International Journal of Trendy Research in Engineering and Technology
Volume 9 Issue 5 October 2025
ISSN NO 2582-0958

POST-SHS TRAJECTORIES: A DEMOGRAPHIC AND CAREER PATHWAY STUDY OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES OF STO. TOMAS SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Received 25 June 2025 Received in revised form 08 July 2025 Accepted 10 July 2025

ABSTRACT

This study sought to analyze the post-Senior High School (SHS) trajectories of graduates from Sto. Tomas Senior High School from School Year (SY) 2017–2018 to SY 2024–2025, emphasizing their demographic profiles, strand completion, post-SHS pathways, institutional affiliations, and course alignment with their SHS backgrounds. Data were collected from 3,773 graduates utilizing a descriptive research methodology, through institutional records and follow-up surveys. The findings indicated that the majority of graduates sought further education, primarily enrolling in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs). The HUMSS strand was the most frequently finished, while courses connected with HUMSS were the most generally selected in higher education. Nonetheless, certain strand-to-course discrepancies were observed, especially among TVL and ABM graduates. A minor fraction of graduates participated in employment or entrepreneurship, although a significant segment was not involved in education, employment, or training (NEET). The results highlight the necessity to fortify career advice initiatives, augment TVL and STEM support frameworks, and institutionalize tracer studies to enhance curriculum pertinence and learner outcomes.

Keywords: Senior High School, tracer study, strand alignment, post-SHS pathway, course choice, TVL, HUMSS, STEM, career guidance, graduate outcomes

I. INTRODUCTION

The K to 12 Basic Education Program in the Philippines was a big change to the country's education system. Its goal was to make sure that Filipino graduates met global standards by giving them the skills they needed for jobs, starting their own businesses, or going on to higher education [1]. Senior High School (SHS) plays a crucial role in this transformation by offering specialized pathways that cater to the many interests and future ambitions of pupils. As Sto. Tomas Senior High School continues to implement this curriculum, there is a growing imperative to evaluate the effectiveness of its graduates in successfully managing their projected paths following high school.

A tracer study is an important tool for checking how well SHS programs work by keeping track of what graduates are doing now in school, at work, or as entrepreneurs. The Commission on Higher Education [2] says that tracer studies help schools figure out how relevant and good their education is, especially when it comes to getting students ready for real-life problems. These studies furnish extensive data regarding graduates' demographics, skill utilization, and career which can aid school administrators, educators, and legislators in improving curricular offerings and support systems.

Recent studies demonstrate that many senior high school graduates face challenges, such as inadequate career opportunities, budgetary constraints, and limited access to further education institutions, especially in rural areas [3, 4]. Doing localized tracer research at Sto. Tomas Senior High School gives you the ability to learn more about how these national issues affect people on the ground. Examining the post-graduation experiences of these individuals will elucidate the efficacy of the school's initiatives in equipping them for life subsequent to senior high school.

The study also aims to improve the school's academic and career counseling programs, which are already getting better. The data collected will facilitate the assessment of the alignment between SHS tracks and real career or college trajectories, aiding the school in enhancing its instructional strategies and student support systems. It contended that educational institutions must perpetually utilize evidence-based decision-making to respond to evolving labor market dynamics and learner requirements [5].

This tracer study will provide an overview of the current status of Sto. Tomas Senior High School graduates and establish a basis for the improvement of institutional policies and processes. The research, which combines quantitative data and qualitative opinions, aligns with DepEd's main goals of making sure that SHS graduates are well-rounded, competitive on a global scale, and able to respond to local needs. The results will be important for helping with smart planning, improving the implementation of SHS programs, and ultimately helping students reach important goals after SHS.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum in the Philippines was to get Senior High School (SHS) graduates ready for work, starting their own business, or going to college. Nonetheless, research indicates that the transition from Senior High School to post-secondary pathways continues to be intricate and diverse. The Department of Education (2023) said in its most recent review of the K to 12 curriculum that the SHS program does offer specialized tracks for students, but there is still a need to strengthen ties to industry, improve practical training through Work Immersion, and provide better support for students who are ready for college or work. The same evaluation asked for localized monitoring and feedback systems, like tracer studies, to help us better understand how students deal with life after SHS.

Manlangit (2023) did a post-K to 12 assessment of SHS graduates in Laguna and discovered that while most of them continued their education, many of them switched to college courses that were not connected to their SHS strand. This suggests a potential deficiency in professional decision-making and program alignment. Almario and Soriano (2022) conducted a study on rural public schools and found that although graduates valued the abilities acquired in senior high school, many faced difficulties in obtaining jobs or accessing postsecondary education due to socioeconomic obstacles. These findings underscore the necessity for schools to implement localized tracer studies to cater to the distinct demands of their alumni and guarantee program responsiveness.

Career advising has also been stressed as a way to assist kids make smart choices about what to do after high school. It was examined the professional decision-making process of SHS graduates and discovered that their choices were profoundly shaped by personal interests, peer and familial expectations, and perceived employment availability [6]. The researchers emphasized the necessity of incorporating formal career advising programs in Grades 11 and 12 to assist students in aligning their strand selections with pragmatic career or educational outcomes. These insights are particularly pertinent in guaranteeing that SHS graduates are equipped for post-secondary life, both academically and professionally.

Also, national authorities have stressed how important tracer studies are for figuring out how educational initiatives affect people. CHED [2] says that tracer studies are very important for getting feedback from graduates and checking how well education-to-employment pipelines work. You may utilize tracer data to change the curriculum, work with businesses, and find out how happy graduates are and how well they use their skills. It was also said that schools need to prepare based on real-time data and the results of their graduates in order to stay relevant and meet the changing needs of the job market. They suggested setting up feedback loops between schools, businesses, and former students to make sure that things keep getting better [5].

Researchers looked at the job outcomes for Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) strand graduates in Region IV-A [7]. Their research revealed that a limited percentage of graduates obtained jobs in their area of expertise, primarily due to insufficient technical preparedness, obsolete equipment, and inadequate employer involvement. This is similar to what the current study found, which is that job outcomes typically don't match the SHS route that was chosen. The authors proposed that educational institutions should enhance training facilities, collaborate with local industry, and provide post-graduation support to optimize job matching and employability.

In the meantime, research has also shown how important it is to know how SHS graduates are enrolling in colleges and universities. Other researchers looked at how SHS graduates enrolled in public schools and found that the COVID-19 epidemic made it much harder for them to move on to college [8]. Numerous students identified financial constraints, exhaustion from distance learning, and a deficiency of enthusiasm as factors for not continuing their studies. These results emphasize the importance of subsequent research and school-based initiatives to re-engage out-of-school kids and foster equal access to post-secondary education.

International and national organizations have also called for localized, data-driven methods for tracking student results on a larger scale. It was stressed that well-designed tracer studies that take into account regional differences and student diversity should be used to keep an eye on school-to-work transition programs [9]. In the Philippines, the National Economic and Development Authority suggested that graduation tracking initiatives should

be made permanent, even at the senior high school level [10]. Their Human Development Report says that making the link between education and work stronger is very important for solving the problems of youth unemployment, school dropout, and underemployment in the country.

Research Objective

This study examined the post-graduation trajectories of Sto. Tomas Senior High School graduates, focusing on their demographic profiles, current educational or employment status, and the congruence of their Senior High School track with their selected career or college course, serving as a foundation for policy recommendations in the implementation of the Senior High School Curriculum.

III. SCOPE AND LIMITATION

This study encompassed the Senior High School graduates of Sto. Tomas Senior High School from the academic years 2017-2018 to 2024-2025. It seeks to ascertain their present status—whether they are enrolled in college, employed, self-employed, or unemployed—and evaluate the congruence between their Senior High School strand and selected vocation or course. The study was confined to graduates from a single institution and is based on self-reported data, which may be influenced by recall bias. Some grads may not be reached because their contact information is out of current, which could make the results less complete.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a descriptive quantitative methodology with a tracer study design. The goal was to gather and examine information about the demographics, present job or school situation, and career paths of Sto. Tomas Senior High School alumni. A standardized survey questionnaire served as the principal instrument for data collection, facilitating the acquisition of self-reported information from respondents. Researchers looked at the data using frequency counts, percentages, and cross-tabulations to find trends, patterns, and how well SHS tracks matched up with what happened after graduation. The descriptive approach was selected to furnish a lucid overview of graduates' paths and to guide enhancements in programs and policies.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following figures present the demographic profile of the Senior High School (SHS) graduates of Sto. Tomas Senior High School, their post-SHS pathways, the institutions they attended, and the alignment of their chosen courses or careers with their SHS track.

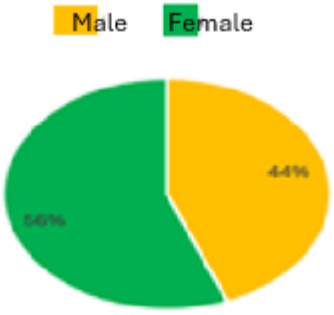

Fig.1 distribution of graduates as to sex

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of Senior High School (SHS) graduates from Sto. Tomas Senior High School categorized by sex. Of the 3,773 graduates, 44% (1,660) are male and 56% (2,113) are female. The data indicates that a higher number of female students graduated from Senior High School within the specified timeframe.

The predominance of female graduates signifies wider national patterns within the Philippine education system, where female students frequently demonstrate superior completion rates compared to their male counterparts. The Philippine Statistics Authority indicates that females consistently surpass males in retention and graduation rates in secondary education [11]. Contributing factors may encompass disparities in academic engagement, behavioral tendencies, and societal forces that promote increased educational enrollment among females.

Understanding the sex distribution of SHS graduates is crucial for formulating inclusive educational policies and guaranteeing equitable support for both male and female students in their academic and career transitions post-high school.

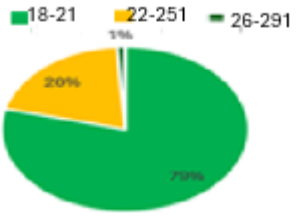

Fig.2 Distribution of graduates as to age Bracket

Figure 2 depicts the age distribution of alumni from Sto. Tomas Senior High School who have completed their courses. Seventy-nine percent of the graduates, totaling 2,981 individuals, are aged between 18 and 21, corresponding with the anticipated age for completing Senior High School in the Philippine education system.

Additionally, 20% (755 graduates) fall between the 22 to 25 age bracket, while 1% (38 graduates) are aged between 26 and 29 years. The existence of elder graduates indicates occurrences of delayed graduation, either due to late school enrollment, academic disruptions, financial difficulties, or choices to resume education after a hiatus. The age diversity highlights the necessity for inclusive and adaptable educational programs that cater to the diverse demands of learners at various life stages.

The Department of Education identifies the provision of basic education for all learners, irrespective of age, as a fundamental priority within its inclusive education framework [1]. By acknowledging the age variation among SHS graduates, educational institutions can more effectively customize interventions and support mechanisms—such as the Alternative Learning System (ALS), modular programs, or evening classes—to facilitate the successful completion of education for older students.

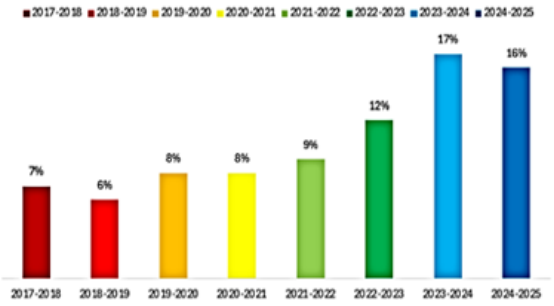

Fig.3 Distribution of graduates as to school year graduated

The bar graph depicting the number of Senior High School (SHS) graduates from Sto. Tomas Senior High School over eight school years demonstrates a consistent upward trajectory in graduate numbers. The graph displays the shortest bars in the initial two academic years—SY 2017–2018 with 307 graduates (7%) and SY 2018–2019 with 283 graduates (6%). The years in question signify the first cohorts of the SHS program, and the diminished numbers may indicate the acclimatization phase for learners, parents, and educators to the recently instituted K to 12 curriculum.

A modest rise is noted in SY 2019–2020 (383 graduates) and SY 2020–2021 (367 graduates), sustaining reasonable graduating figures despite the emergence of the COVID-19 epidemic. Despite the pandemic's disruption of the national education system, Sto. Tomas Senior High School demonstrated resilience by maintaining graduation rates through adaptable learning delivery and support methods. In the academic year 2021–2022, the bar has been elevated with 402 graduates, indicating a progressive resurgence from pandemic-induced challenges.

The highest bars are observed in the last academic years—SY 2022–2023 (536 graduates), SY 2023–2024 (755 graduates), and SY 2024–2025 (740 graduates). These values constitute 45% of the total graduates in the sample and indicate substantial growth in completion rates. The significant rise throughout these years can be ascribed to enhanced educational methodologies, augmented student support services, and intensified school-community collaboration. The rise corresponds with the national objective of ensuring a greater number of students finish basic education, as detailed in the Department of Education's Basic Education Report [12]..

The bar graph visualization clearly depicts a positive trajectory in the school's ability to graduate more learners over time. This trend suggests that Sto. Tomas Senior High School has strengthened its implementation of the SHS program, addressed early challenges, and contributed meaningfully to the goal of producing job-ready or college-ready graduates.

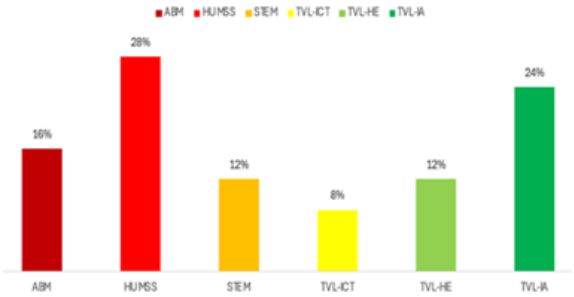

Fig.4 Distribution of graduates as to strand in SHS

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of graduates from Sto. Tomas Senior High School The bar graph indicates that the strand with the highest number of graduates is HUMSS (Humanities and Social Sciences), totaling 1,056 graduates (28%), followed by TVL-IA (Technical-Vocational-Livelihood – Industrial Arts) with 906 graduates (24%). The combination of these two strands constitutes more than fifty percent of total graduates, reflecting a significant preference among students for programs centered on social sciences or technical skills in the trades sector.

The ABM (Accountancy, Business, and Management) strand has 604 graduates, representing 16%, indicating sustained student interest in business-related professions. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and TVL-HE (Home Economics) each produced 453 graduates, representing 12% of the total. This reflects a moderate level of interest in both science and technology

pathways and home management and livelihood-related tracks. TVL-ICT (Information and Communications Technology) reported the lowest number of graduates, totaling 302 (8%), potentially indicating limited availability of ICT equipment or reduced student demand.

The bar graph analysis illustrates the school's varied strand offerings and their alignment with student interests and community requirements. The prevalence of HUMSS and TVL-IA indicates that a significant number of learners are drawn to disciplines with robust employment prospects in education, social services, and practical technical occupations. The Department of Education states that providing diverse SHS strands enables learners to follow pathways aligned with their strengths, aspirations, and labor market trends [1].

This distribution assists school administrators and curriculum planners in assessing which strands require additional support, promotion, or expansion, informed by student interest and future employability prospects. Increased investment in STEM and ICT resources may attract more enrollees in these expanding sectors.

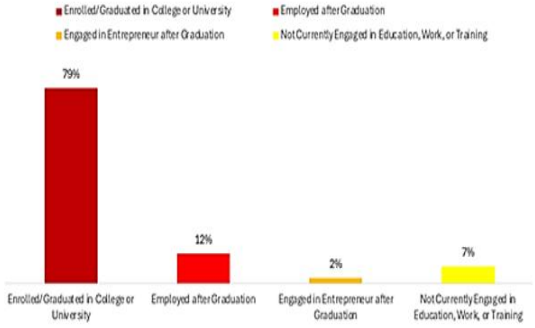

Fig.5 Distribution of graduates as to post SHS pathway

A substantial majority, 79% or 2,981 graduates, continued to higher education, suggesting that most students regarded SHS as a preparatory phase for college or university. This outcome indicates the effectiveness of the school's academic program and guidance services in facilitating students' transition to tertiary education.

Conversely, 12% or 453 graduates indicated employment following SHS, aligning with the K to 12 curriculum's objective to provide students, particularly those in the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) track, with job-ready skills. This group represents the segment of SHS completers who either chose to enter the workforce immediately or lacked the financial means to continue their education. Their employment demonstrates that SHS can function as a terminal level of education facilitating economic participation.

Only 2% of graduates, or 75 individuals, transitioned into entrepreneurship. This indicates that although the curriculum advocates for entrepreneurship as a feasible option, additional measures are necessary to assist students in actualizing their business concepts. Barriers including inadequate startup capital, limited training opportunities, and insufficient mentorship may impede young graduates from pursuing this path.

Additionally, 7% of graduates, totaling 264 individuals, indicated that they are not currently engaged in education, employment, or training (NEET). This group poses a significant issue, as disengagement following secondary education can result in prolonged economic and social vulnerability. The existence of NEET youth necessitates the implementation of targeted initiatives, including re-engagement strategies, job placement services, and adaptable higher education options, to reintegrate these individuals into productive trajectories.

The findings align with those of Manlangit [4], who highlighted the significance of post-SHS monitoring in informing educational planning and career readiness initiatives. The study concluded that although the majority of SHS graduates advance to college, there remains a significant need to improve pathways for employment and entrepreneurship, as well as to implement interventions for at-risk youth.

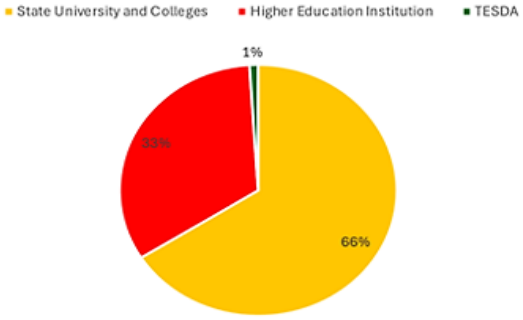

Fig.6 Distribution of graduates as to the institution enrolled or graduated

The data indicate that among the 2,981 Senior High School (SHS) graduates of Sto. Tomas Senior High School who enrolled in or completed higher education, a substantial majority—66% or 1,967 graduates—attended State Universities and Colleges (SUCs). This indicates that public higher education institutions continue to be the most accessible and favored option for graduates, primarily attributed to affordability, government subsidies, and geographical proximity. Numerous families in the Philippines, particularly from low- to middle-income backgrounds, view State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) as a viable choice owing to the decreased tuition fees established by the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (Republic Act No. 10931).

Additionally, 33% of graduates, totaling 984 individuals, enrolled in private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This figure indicates that a considerable number of students continue to choose private colleges and universities, likely due to factors such as program specialization, scholarship availability, or perceived quality. Certain private higher education institutions may provide specialized courses or more adaptable admission policies, attracting students pursuing specific career paths not offered by public institutions.

Only 1% of graduates, or 30 individuals, engaged in further education at TESDA-accredited institutions, reflecting limited participation in formal technical-vocational programs following senior high school. The SHS curriculum promotes employment or entrepreneurship following TVL tracks; however, the limited transition to TESDA institutions may indicate a preference for direct employment or insufficient awareness and access to TESDA programs.

The findings highlight the necessity of enhancing career guidance services at the senior high school level to assist learners in making informed decisions aligned with their skills, interests, and financial situations. Salazar and Ylagan indicate that post-secondary decisions are frequently shaped by factors such as affordability, proximity, and the alignment of programs with SHS strands, underscoring the necessity of early orientation and support services for effective transitions [8].

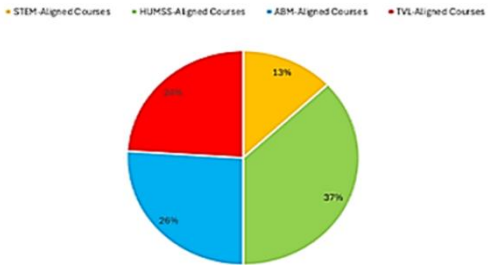

Fig. 7 Course choices in relation to Specializations

The analysis of the SHS strands completed by Sto. Tomas Senior High School graduates (Figure 4) in relation to the college course selections corresponding to those strands (Figure 7) reveals significant patterns that illustrate the connection between SHS strand choices and subsequent college pathways.

The HUMSS strand accounted for the largest share of SHS graduates at 28% (1,056) and exhibited the highest percentage of students enrolling in HUMSS-related college programs at 37% (1,103). This alignment indicates that numerous students pursued careers in education, psychology, social work, and communication. The alignment between SHS specialization and college program selection reflects effective guidance and a clear comprehension of academic objectives. Borres and Ascano assert that a strong alignment between SHS strands and college courses enhances academic adjustment and promotes long-term success in higher education [13].

Sixteen percent (604) of senior high school completers were graduates from the ABM strand, while twenty-six percent (775) opted for college courses aligned with ABM. This indicates that students from other academic strands, such as HUMSS or STEM, transitioned to business-related programs in higher education. This trend may be shaped by the perceived practicality and employment prospects in areas such as business administration, accountancy, and entrepreneurship. De Guzman and Tan observe that a significant number of Filipino students are drawn to business courses in college because of their wide-ranging applicability and potential for employment [14].

The TVL track, comprising TVL-IA, TVL-HE, and TVL-ICT, accounted for the largest proportion of SHS completers at 44% (1,661). Only 24% (715) of college attendees pursued courses aligned with TVL. This notable decline indicates that a considerable proportion of TVL students may have directly entered the workforce, opted for unrelated academic programs, or ceased formal education. This evidence aligns with the perspective that numerous TVL students perceive SHS as the final stage of formal education. Mendoza and Santos indicate that TVL students are inclined to pursue employment, driven by financial limitations and the necessity for immediate income [15].

In the same period, 12% (453) of senior high school graduates were in the STEM strand, while 13% (388) of college entrants chose STEM-related courses. This close match indicates a consistent academic trajectory while also demonstrating that STEM continues to attract a smaller segment of students. The decline in STEM enrollment may be due to the academic rigor, financial requirements of science programs, or restricted access to laboratories and specialized instruction in public senior high school environments. This aligns with the findings of Reyes and Garcia, who noted that insufficient STEM resources at the SHS level dissuade certain students from pursuing careers in science and engineering [16].

The observed trends highlight the necessity of improving career guidance and strand orientation initiatives in Senior High School to facilitate informed decision-making among students in relation to their long-term objectives. Llego highlights that effective strand-to-course alignment is crucial for

enhancing retention in higher education and attaining improved educational and career outcomes [17].

Policy Recommendation on the Implementation of the Senior High School Curriculum

Based on the results of the study, it is recommended that the Department of Education, in coordination with schools offering Senior High School (SHS), implement enhanced and responsive strategies to strengthen strand-to-course alignment, support diverse post-SHS pathways, and address the gaps in learner transitions. The following policy actions are recommended:

1. *Strengthen Career Guidance and Strand Selection Programs*

Schools may establish a standardized career guidance program starting in Grade 9 to assist students in making informed decisions regarding their selection of SHS strands. This will facilitate a more accurate alignment between students' interests, aptitudes, and prospective career or academic trajectories, thereby reducing strand misalignment in college or post-secondary school plans. Strand orientation should engage parents and be grounded in labor market trends and higher education opportunities.

2. *Intensify Industry and Higher Education Linkages*

Enhance trifocalization among DepEd, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), TESDA, and local industries to ensure alignment of the SHS curriculum content, work immersion experiences, and technical skills with post-secondary requirements. Improved connections will better equip SHS graduates for higher education and the workforce, especially for those in the TVL track.

3. *Expand Access to Post-SHS Opportunities for TVL Graduates*

Many TVL graduates do not pursue higher education; therefore, schools could collaborate with TESDA and LGUs to offer scholarship programs, enterprise incubation, and alternative training initiatives. Enhancing TESDA participation and fostering entrepreneurial involvement will optimize the SHS program's objective of producing graduates who are prepared for employment or entrepreneurship.

4. *Institutionalize Post-Graduate Monitoring Systems*

Schools may implement a systematic tracer study mechanism to annually assess the post-SHS outcomes of graduates. The data will offer essential insights into curriculum effectiveness, employment trends, and the relevance of strand offerings, enabling school leaders to adjust their programs and interventions according to actual learner trajectories.

5. *Reinforce STEM and ICT Strand Support*

The SHS program may invest in modern laboratories, updated teaching resources, and training for STEM and ICT teachers to encourage more students to pursue high-demand fields in science, technology, and innovation. Improved support will boost enrollment and success in these areas, thereby contributing to national development objectives in science and technology.

VI CONCLUSION

The tracer study findings indicate that the majority of graduates from Sto. Tomas Senior High School during the academic years 2017–2018 to 2024–2025 have effectively transitioned to higher education, with numerous students enrolling in courses that correspond to their SHS strands. Gaps in strand-to-course alignment, low engagement in entrepreneurship and TESDA programs, and the existence of NEET graduates underscore the necessity for enhanced guidance, support systems, and industry partnerships. The findings highlight the necessity of ongoing improvements in the implementation of the Senior High School curriculum to adequately prepare students for various academic, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings suggest several actions to enhance the implementation of the Senior High School (SHS) curriculum and improve post-graduation outcomes for learners. Schools can improve career guidance and strand orientation programs beginning in Grade 9. This will assist students in making informed decisions regarding their SHS strand, ensuring alignment between their interests, abilities, and long-term goals with suitable academic or vocational pathways.

Additionally, schools may consistently assess strand-to-course alignment to confirm that SHS graduates are entering college programs or careers aligned with their specialization. This information can facilitate curriculum development and inform enhancements in instruction and support services. Enhancing collaborations with State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), TESDA, and local industries can facilitate pertinent work immersion experiences, training programs, and smooth transitions to post-SHS opportunities, particularly for TVL students.

Furthermore, educational institutions may offer specialized technical-vocational training and entrepreneurship development programs to motivate TVL graduates to engage in business ventures or

skills-oriented careers. Access to TESDA certifications, livelihood programs, and support for small enterprises may enhance the effectiveness of the TVL track. Increased investments in facilities and teacher training for STEM and ICT could motivate more students to enter these high-demand and high-potential career fields.

Schools and divisions may institutionalize annual tracer studies to monitor graduate outcomes consistently. These findings could inform subsequent interventions and strategic planning. Prioritizing early identification and support for at-risk learners who are not engaged in education, employment, or training (NEET) can be achieved through life skills programs, counseling, and connections to scholarship or job placement opportunities. The SHS program may enhance the preparedness of Filipino learners for higher education, employment, or entrepreneurship through these responsive actions.

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