

Research Article

Career Preparedness of Catholic High School Students in Western Visayas: A Basis for Career Development Program

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Abstract

Career preparedness is a set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes that enable students to achieve their career aspirations. Students who engage in career preparedness tend to have higher career adaptability. Hence, this study assessed career preparedness in the areas of knowledge and skills, motivational resources, environmental resources, and career management behaviors among students in a Catholic high school. Additionally, it examined the significant differences in career preparedness among students when grouped by their demographics. It employed a descriptive-comparative design. It consists of 297 randomly sampled students. Also, it utilized a 36-item standardized questionnaire on career resources. In data analysis, mean, standard deviations, the Mann-Whitney U test, and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used. Generally, it revealed that students have strong motivational, environmental, and career management behavior resources, yet a moderate level in other areas. In terms of demographics, grade level, and monthly family income were found to have significant differences. These highlight that high school students are motivated and supported in their career aspirations; however, they lack the practical knowledge on how to realize them. Hence, the study emphasizes the role of the guidance office in scaffolding a well-defined and actionable career path to achieve optimal career development. Lastly, the findings imply the need for structured career guidance to support the students.

Keywords

Career Preparedness, Career Development Program, Career Guidance, Catholic High School, Western Visayas

1. Introduction

Career preparedness is a set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes that enable students to assess their own strengths and weaknesses in order to achieve their career aspirations. Career preparedness involves self-exploration and recognition of one's responsibilities, limitations, and opportunities [1]. In fact, studies indicate that students who proactively engage in career preparedness have higher career adaptability [2]. Moreover, the fast-paced and unstable global market environment compels students to prioritize this read-

iness within an evolving landscape [3].

In response, global support systems have been recalibrating to foster preparedness amidst a constantly volatile environment, rather than focusing on a stable and predictable career [3]. This demand has spurred global initiatives to equip individuals with industry-relevant competence, including the Reskilling Revolution Platform [4], the Career Readiness Project [5], and the Global Skills Programme [6].

Furthermore, the Philippines established the National

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Received: 11 November 2025; **Accepted:** 26 November 2025; **Published:** 20 December 2025



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Secondary School Guidance and Counseling Program (CGCP) to institutionalize career guidance and counseling programs in the educational sector [7]. It mandates programs, such as homeroom guidance, career counseling or coaching, and work immersion, to empower students with the competence to make informed career decisions [8, 9].

Despite these initiatives, unpreparedness persists as the exponential rise of automation, artificial intelligence, and the gig economy has destabilized labor market structures [3, 10]. This rapid technological shift has shortened the lifespan of technical skills, often outstripping the institutions' capabilities to deliver relevant and timely support to the students [11-13]. In the Philippines, it is a persistent and systemic concern [14, 15]. The discontinuity between academic curricula and the labor market is often seen as a barrier [11, 16]. This discontinuity suggests that, while enrollment is high, the curriculum remains static, whereas the labor market is dynamic, leaving students inadequately prepared in adaptive, socioemotional, and relevant technical skills [17, 18]. This lack of readiness drives career insecurity that impedes individual and national economic growth [19].

1.1. Research Problem

College and career preparedness have been integrated into the high school curricula and programs [12]. In Catholic high schools, this formation instills vocational discernment, helping students discover their values, gifts, sense of purpose, and mission [20]. It requires continuous guidance for the students. However, zooming in on institutional practice, local Catholic institutions rely heavily on episodic and one-size-fits-all career interventions and programs, such as career days. While this program is memorable, it compromises sustained guided support [21]. Dependence on interventions and the need for a sustained career guidance program highlight the gap in practice.

To address this gap, this study aimed to assess students' career preparedness in terms of knowledge and skills, motivation resources, environmental resources, and career management behavior in a Catholic high school in Western Visayas during the school year 2025 – 2026. It also aimed to identify significant differences in career preparedness among students grouped by their demographics. The study's findings may serve as an empirical basis for developing a career development manual tailored to the career needs of high school students.

1.2. Research Framework

This paper theorized that the level of career preparedness of Catholic high school students varies based on their sex, grade level, family background, and monthly income. This assumption was grounded in the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by Lent et al. [22], which posits that career development varies based on personal beliefs, behavior, and

environment. Hence, this theory highlights the influence of background factors in shaping career preparedness. These beliefs drive students' career choices, including self-efficacy and outcome expectations. In the context of this study, this theory pertains to career preparedness among high school students, measured through knowledge and skills, motivational resources, and environmental resources. These cognitive and social processes are measured in career management behavior. However, their career preparedness varies in relation to the interacting background factors, as manifested in their sex, grade level, family background, and monthly income. Hence, exploring career preparedness using this theory could offer additional lenses for analyzing the problem.

1.3. Research Limitations

This research acknowledges several limitations. Primarily, the study is limited to a single-site Catholic high school in Western Visayas, as well as the demographic used in the study. This geographical constraint may affect the generalization of the findings from the public schools, non-sectarian private schools, or schools from different regions. It relies heavily on self-report measures that might over- or underestimate students' competence. Additionally, the use of quantitative methods may compromise the stories of students, parents, and teachers in fostering career preparedness. Hence, further studies are encouraged to employ a qualitative design, incorporate additional demographic variables, utilize a standardized instrument, and apply different theories to validate the claims of this study.

2. Materials and Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research design, specifically a descriptive-comparative approach. The chosen methodology statistically measures a set of variables to answer the theory-guided research questions or problems and hypotheses [23, 24]. Specifically, the descriptive approach assessed students' level of career preparedness in the areas of knowledge and skills, motivational resources, environmental resources, and career management behavior. Meanwhile, the comparative approach examined the differences in career preparedness levels when students were grouped by their demographics.

2.2. Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation from different grade levels within the Catholic high school in Western Visayas. This process enables a comprehensive understanding of the career preparedness at different grade levels. The sample size was determined using the Raosoft Online Calculator, with a 95% confidence level

and a 5% margin of error. Based on the total population size of 1,292 high school students and the desired confidence level, a final sample size of 297 high school students was yielded. The respondents were selected using the fishbowl technique.

2.3. Research Instrument

To assess the level of career preparedness among high school students, a 36-item standardized Career Resource Questionnaire – Adolescent Version (CRQ-A) was used. It assessed four broad constructs, namely, knowledge and skills, motivational resources, environmental resources, and career management behavior. The instrument was validated through factor structure using two samples and correlated with other standardized constructs. It provided a good fit criterion to assess the indicators of career [25]. Meanwhile, the fitness of the items to the Filipino context was conducted with 30 non-actual respondents and yielded a reliable Cronbach's alpha score of 0.82.

Additionally, the instrument contained two sections. The first section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including sex, grade level, family background, and monthly income. The second section evaluates the level of career preparedness among high school students. The study employed a 5-point Likert scale format, with responses ranging from "not true at all" (1) to "completely true" (5). The items were spread across knowledge and skills, environmental resources, motivational resources, and career management behavior.

2.4. Data Gathering Procedure

Phase 1. The researchers ensured approval from the College president to conduct the study. The data collection was endorsed and authorized by the principal of the high school department. The researchers also supported the authorization of the class advisers of the high school department.

Phase 2. Before administering the instrument, respondents were asked to complete a parental assent form and an informed consent form. They were informed about the nature, purpose, scope, potential benefits and risks, confidentiality, and their rights to withdraw.

Phase 3. Afterward, the collected data underwent tabulation and were subjected to statistical analysis using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) under the guidance of the statistician. The researchers ensured that the data was securely stored and kept confidential.

2.5. Data Analysis

Descriptive and comparative analyses were utilized. A descriptive analysis was employed to determine the students' level of career preparedness, using the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). Meanwhile, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to determine the normality of the variable. It revealed that knowledge and skills ($W = 0.989$, $p = 0.023$), motivational

resources ($W = 0.964$, $p = 0.000$), environmental resources ($W = 0.985$, $p = 0.003$), and career management behaviors ($W = 0.987$, $p = 0.008$) deviate from a normal distribution. Hence, the Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis H test were used to examine the significant differences in career preparedness levels among high school students grouped by their demographics.

2.6. Ethical Consideration

This study adhered to the guidelines of the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB). It addressed the general principles of respect for persons, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice to ensure the study's ethical soundness. Specifically, it addressed the respondents' vulnerability, anonymity, and confidentiality of the data.

3. Results

3.1. Career Preparedness of High School Students

Table 1 presents the level of students' career preparedness in terms of knowledge and skills, motivational resources, environmental resources, and career management behaviors among high school students.

Overall, the respondents demonstrated a moderate level of preparedness in terms of knowledge and skills ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.67$). Male students ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.68$) demonstrated a moderate level, while female students ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 0.66$) also reflected a moderate level. Across grade levels, Grade 7 students ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.68$) had a moderate level, while Grade 8 students ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.66$) had the lowest level, which was also moderate. In terms of family background, students from single-parent families ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.57$) and those from nuclear families ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.67$) both exhibited moderate levels of support. Students from grand-parent families ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.73$) also demonstrated a moderate level of knowledge and skills. When grouped by monthly income, the highest mean was observed among those earning ₱118,350–₱157,800 ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.80$), interpreted as a moderate level. Similarly, those earning less than ₱7,890 ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.82$) also reflected a moderate level. These results indicate that students possess a sufficient but not extensive understanding and application of career-related knowledge and skills.

For motivational resources, the respondents as a whole demonstrated a high level ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.76$). Male students ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.73$) and female students ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.79$) both exhibited high motivational resources. By grade level, Grade 11 students ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.72$) demonstrated a high level, while Grade 8 students ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.76$) showed a moderate level. Across family backgrounds, all groups demonstrated high motivational resources,

with single-parent families ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.54$) reflecting the highest level. In terms of monthly income, students with family earnings between ₱15,780 and ₱31,560 ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.72$) showed a high level, while those earning less than ₱7,890 ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.83$) showed a moderate level. These results suggest that most students are motivated and possess strong personal drive and commitment to preparing for their careers.

In terms of environmental resources, the respondents displayed a high level ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.69$). Both male ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.66$) and female ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.71$) students reflected high levels. Across grade levels, Grade 7 students ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.64$) demonstrated the highest scores and

were interpreted as high, while Grade 8 students ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.62$) had the lowest scores and were interpreted as moderate. Based on family background, all groups revealed high levels of environmental resources, with extended families ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.73$) showing the highest levels. Across monthly income, students from families earning ₱31,560–₱78,900 ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.64$) exhibited a high level, while those earning ₱118,350–₱157,800 ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.78$) reflected a moderate level. These findings imply that students benefit from strong environmental support from their families, schools, and communities that encourages career preparedness.

Table 1. Level of Students' Career Preparedness in Terms of Knowledge and Skills, Motivational Resources, Environmental Resources, and Career Management Behaviors Among High School Students.

Variable	Knowledge and Skills			Motivational Resource			Environment Resource			Career Management Behavior		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Sex												
Male	3.17	0.68	Mo	3.78	0.73	Hi	3.63	0.66	Hi	3.38	0.67	Mo
Female	3.06	0.66	Mo	3.70	0.79	Hi	3.63	0.71	Hi	3.51	0.79	Hi
Grade Level												
Grade 7	3.30	0.68	Mo	3.87	0.63	Hi	3.91	0.64	Hi	3.60	0.66	Hi
Grade 8	2.84	0.66	Mo	3.36	0.76	Mo	3.27	0.62	Mo	3.08	0.72	Mo
Grade 9	3.19	0.83	Mo	3.82	0.70	Hi	3.63	0.70	Hi	3.59	0.81	Hi
Grade 10	2.99	0.54	Mo	3.61	0.89	Hi	3.48	0.68	Hi	3.21	0.71	Mo
Grade 11	3.17	0.62	Mo	3.96	0.72	Hi	3.78	0.66	Hi	3.57	0.71	Hi
Grade 12	3.13	0.64	Mo	3.67	0.76	Hi	3.63	0.70	Hi	3.52	0.73	Hi
Family Background												
Nuclear Family	3.11	0.67	Mo	3.69	0.81	Hi	3.57	0.70	Hi	3.37	0.78	Mo
Single Parent	3.17	0.57	Mo	3.84	0.54	Hi	3.73	0.62	Hi	3.61	0.63	Hi
Extended Family	3.14	0.72	Mo	3.81	0.77	Hi	3.77	0.73	Hi	3.63	0.71	Hi
Grandparent Family	3.02	0.73	Mo	3.77	0.68	Hi	3.71	0.64	Hi	3.44	0.61	Hi
Monthly Income												
Less than ₱7,890	2.84	0.82	Mo	3.38	0.83	Mo	3.54	0.79	Hi	3.05	0.84	Mo
₱7,890 – ₱15,780	2.92	0.69	Mo	3.52	0.70	Hi	3.59	0.65	Hi	3.34	0.63	Mo
₱15,780 – ₱31,560	3.28	0.68	Mo	3.87	0.72	Hi	3.67	0.67	Hi	3.65	0.77	Hi
₱31,560 – ₱78,900	3.12	0.56	Mo	3.81	0.70	Hi	3.75	0.64	Hi	3.52	0.61	Hi
₱78,900 – ₱111,350	3.10	0.55	Mo	3.72	0.75	Hi	3.55	0.70	Hi	3.35	0.66	Mo
₱118,350 – ₱157,800	3.35	0.80	Mo	3.82	1.00	Hi	3.27	0.78	Mo	3.29	1.06	Mo
Above ₱157,800	3.02	0.66	Mo	3.83	0.97	Hi	3.60	0.85	Hi	3.34	0.88	Mo
Whole	3.11	0.67	Mo	3.74	0.76	Hi	3.63	0.69	Hi	3.45	0.74	Hi

Variable	Knowledge and Skills			Motivational Resource			Environment Resource			Career Management Behavior		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int

Mean Range: 1.00-1.80=Very Low (VL), 1.81-2.60=Low (Lo), 2.61-3.40=Moderate (Mo), 3.41-4.20=High (Hi), 4.21-5.00=Very High (VH)

Regarding career management behavior, the overall level was high ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.74$). Female students ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.79$) exhibited a high level, while male students ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.67$) displayed a moderate level. Among grade levels, Grade 9 students ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.81$) showed the highest mean, indicating a high level, while Grade 8 students ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.72$) showed the lowest mean and were interpreted as having a moderate level. When grouped by family background, students from extended families ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.71$) demonstrated a high level, while those from nuclear families ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.78$) showed a moderate level. In terms of monthly income, students with family earnings between ₱15,780 and ₱31,560 ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.77$) had the highest mean, reflecting a high level, while those

earning less than ₱7,890 ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.84$) reflected a moderate level. These findings indicate that students generally exhibit effective career management behaviors, although some groups may require additional support to enhance consistency.

3.2. Differences in Career Preparedness of High School Students

Table 2 revealed no significant difference in knowledge and skills [$U=10071.500$, $p=0.228$], motivational resources [$U=10424.000$, $p=0.467$], environmental resources [$U=10835.500$, $p=0.866$], and career management behaviors [$U=9701.000$, $p=0.088$] between male and female students.

Table 2. Differences in the Level of Students' Career Preparedness in Terms of Knowledge and Skills, Motivational Resources, Environmental Resources, and Career Management Behavior among High School Students according to sex.

Variable	U	z	p
Knowledge and Skills	10071.500	-1.206	0.228
Motivational Resource	10424.000	-0.727	0.467
Environment Resource	10835.500	-0.169	0.866
Career Management Behavior	9701.000	-1.709	0.088

Note: the difference in the means is significant when $p \leq 0.05$

Table 3 revealed significant differences in knowledge and skills [$H(5) = 13.207$, $p=0.022$], motivational resources [$H(5)=19.103$, $p=0.002$], environmental resources [$H(5) = 22.913$, $p=0.000$], and career management behaviors [$H(5)=18.627$, $p=0.002$] when group according to grade level.

Post hoc analysis of knowledge and skills revealed that Grade 7 students differed significantly from Grade 8 [$p = 0.003$] and Grade 10 [$p = 0.022$] students, with Grade 7 students demonstrating higher levels. Similarly, Grade 8 students showed significantly lower levels compared with Grade 9 [$p = 0.033$], Grade 11 [$p = 0.008$], and Grade 12 [$p = 0.019$], indicating that students in lower grade levels generally reported less career-related knowledge and skills.

For motivational resources, significant differences were found between Grade 7 and Grade 8 ($p = 0.003$), Grade 8 and Grade 9 ($p = 0.014$), Grade 8 and Grade 11 ($p = 0.000$), and Grade 8 and Grade 12 ($p = 0.012$). These results indicate that

students in Grades 7, 9, 11, and 12 exhibited higher motivational resources compared to those in Grade 8, who consistently showed lower motivation.

Regarding environmental resources, significant differences were observed between Grade 7 and Grade 8 [$p=0.000$], Grade 7 and Grade 9 [$p=0.030$], Grade 7 and Grade 10 [$p=0.004$], Grade 7 and Grade 12 [$p=0.039$], Grade 8 and Grade 9 [$p=0.040$], Grade 8 and Grade 11 [$p=0.000$], and Grade 8 and Grade 12 [$p=0.010$]. The results suggest that Grade 7 students experienced a more supportive environment, while Grade 8 students had the least favorable environmental resources.

As for career management behaviors, significant differences were noted between Grade 7 and Grade 8 [$p=0.003$], Grade 7 and Grade 10 [$p=0.027$], Grade 8 and Grade 9 [$p=0.004$], Grade 8 and Grade 11 [$p=0.001$], Grade 8 and Grade 12 [$p=0.004$], Grade 9 and Grade 10 [$p=0.035$], Grade

10 and Grade 11 [$p=0.011$], and Grade 10 and Grade 12 [$p=0.042$]. These results reveal that Grade 8 and Grade 10

students demonstrated significantly lower career management behaviors compared to other grade levels.

Table 3. Differences in the Level of Students' Career Preparedness in Terms of Knowledge and Skills, Motivational Resources, Environmental Resources, and Career Management Behavior among High School Students according to Grade Level.

Variable	H	df	p
Knowledge and Skills	13.207*	5	0.022
Motivational Resource	19.103*	5	0.002
Environment Resource	22.913*	5	0.000
Career Management Behavior	18.627*	5	0.002

Note: *the difference in the means is significant when $p \leq 0.05$

Table 4 revealed no significant difference among family background in knowledge and skills [$H(3) = 0.380$, $p=0.944$], motivational resources [$H(3) = 0.956$, $p = 0.812$], environmental resources [$H(3) = 3.577$, $p=0.311$], and career management behaviors [$H(3) = 6.058$, $p=0.109$]. These findings

indicate that students from nuclear, single-parent, extended, and grandparent families demonstrated comparable levels of knowledge and skills, as well as motivational and environmental resources, and career management behaviors.

Table 4. Differences in the Level of Students' Career Preparedness in Terms of Knowledge and Skills, Motivational Resources, Environmental Resources, and Career Management Behavior among High School Students according to Family Background.

Variable	H	df	p
Knowledge and Skills	0.380	3	0.944
Motivational Resource	0.956	3	0.812
Environment Resource	3.577	3	0.311
Career Management Behavior	6.058	3	0.109

Note: *the difference in the means is significant when $p \leq 0.05$

Table 5 revealed significant differences among monthly income in knowledge and skills [$H(6) = 18.182$, $p=0.006$], motivational resources [$H(6) = 16.488$, $p=0.011$], and career management behaviors [$H(6) = 17.787$, $p = 0.007$], while environmental resources [$H(6) = 6.922$, $p=0.328$] showed no significant difference. These findings indicate that the level of students' career preparedness in knowledge and skills, motivational resources, and career management behaviors varies significantly across income groups, whereas their environmental resources remain relatively comparable.

Post hoc analysis for knowledge and skills revealed significant differences between families earning less than ₱7,890 and those earning ₱15,780–₱31,560 ($p = 0.002$), ₱31,560–₱78,900 ($p = 0.035$), and ₱118,350–₱157,800 ($p = 0.030$). Students from higher-income families demonstrated higher levels of knowledge and skills compared to those from low-

er-income groups. Similarly, families earning ₱7,890–₱15,780 also differed significantly from those earning ₱15,780–₱31,560 ($p = 0.001$), ₱31,560–₱78,900 ($p = 0.048$), and ₱118,350–₱157,800 ($p = 0.050$), with the higher-income students exhibiting better preparedness.

For motivational resources, significant differences were found between families earning less than ₱7,890 and those earning ₱15,780–₱31,560 ($p = 0.006$), ₱31,560–₱78,900 ($p = 0.024$), and above ₱78,900 ($p = 0.022$). In addition, students with family income between ₱7,890–₱15,780 differed significantly from those in the ₱15,780–₱31,560 ($p=0.002$), ₱31,560–₱78,900 ($p=0.016$), and above ₱157,800 ($p=0.022$) brackets. These results indicate that higher-income groups consistently reported higher motivational resources, suggesting that financial stability positively influences students' career motivation.

Regarding career management behaviors, post hoc comparisons revealed significant differences between families earning less than ₱7,890 and those earning ₱15,780–₱31,560 ($p = 0.001$) and ₱31,560–₱78,900 ($p = 0.007$). Significant differences were also found between ₱7,890–₱15,780 and ₱15,780–₱31,560 ($p=0.004$), ₱7,890–₱15,780 and ₱31,560–

₱78,900 ($p=0.050$), and ₱15,780–₱31,560 and ₱78,900–₱111,350 ($p=0.035$). These results suggest that students from middle- to higher-income families tend to demonstrate stronger career management behaviors compared to those from lower-income brackets.

Table 5. Differences in the Level of Students' Career Preparedness in Terms of Knowledge and Skills, Motivational Resources, Environmental Resources, and Career Management Behavior among High School Students according to Monthly Income.

Variable	H	df	p
Knowledge and Skills	18.182*	6	0.006
Motivational Resource	16.488*	6	0.011
Environment Resource	6.922	6	0.328
Career Management Behavior	17.787*	6	0.007

Note: *the difference in the means is significant when $p \leq 0.05$

4. Discussions

The high levels of motivational resources, environmental resources, and career management behaviors indicate an initial career maturity among the students. These findings suggest that high school students possess clear career goals and proactively explore their career aspirations. As Luszczynska and Schwarzer [26] argue, this behavior is often fueled by self-efficacy conditioned by a supportive environment. Similarly, Kleine et al. [1] and Yap [27] believe that this proactive engagement helps students weigh and clarify their career choices.

Meanwhile, a disparity emerges that the knowledge and skills domain is in the developing stage, which pertains to the perceived vocational competence. This suggests that while students have initial career maturity, they lack the practical skills to realize their aspirations. The paradox highlights that students are psychologically ready - motivated, goal-oriented, and supported – however, they remain practically unequipped.

Hoff et al. [28] noted that students often hold optimistic career expectations when they enter higher education, which fail to align with the competitive realities of the labor market. Jia et al. [29] and Arbona et al. [30] indicate that this gap often paralyzes students, causing them to feel overwhelmed and lost. This fear of making incorrect choices in a high-stakes environment, coupled with a sense of unpreparedness, frequently leads to chronic career indecision [29, 30]. Xu and Adams [31] further caution that unresolved indecision may lead to pervasive psychological distress and career drift that spans beyond adulthood.

One factor that may contribute to the domain's moderate

rating is the limited scope of school-based intervention. This may stem from the reactive approach within the guidance office's function, which often relies on episodic intervention, such as career days. While the guidance office usually succeeded in fostering career motivation and engagement, it lacks sustained vocational competence, which could strongly influence the moderate result.

Keele et al. [32], Kim and Lee [33], and Yamamoto et al. [34] emphasize the importance of structured career guidance and the integration of career education into curricula to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills. When practical career guidance is in place, students can translate their career goals into a workable career plan.

Furthermore, an analysis of specific demographic characteristics reveals a particular challenge, particularly among grade 8 students, that may indicate a lack of active career aspirations. Several studies supported the difference in these variables and pointed to the influence of passive interaction [32]. The avenue of interaction among students influences the perceived self-concept to explore possible career goals [35].

Keele et al. [32] argue that students begin to eliminate entire career fields based on perceived career goals, influenced by gender roles, prestige, or simply a lack of exposure. Furthermore, Bettencourt et al. [36] further noted that students often fail to see the link between their classes and any real-world career. Consequently, students are left to passively set career goals without any active connection to their budding interests, skills, and values [37]. As Rogiers et al. [5] indicated, this passivity could lead to passively accepting a career path without any personal exploration or remaining lost and overwhelmed, unable to connect any interests to any goals.

Hitches et al. [38] believe that it is associated with inac-

cessible career guidance services or insufficient focus on career development. Nevertheless, this unsupported career development may lead to career disengagement. This observation raises concerns for the Grade 8 students who feel less connected to their career goals. This is particularly concerning, given the Grade 7 students' experience with high initial career maturity. The supportive environment is proactive upon students' entry; however, this support is inconsistent and wanes in subsequent grade levels.

In addition, the moderate rating in career management behavior, as assessed by students from grade 10 and those from nuclear families, indicates a reluctance to engage in proactive career exploration. This reluctance is consistent with the literature and may suggest a fear of inadequacy and fear of disappointment.

Grade 10 students feel unprepared even to begin the exploration. They lack the actionable resources from the school to know how to explore, making the task feel overwhelming [21, 27]. Students who belong to a nuclear family are reluctant to investigate because they might find something, they genuinely like that contradicts their parents' explicit or implicit expectations. Proactive exploration is risky because it might lead to conflict [39, 30].

Meanwhile, students from lower-income and affluent families report experiencing a career drift due to socioeconomic barriers. While Groves et al. [40] and Hu et al. [41] argue that financial security is strongly associated with the pursuit of career aspiration. However, it presents a unique tension across family income and student perceived career aspiration. A lack of resources blocks the lower-income student, while the affluent student is blocked by the expectations tied to their resources [40, 41].

This hurdle for the students from lower-income families redefines perceived career success as a necessity. Success is recalibrated from career aspiration to stability and security driven by resource scarcity and immediate financial needs [42, 40]. At the same time, students from affluent backgrounds struggle to reconcile the familial career expectations with their contrasting personal career aspirations. This barrier may lead to rebellion and resource constraints, or conforming and entering a high-prestige career for which they have no passion [42, 43].

Despite the differences in family income, students from varying family economic statuses received comparable affective support in navigating their career aspirations. It is supported by Fernandez et al. [42] and Simaremare et al. [44], and further indicates that it renders resilience and motivation to their career aspirations. However, it is often accompanied by scarcity that redefines the career success of students from challenging economic backgrounds. While tangible and affective resources are present to students from affluent families.

Hence, these findings indicate a need to review the delivery of support and guidance to students. It signifies a dual imperative in the guidance office. First, to invest in the initial

career maturity of students in tangible literacy to support their career opportunities. Secondly, providing targeted interventions to build well-defined, realistic, and practical actions that help students realize their career aspirations. These imperatives require a paradigm shift in the guidance office's practice.

Finally, this study hypothesized that demographics differ in career preparedness, anchored in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). The findings affirm the study's theoretical assumption regarding dynamic variables. Factors such as grade level and monthly income exhibited significant variations, confirming that personal context influences the core beliefs that drive career choices. Conversely, static variables such as sex and family background showed less variability, suggesting these factors may act as stable constants in this specific context. These insights validate the theoretical framework, demonstrating that the dynamic interaction of background factors, rather than their existence, shapes career preparedness.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study highlights the reactive nature of current interventions, which have succeeded in preparing students psychologically, motivating them, and making them goal-oriented and supported; however, they remain practically unequipped. It is also highlighted that establishing a proactive and developmental career guidance program will scaffold a well-defined, realistic, and actionable career pathway for students. This approach may entail integrating career education into the curriculum, reinforcing practical skills within daily instruction rather than solely in the guidance office. Furthermore, schools may reevaluate work immersion programs to prioritize the acquisition of tangible skills over observation and utilize data-driven Labor Market Information to align students' optimistic expectations with reality. Finally, guidance services may incorporate targeted psychological support to mitigate the decision-making anxiety and paralysis that stem from the students' perceived lack of technical preparedness.

Given the identified limitation of the study, further studies are encouraged to employ longitudinal studies to track career preparedness of students over time, a mixed-method approach to explore the qualitative reasons behind the passivity observed in the grade 8 students, or multi-site and demographic studies to validate the claim of this study as a policy basis.

Acknowledgments

The researchers would like to acknowledge and express their deepest gratitude to all those who have provided support and assistance in the preparation of this study. The Research Services Office of St. Anthony's College, and the high school students who participated, the principal, teachers, parents, and

guardians of the high school department. Lastly, the Almighty God, who gave the researchers all the support throughout the conduct of this study.

Author Contributions

Theodore Francis Odiada Calantas: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data Curation, Methodology, Writing – original draft

Daniel Sampag Fernando: Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – review & editing

Funding

This work is supported by St. Anthony's College.

Data Availability Statement

The data is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The researchers declare no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



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