
5	4.50 – 5.00	Outstanding	90 – 100	Passed
4	3.50 – 4.49	Very Satisfactory	85 – 89	Passed
3	2.50 – 3.49	Satisfactory	80 – 84	Passed
2	1.50 – 2.49	Fairly Satisfactory	75 – 79	Passed
1	1.00 – 1.49	Did Not Meet Expectations	Below 75	Failed

2. The areas of occupational interests of the respondents were described using frequency counts, percentages, and arithmetic averages, and were quantified using the following description:

Scale	Range	Percentage Range	Descriptive Interpretation
4	3.50 – 4.00	76% – 100%	High Preference (HP)
3	2.50 – 3.49	51% – 75%	Moderate Preference (MP)
2	1.50 – 2.49	26% – 50%	Low Preference (LP)
1	1.00 – 1.49	0% – 25%	Very Low Preference (VLP)

3. The impact of learners’ academic performance on their occupational fields of interest was determined using correlation analysis. The computed p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

4. All other quantifiable variables were described using frequency counts, percentages, and arithmetic averages, while learners’ reasons in choosing what course to take in college during the interview were recorded and grouped for clarity of presentation.

7.8. Timetable

The study was finished for seven months. It took a long time from the initial timetable because of the waiting period of the researchers from the approval of the Regional Research Committee to conduct the study. The time extension positively gave chances to the researchers to review the content of the study to ensure smooth implementation across all stages of the research.

8. PLANS FOR DISSEMINATION AND ADVOCACY

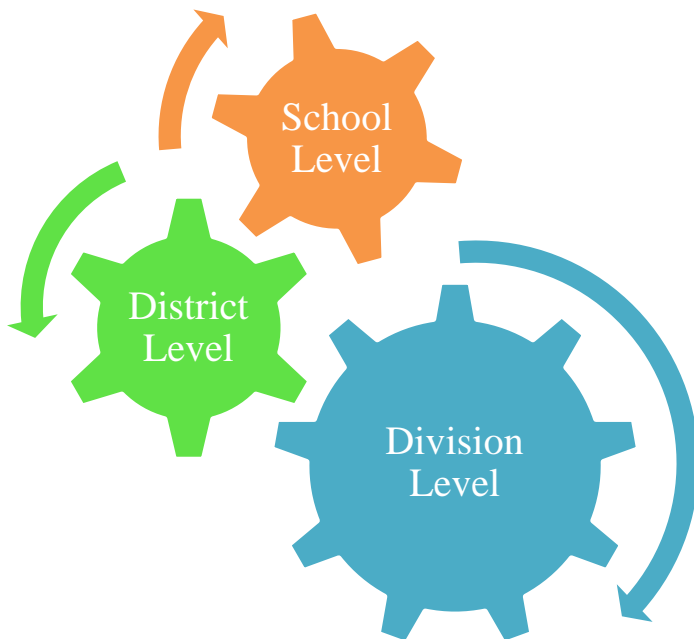


Fig. 2. Dissemination Paradigm of the Study

The results of this study will humbly be presented to SDO City of Malolos officials for evaluation on how it could contribute to the existing efforts of the department in aligning learners' preferences on what course to choose in college with their level of academic performance and areas of occupational interest.

Upon final evaluation of the Division Research Committee, the completed study will be presented in a school-based research colloquium for a fruitful discussion. It will also be shared with the other participating schools for more practical and academic discussion on the results of the study. District and division-wide research presentations will likewise be organized to disseminate the value of the study in the widest possible venue

9. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1. What is the level of the academic performance of the learners in terms of their final rating in each learning area for the previous school year?

This study utilized the final ratings of the learners in each learning area during their Grade 9 period, the time when they took the NCAE. The ratings were summarized and recorded an average rating of 3.40 (Satisfactory) and a standard deviation of 0.85. Furthermore, the data revealed that learners' rating in MAPEH (mean, 3.45) and TLE (mean, 3.58) marked the highest with a Very Satisfactory description. All other six learning areas were only described as Satisfactory with ratings in Mathematics (mean, 2.95) as the lowest.

Appropriate interventions should be applied in the classroom to improve the general Satisfactory performance of the learners. This minimal performance poses a big challenge to school heads to capacitate their teachers in ensuring quality delivery of teaching, thus helping learners improve their academic performance in all learning areas.

Learners' academic performance is classified into five levels according to the final rating they obtained. Data revealed that the highest number of learners obtained a general rating in the Satisfactory level (with 36.90% of the learners) followed by the Very Satisfactory level (31.02%). A minimal number of learners recorded ratings under the Outstanding and the Fairly Satisfactory levels. Notably, no learners received a final rating in the lowest level which is Did Not Meet Expectations.

Research Question 2. What is the learners' occupational interest in terms of the rating they obtained in the National Career Assessment Examination (NCAE) in terms of (2.1) the average rating of the proficiency level of learners in each area of occupational interest; and (2.2.) the number of learners in each area of occupational interest across proficiency levels?

Average Rating of the Proficiency Level of Learners in Each Area of Occupational Interest

Learners' proficiency level in each area of occupational interest was summarized. In the 15 fields of occupational interest, the learners marked an average performance of 3.07 interpreted as Moderate Preference, with a standard deviation of 0.50. The areas which registered the highest means were Professional Services (3.22), Computers and Technology (3.15), Personal Services (3.13), Architecture and Construction (3.13), and Science (3.12). On the other hand, the lowest means were recorded in the following areas of occupational interest: Aquaculture and Agriculture/ Forestry (2.95), Engineering (3.01), Spiritual Vocation (3.01), Fashion (3.02), and Military and Law Enforcement (3.02).

Number of Learners in Each Area of Occupational Interest Across Proficiency Levels

This study sought answers on the number of learners grouped according to the proficiency level they obtained in each area of occupational interest. The areas of occupational interest were presented with the corresponding numbers and percentages per preference level.

The data revealed that in all 15 areas of occupational interest, the majority of the learners obtained Moderate Preference, with percentages of higher than 50% of the total number of learners who were included in the study. The second bulk of learners fell under the High Preference, followed by the Low Preference at third, and the Very Low Preference recording the least number of learners.

The areas of occupational interest that recorded the highest percentages are as follows: Aquaculture and Agriculture/ Forestry (70.05%); Science (69.52%); Business and Finance/ Commerce (68.45%); Natural Sciences (65.24%); and Engineering (63.10%). These data mean that most learners have an only moderate preference in various areas of occupational interest.

Research Question 3. Does learners’ academic performance significantly impact their recorded fields of occupational interest?

Table 1: Correlation Analysis of Learners’ Academic Performance and Their Occupational Interests

Variables		Academic Performance	Occupational Interests
Learners’ Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.149*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.042
	N	187	187
Learners’ Occupational Fields of Interest	Pearson Correlation	.149*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.042	
	N	187	187

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

To determine the relationship between learners’ academic performance and their occupational fields of interest based on the NCAE results, the data gathered were subjected to correlation analysis. The assumption which states that Learners’ academic performance poses a significant impact on their recorded areas of occupational interest was tested.

Results of the correlation analysis revealed that learners’ academic performance has a significant correlation with their occupational fields of interest as shown in the computed p-value of .042. Since the p-value of .042 is lower than the significance level set at .05, the study affirmed the first assumption which states that Learners’ academic performance poses a SIGNIFICANT IMPACT on their recorded areas of occupational interest.

Research Question 4. What are the learners’ preferred courses to take in college?

To determine what courses to take in college, learner-respondents were asked to identify three courses according to priority. They were reminded to be free from any pressure and write on the survey questionnaires their first three courses that they might be possibly take in their college studies.

For the respondents’ first choice, the following courses were revealed as the top priority of the learners. Rank 1 (39 learners, 20.86%) are the courses belonging to Personal Services [Transportation and Travel, Hotel Administration, Hotel Support Staff, Tourism Support Staff], Rank 2 (33 learners, 17.65%) are the courses on Professional Services [Law, Teaching, School Administration, Guidance & Counseling, Support Staff], Rank 3 (24 learners, 12.83%) are courses on Engineering [Specialized Areas like Mechanical Engineer, Civil Engineer, and the Support Staff], Rank 4 (24 learners, 12.83%) are courses on Military and Law Enforcement [Military Services, Law Enforcement], and Rank 5 (22 learners, 11.76%) on the list are courses on Business and Finance/ Commerce (Finance, Business, Support Staff).

For their second choice on what course to take in college, the following lines of studies were identified. More than half of the learners chose courses on Personal Services Courses which ranked first (64 learners, 34.22%), these include studies on Transportation and Travel, Hotel Administration, Hotel Support Staff, and Tourism Support Staff. Second on the rank are the Engineering Courses (24 learners, 12.83%) which refer to Specialized Areas like Mechanical Engineer, Civil Engineer, and the like, and its Support Staff). On third are the Science Courses (23 learners, 12.30%) which include Medicine, Allied Medicine, Allied Health Professions, Hospital Administration, and Health & Wellness Support Staff. On the fourth rank are the Professional Services Courses (18 learners, 9.63%) which consist of Law, Teaching, School Administration, Guidance & Counseling, and its Support Staff. Courses tied on the fifth rank are the Business and Finance/ Commerce Courses (Finance, Business, and its Support Staff) and the Military and Law Enforcement Courses (Military Services, Law Enforcement) both with recorded 14 learners or 7.49%.

On learners’ third choice, Military and Law Enforcement Courses (Military Services, Law Enforcement) with 47 learners or 25.13% ranked first. The Personal Services Courses (Transportation and Travel, Hotel Administration, Hotel Support Staff, and Tourism Support Staff) with 39 learners or 20.86% ranked second, and the Professional Services Courses (Law, Teaching, School Administration, Guidance & Counseling, and its Support Staff) with 34 learners or 18.18% ranked on third. The Engineering Courses (Specialized Areas like Mechanical Engineer, Civil Engineer, and the like, and its Support Staff) and the Business and Finance/ Commerce Courses (Finance, Business, and its Support Staff) tied on the fourth rank with 13 learners or 6.95%.

None of the learners chose courses related to (1) the Community Services [Community Governance, Administration, and Specialized Services, Community Support Staff] and (2) the Spiritual Vocation [Priest/ Pastor/Imam, Spiritual Counselor/ Nun, Charity Worker] while very minimal numbers were recorded on some line of

studies, which includes (1) the Aquaculture and Agriculture/Forestry Courses (Specialized Areas like Aquaculturist, Agriculturist, and its Support Staff) with only 1 learner who chose it, the Natural Sciences Courses (Specialized Areas like Biologist, Botanist, Zoologist, Chemist, and the like) with only 2 learners who preferred it, and (3) the Fashion Courses (Garments, Linens, and Textile Industry, Hairstyle, Cosmetics, and Other Parlor Services, Jewelry and Fashion Accessories) with 4 learners.

Research Question 5. What are the learner’s common reasons for choosing a course to take in college?

Table 2: Common Learners’ Reasons in Choosing A Course to Take in College

Rank	Reasons
1	Personal Choice/Line of Interest
2	Influence of Others
3	Present Financial Conditions of the Family
4	Employability to Work Local and/or Abroad

To truly capture learners’ voices, an interview was held to validate learners’ responses on their reasons in choosing courses to take in college. Upon recording and grouping learners’ responses, four major reasons came out on how they decided to choose what courses to take in college. Their (1) personal choice/ line of interest ranked one and the other three major reasons are (2) influence of others; (3) present financial conditions of the family; and (4) employability to work local and/or abroad.

Personal Choice/Line of Interest. For the personal choice/ line of interest of the learners, it is worthy to note the following short responses of the learners during the validation interview done by the researchers:

Learner 001: *I want to know more about managing a hotel and restaurant.*

Learner 002: *Ito ang hilig kong gawin.*

Learner 003: *Gusto kong maging computer programmer para makagawa ng edit art animation. I want to be an animator.*

Learner 004: *I want tourism because I like to travel around the world.*

Learner 005: *Kaya kong patunayan sa sarili ko na kaya kongtapusin ang pagpupulis dahil ito ang pangarap ko.*

Learner 006: *Because this is my hobby.*

Learner 007: *Gusto kong sunubukan ang aking kakayahan.*

Learner 008: *Pangarap ko mula pa pagkabata.*

Learner 009: *Gusto kong maging pulis para galangin ako ng ibang tao.*

Learner 010: *I have talent in animation.*

Learner 011: *I want to learn and cook other dishes or viand.*

Learner 012: *I want to be successful someday.*

Learner 013: *Mahilig ako sa mga bata kaya gusto.*

Learner 014: *I want to take care of my parents when they get old.*

Learner 015: *I want to take accountancy because I'm good at Mathematics.*

Learner 016: *I like HRM because I think this is the easiest course for me.*

Learner 017: *I'm good at public speaking that is why I like to take tourism.*

Learner 018: *Gusto kong maging tanyag na dress designer.*

Learner 019: *Gusto kong maging abogado para matulungan ko ang mga taong walang pambayad para sa kaso nila.*

Learner 020: *Gusto kong Culinary Arts para maia-apply ko ang mga natutunan ko sa Bread and Pastry.*

Learner 021: *To pay back the sacrifices of my parents.*

Learner 022: *Kaya military ang gusto kasi gusto ko maglingkod sa bayan.*

Learner 023: *Gusto kong maging pulis dahil gusto kong hulihin at puksain ang masasamang-loob.*

Influence of Others. Other learners were influenced by their parents and other important people around them in deciding what course to take on their future college years. Some of the notable responses are as follows:

Learner 024: *Gusto ng aking magulang na maging chef ako.*

Learner 025: *Gusto ng aking magulang na maging Pulis ako.*

Learner 026: *Gusto ng mama ko na madaling course lang ang kukuhanin ko sa college.*

Learner 027: *I want to be a teacher because it's my parents' choice.*

Learner 028: *Ito rin kasi ang course ng aking ate.*

Learner 029: *Pananahi ang trabaho ng nanay ko kaya ito rin ang course na gusto ko.*

Learner 030: *Pangarap ng mga magulang ko na makapagtrabaho ako sa malalaking kompanya.*

Learner 031: *Most of my relatives are seaman so I want to be like them.*

Present Financial Conditions of the Family. Considering the present financial conditions of their families, the following responses were gathered during the interview:

Learner 032: *My family can only afford that course.*

Learner 033: *Para makatulong ako sa aking mga magulang sa pagpapaaral sa aking sarili.*

Learner 034: *Ito lang ang kurso na kaya ng aking mga magulang.*

Learner 035: *I really want to be a Med-Tech but my parents don't like it because of the high tuition fee.*

Employability to Work Local and/or Abroad.
Employability here and abroad was the fourth major consideration of the learners in choosing what courses to take in college. Some of the learners' responses during the interview are as follows:

Learner 036: *Madaling magkatrabaho para sa akin.*

Learner 037: *I like to be a nurse because of its high salary.*

Learner 038: *There's an easy possibility to work abroad.*

These varied responses of the learners manifest the various factors that contribute to the learners' preferences in choosing the line of studies they would take in the succeeding years of the educational ladder. Personal competencies and inclinations are not only the reasons that dictate learners' directions in their future studies. Though certain courses are far beyond their match, other learners pursue courses that they think to benefit the expectations surrounding them.

Research Question 6. Are learners' preferred courses to take in college aligned to their recorded potentials/inclinations based on NCAE results?

The NCAE results provide information on the aptitudes of the learners based on their performance in this national assessment. This examination predicts the specific potentials or inclinations appropriate for the learners, giving them ideas about what line of studies or career to pursue afterward. Learners with recorded High Preference level to a particular area of occupational interest are expected to become more successful if opted to pursue the line of studies aligned to their recorded aptitudes, due to match of innate knowledge, skills, and attitude on a specific endeavor. On the other hand, learners are less likely to succeed if they pursue areas not matched to their recorded potentials or inclinations.

This study identified the preference levels of the learners' priority choices, of course, to take in college. Data revealed that most of the learners' choices from their first, second, and third priorities marked Moderate Preference. For instance, on their first choice of courses to pursue in college, only 53 of them (28.34%) marked with High Preference, the biggest number (112 learners) obtained only Moderate Preference level, while minimal numbers fell under Low Preference level (19 learners, 10.16%) and Very Low Preference level (3 learners, 1.60%). The same pattern occurred with their second and third choices.

Research Question 7. What strategic school-initiated Career Guidance Program for Grade 10 learners may be developed based on the findings of the study?

The findings of the study affirmed the second assumption of the study which states that A strategic school-initiated career guidance program is necessary to ensure learners' alignment of recorded areas of occupational interest to their preferred courses in college. With this premise, the study posed several inputs worthy of consideration in crafting a strategic school-initiated career guidance program, and these are as follows: (a) Teachers, parents and/or guardians, and learners must all be involved in the school career guidance program so that they can work hand in hand throughout the process. (b) The school career guidance program must be given to all learners across grade levels and note solely to Grades 9 and 10 only. (c) The importance of academic performance should be explained well to the parents and/or guardians and learners because it will help them to succeed in their future studies and careers. (d) The rationale, features, and results of NCAE should be relayed well to Teachers, parents and/or guardians, and learners to maximize the benefits of the said free assessment given to learners. (e) Various activities on career guidance shall be implemented in school and connect it on the continuous orientation of learners on the occupational fields of interest suited to their skills and competencies in various learning areas. (f) An evaluation and planning program at the end of the school year should be done to refine the crafted and implemented school career guidance program, addressing the present needs of the learners.

10. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data gathered and findings presented, the researchers come up with the following insights of the study.

- (a) Learners' academic performance, in general, is only satisfactory level. This status shows a need for an adequate intervention for learners to master the necessary learning competencies of each learning area.
- (b) Learners' occupational interest in terms of the rating they obtained in NCAE revealed that in general, the majority of learners in each occupational field of interest manifested moderate preference level. This finding reflects that the likelihood to succeed in a chosen endeavor is strong but not to a very high possibility.
- (c) Learners' academic performance significantly impacts their recorded fields of occupational interest. This fact should be considered in guiding the learners to choose which occupational fields of interest fit their competencies in various learning areas.
- (d) The study revealed that the general preferences of the learners to take in college are the following line of studies: Personal Services courses [Transportation and Travel, Hotel Administration, Hotel Support Staff, Tourism Support Staff], Professional Services courses [Law, Teaching, School Administration, Guidance & Counseling, Support Staff], Engineering courses, Military and Law Enforcement Courses [Military Services, Law Enforcement], and Business and Finance/

Commerce (Finance, Business, Support Staff). On the other hand, no learners showed possible interests in taking Community Services courses [Community Governance, Administration, and Specialized Services, Community Support Staff] and Spiritual Vocation courses [Priest/ Pastor/Imam, Spiritual Counselor/ Nun, Charity Worker]. These facts show a diverse line of interests of the learners but not on all types of courses. Some courses seem interesting to them while others do not make any appeal to them.

- (e) Learners' common reasons in choosing a course to take in college are their (1) personal choice/ line of interest; (2) influence of others; (3) present financial conditions of the family; and (4) employability to work local and/or abroad. This ranking shows positive insight that if learners will just be able to realize the importance of linking their competencies to their choice of studies in the future, they will be more likely to succeed.
- (f) Learners' preferred courses to take in college are aligned to their recorded potentials/inclinations based on NCAE but only to a moderate preference level. This shows that there is a need to reorient learners on what to consider in choosing courses to take in college based on existing significant considerations and not just on what they think is good for them.
- (g) A strategic school-initiated career guidance program is needed to assist learners to come up with a sound decision in choosing what line of studies or occupations to pursue in the future.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the enumerated findings and conclusions, the researchers presented the following recommendations are hereby given.

- (a) Appropriate interventions should be given to learners to improve their academic performance in each learning area, these might include employing new teaching strategies, the conduct of peer-tutoring, development of self-learning kit or strategic intervention materials for least mastered competencies, and strengthened teacher-parent conferences.
- (b) Effective orientation and reorientation programs on NCAE should be given to learners, parents, and teachers from Grade 8 onwards, with these, all major stakeholders will be oriented on the importance of this national assessment and its benefits in guiding the learners to decide which occupational fields of interest fit best their competencies. These programs might include a symposium, small and big group discussion, seminar-workshop, and film showing.
- (c) A continuous strategic school-initiated career guidance program should be implemented to appropriately assist learners in making sound decisions for their future studies

and occupations. Effective evaluation mechanisms with internal and external stakeholders on the implemented career guidance program shall be done to craft the most appropriate plan of activities of the career guidance program in the next school year.

- (d) Another study with similar variables is suggested to be conducted to continuously improve the development of an existing career guidance program in school for the utmost benefits of the learners, thus living to our Department's mandate of being a learner-centered institution.

12. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Teamwork makes the dream works! Thus, this study was made possible through the collaborative efforts of the researchers who are continuously inspired by God's grace and mercy each day for having the following individuals whom they are truly grateful throughout the conduct of this endeavor:

To their respective family members who always support and cheer them up despite the numerous workload in the department: The understanding of each family member to spend more time in researching home inspired the researchers to push it through with a happy heart;

To their superiors: Madam Schools Division Superintendent Dr. Norma P. Esteban, Sir Assistant Schools Division Superintendent Dr. Zurex T. Bacay, Madam SGOD Chief Dr. Cynthia C. Briones, Madam CID OIC-Chief Ms. Fatima M. Punongbayan, CID Education Supervisor for Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao and Guidance & Counseling Mrs. Carmelita E. de Guzman, and Sir District 8 Public Schools District Supervisor Mr. Dennis C. Robles, for their continuous motivation to the researchers to go an extra mile in the conduct of this study. The advice, comments, and suggestions of DepEd SDO City of Malolos officials helped a lot in ensuring the accuracy of the research structure. Special mention is likewise given to Madam SEPS for Planning and Research Mrs. Leonila H. Antonio for assisting the Division Research to evaluate and approve this paper at the soonest possible time.

To the Regional Research Committee of DepEd Region III for taking time to scrutinize the proposal of this study and granted permission to conduct it with corresponding funding: This provision inspired the researchers to motivate their colleagues to conduct similar endeavors and contribute to DepEd's advocacy of building a culture of research.

To the school heads, teachers, and learners of the participating schools for accommodating the conduct of the study and for facilitating the speedy data gathering: The data gathered truly served its purpose to complete the study smoothly and happily, for, without their unconditional cooperation, this study will never be realized.

With all these inspirations, the researchers hope to be given another opportunity to conduct a research study in some future time that will contribute development in some way or another

to the continuous programs, projects, and activities of the school.

13. REFERENCES

- [1] Government of the Philippines. (2019). *Republic Act 11206. Secondary School Career Guidance and Counseling Act.*
- [2] Ross, L. (2019). *The importance of a national career assessment examination.* Leaf Group Ltd. / Leaf Group Education. <https://theclassroom.com>.
- [3] DOLE. (2010). *Job mismatch, deteriorating education lead CHED to declare moratorium on some courses* (November 15, 2010). Press release by the Department of Labor and Employment. <http://www.gov.ph/2010/11/15/dole-jobs-mismatch-deteriorating-education-lead-ched-to-declare-moratorium-on-some-courses/>
- [4] Lopus, J. (2002). *NCAE.* <http://www.philstar.com>
- [5] Ferrer, F. H., & Dela Cruz, R. J. (2017). *Correlation of STEM students' performance in the National Career Assessment Examination and academic subjects.* PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences, Special Issue, 3(1), 532-541. <https://doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2017.s31.532541>
- [6] Escudero, F. G. (2016). *An act creating a National Career Assessment Examination to institutionalize a career direction program for secondary graduates, defining, its scope and functions and for other purposes.* Seventeenth Congress of the Republic of the Philippines, First Regular Session, Senate S. B. No. 790.
- [7] Giobbi, M. (2018). *Characteristics of the trait and factor theory.* <https://careertrend.com>.
- [8] Schembri, J. (2012.) *Input output model.* Six Sigma Daily. <https://www.sixsigmadaily.com>
- [9] Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative & quantitative approaches.* SAGE; Thousand Oaks, CA.
- [10] Lynn, P. (2016). *The advantage and disadvantage of implicitly stratified sampling.* Understanding Society Working Paper Series. No. 2016-5. www.understandingsociety.ac.uk.
- [11] Mertens, D. M. (2005). *Research methods in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative and qualitative approaches.* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- [12] Stangor, C. (2011). *Research methods for the behavioral sciences.* (4th ed.) Mountain View, CA: Cengage. open.lib.umn.edu.
- [13] Government of the Philippines. (2012). *Republic Act 10173. Data Privacy Act of 2012.*

Appendix: Recommended Strategic School-Initiated Career Guidance Program

NO.	OBJECTIVES	SCHOOL-BASED STRATEGIES	FOCAL PERSON/S	TIME FRAME	BUDGETARY REQUIREMENTS	SUCCESS INDICATORS
1	To acquaint teachers, parents/ guardians, and learners on the rationale and features of NCAE	Orientation program with Grades 8 teachers, parents/guardians, and learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Guidance Coordinator/s ▪ School Testing Coordinator ▪ Class Advisers 	June 2020 to July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MOOE Fund ▪ Canteen Fund 	Participants identified the rationale of NCAE and its major features
		Reorientation program with Grades 9 & 10 teachers, parents/guardians, and learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Guidance Coordinator/s ▪ Class Advisers 	July 2020 to August 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MOOE Fund ▪ Canteen Fund ▪ External Funding 	Participants strengthened the knowledge on the rationale of NCAE and its major features
2	To orient learners parents/ guardians and learners on the NCAE inventory of occupational interests	Film showing of films/ documentaries on the different kinds of jobs and professor for parents/ guardians and learners for Grades 8, 9, & 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Guidance Coordinator/s ▪ Class Advisers 	July 2020 to March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MOOE Fund ▪ Canteen Fund ▪ External Funding 	Participants enumerated different jobs and professions and its corresponding contribution in social development
		Seminar on the different courses and jobs qualifications for Grades 9 & 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Guidance Coordinator/s ▪ External Expert/s 	September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MOOE Fund ▪ Canteen Fund ▪ External Funding 	Participants continuously deepened their knowledge on different courses of studies and job qualifications
		Benchmarking of Grades 9 & 10 learners to various local industries regarding the skills and competencies required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Guidance Coordinator/s ▪ Partner Institution/s 	October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MOOE Fund ▪ Canteen Fund ▪ External Funding 	Participants immersed themselves on the actual workplace
		Regular career guidance program on occupational interests for Grades 9 and 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Guidance Coordinator/s ▪ Class Advisers ▪ External Expert/s 	October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MOOE Fund ▪ Canteen Fund ▪ External Funding 	Participants widened their personal knowledge on different courses of studies and occupations
		Conduct of Festival of Works and Professions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Guidance Coordinator/s ▪ Class Advisers 	March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MOOE Fund ▪ Canteen Fund ▪ External Funding 	Participants articulated their chosen career to pursue in the future
		Talk on curricular offerings of SHS and/or tertiary institutions for Grade 10 learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Guidance Coordinator/s ▪ Partner Institution/s 	October 2020 to December 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ External Funding 	Participants gained more information on which schools suit their choice for their succeeding education program

Continued on the next page

Continuation...

NO.	OBJECTIVES	SCHOOL-BASED STRATEGIES	FOCAL PERSON/S	TIME FRAME	BUDGETARY REQUIREMENTS	SUCCESS INDICATORS
3	To prepare Grade 9 teachers in the administration of NCAE and to familiarize learners in the conduct of the assessment	Administration of mock NCAE for Grade 9 learners two weeks prior to the actual examination date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Testing Coordinator ▪ Class Advisers 	Two Weeks Before the Actual NCAE Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MOOE Fund ▪ Canteen Fund 	Participants familiarized themselves on what to do during the actual testing day
4	To relay NCAE results to teachers, parents/ guardians and learners	Symposium on the interpretation of NCAE Results with Grade 10 teachers, parents/ guardians and learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Guidance Coordinator/s ▪ School Testing Coordinator ▪ Class Advisers ▪ External Expert/s 	January 2021 to March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MOOE Fund ▪ Canteen Fund 	Participants were guided on how NCAE results could help them to identify the occupational fields of interest to pursue in the future that fit best to their competencies
5	To evaluate the implementation of the school-initiated career guidance program and plan program of activities for the succeeding school years	Evaluation and Planning Program with the School Guidance Coordinator/s, School Testing Coordinator, Class Advisers, and Members of the School Governing Council (SGC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School Principal ▪ Head Teachers ▪ Other Administrative Officers 	April 2021 to May 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MOOE Fund ▪ Canteen Fund 	Participants identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the implemented program and from there, craft a new plan for the succeeding school year