



Career Aspirations, Interests, and Acquired Competencies of Technical Vocational Livelihood Learners

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Abstract: This research, entitled "Career Aspirations, Interests, and Acquired Competencies of Technical Vocational Livelihood Learners," was conducted to assess the career aspirations, vocational interests, and technical and soft skill competencies of Grade 12 TVL learners in a large secondary school in the Negros Island Region during School Year 2025-2026, utilizing the descriptive-correlational research design. A validated researcher-made questionnaire and official performance task grades were used as instruments. Results showed that most learners aspired to higher education, overall vocational interest was high, technical skills were very satisfactory, and soft skills were high. Correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between interest and technical skills, but a strong, significant positive relationship between interest and soft skills. Regression analysis confirmed soft skills as a significant predictor of interest. Taking the study's results into account, domain-specific findings demonstrate that interest alone does not guarantee technical mastery but does strongly foster soft skill development. The study proposes a Comprehensive Career Readiness and Competency Development Program integrating interest-competency mapping, differentiated entrepreneurship support, and preventive career guidance at Grade 10 to bridge aspiration-competency gaps.

Keywords: Career aspirations, vocational interest, technical skills, soft skills, TVL learners, competency, descriptive-correlational.

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Introduction

The global shift toward competency-based and career-oriented education has prompted many countries, including the Philippines, to redesign their basic education systems to better prepare young people for the demands of the workforce. In response to this imperative, Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, established the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum and introduced the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) track at the Senior High School level. Under DepEd Memorandum No. 76, s. 2016, TVL learners are prepared for four curriculum exits: higher education, middle-level skills development through TESDA, employment, and entrepreneurship. Republic Act No. 11206 further mandates career guidance counseling in all public secondary schools, recognizing that informed career decision-making, rooted in a clear

understanding of one's interests, aspirations, and capabilities, is essential to realizing the full intent of the TVL track.

Despite this policy framework, the full realization of the TVL track's goals remains a continuing challenge. While the K to 12 reforms clearly articulate what TVL graduates should be able to do and where they should be able to go, it does not guarantee that the competencies learners develop in school will align with their personal aspirations and interests. This raises a critical concern at the school level: whether Grade 12 TVL learners are developing the technical and soft skills that align with what they aspire to achieve and what they are genuinely drawn toward, and whether schools are equipped to bridge any gap between these dimensions through purposeful career guidance.

At the regional level, this concern is given further weight by Western Visayas' labor market data. In 2024, the region's labor force participation rate was 63.3%, and the employment rate was



96.2% (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2025). Yet the underemployment rate reached 12.8% in April 2024, representing over 450,000 employed persons who desired additional work hours or an extra job. In Bacolod City, industry reports note that ICT and service sector positions remain frequently unfilled despite the availability of job seekers, with approximately 20,000 unfilled job vacancies concentrated largely in the business-process outsourcing sector (Guadalquiver, 2023). These figures suggest that the skills-readiness gap is not merely a national abstraction but a concrete local reality.

This study was conducted at a large secondary school in the Division of Negros Island Region. The school was selected because it is among the largest TVL-implementing schools in the division, with substantial Grade 12 enrollment in the Home Economics and Information and Communications Technology strands, two specializations that closely mirror the local economy's dominant industries. While national policies articulate clear goals and regional data document persistent skills mismatches, there remains a notable absence of school-based evidence that simultaneously examines all three dimensions: what TVL learners aspire to, what they are drawn toward, and what they can actually demonstrate in terms of technical and soft skills. This study directly addresses that gap.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to assess the relationship between vocational interests and acquired competencies, both technical and soft skills, among Grade 12 TVL learners in a large school in the Negros Island Region for School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Identify the prevailing career aspirations of SHS learners;
2. Determine the level of interest of learners by TVL specialization and career pathway;
3. Assess the level of acquired competencies in terms of technical and soft skills;
4. Examine the relationship between the level of interest and the level of acquired competencies; and

5. Determine whether interest significantly predicts acquired competencies.
6. Based on the findings, what career guidance and development program may be proposed to effectively bridge TVL learners’ aspirations, acquired competencies, and their chosen pathway?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theories: the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) and the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (1985). SCCT posits that career interests emerge from the dynamic interaction among self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Learners develop and sustain interest in activities where they believe they can perform well and where they expect positive outcomes from their efforts. In the context of TVL learners, a learner's perceived mastery of the skills required by their specialization directly shapes how deeply they engage with and commit to their chosen strand.

SDT posits that sustained engagement in learning and the development of complex, durable skills are driven by intrinsic motivation. SDT identifies three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When these needs are met, learners engage more deeply, persist longer, and develop more sophisticated competencies. Together, SCCT and SDT provide a mutually reinforcing theoretical foundation. SCCT explains how competency beliefs sustain and reinforce vocational interest, while SDT explains how the quality of intrinsic motivation shapes the depth of skill development.

The conceptual framework begins with two entry variables: TVL specialization and career aspirations, which together set the context for understanding the level of interest as the independent variable. This variable is expected to directly influence the development of acquired competencies in technical and soft skills as the dependent variables. The study culminates in the proposed Comprehensive Career Readiness and Competency Development Program (CRCPD) as its final output, grounded in the mandate of DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2015.

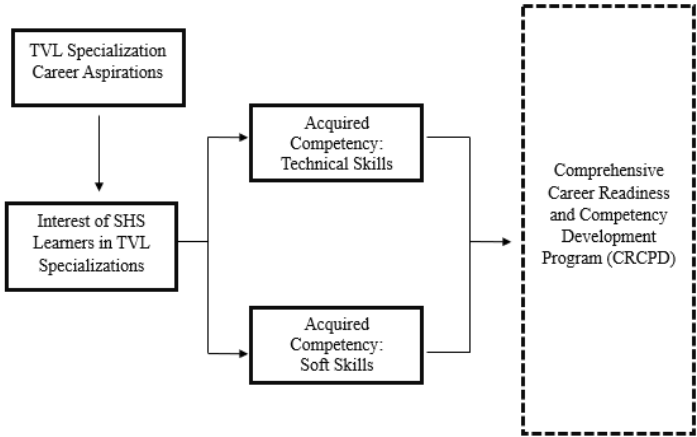


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study on Career Aspirations, Interests, and Acquired Competencies of Technical Vocational Livelihood Learners

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component characterized the prevailing career aspirations, levels of vocational interest, and levels of acquired competencies of Grade 12 TVL learners. The correlational component examined whether a statistically significant relationship exists between the level of vocational interest and the level of acquired competencies in terms of technical and soft skills, and whether interest significantly predicts those competencies.

The respondents were 89 Grade 12 TVL learners of a large secondary school in the Negros Island Region during School Year 2025–2026, drawn from the Home Economics and Information and Communications Technology specializations. Sample size was determined using G*Power analysis (effect size $f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = .05$, number of predictors = 1), ensuring sufficient statistical power to detect a medium effect size. Stratified random sampling was used to proportionally allocate respondents: 45 from Home Economics and 44 from ICT. Simple random sampling was then applied independently within each strand.

Data were collected using a validated researcher-made questionnaire consisting of three parts: (1) a demographic section capturing TVL specialization and career pathway; (2) a 10-item Vocational Interest Scale measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree); and (3) an 87-item Soft Skills Self-Assessment Questionnaire covering Communication Skills, Teamwork and Collaboration, Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking, Time Management and Organization, Professionalism

and Work Ethics, Adaptability and Flexibility, Initiative and Self-Direction, and Digital Literacy and Technology Skills. Technical skills competency was measured using official performance task grades aligned with TESDA National Competency (NC II) standards.

The instruments were validated by eight expert validators, including Licensed Guidance Counselors, a Licensed Psychometrician, Master Teachers in Home Economics and ICT, holders of doctoral degrees in ICT and Home Economics, and the Division Education Program Supervisor for TLE/TVL, using Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio. Reliability was established through Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.940$), indicating excellent internal consistency.

Data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations for descriptive purposes. Spearman's rank-order correlation (Spearman's rho) was used to examine the relationship between interest and acquired competencies, selected because preliminary Shapiro-Wilk tests confirmed non-normality of data distributions. Simple linear regression was performed to determine whether soft skills predicted interest. All analyses were conducted using JASP statistical software at the .05 level of significance.

Results and Discussions

Prevailing Career Aspirations of SHS Learners in TVL

The first problem sought to identify the post-secondary pathways that TVL learners intend to pursue after graduation. Table 1 presents the distribution of these intended pathways.

Table 1: Prevailing Career Aspirations of Senior High School Learners in Selecting TVL Specialization

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
Employment	6	6.74
Entrepreneurship	9	10.11
Higher Education	51	57.30
Vocational Training	23	25.84
<i>Total</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>100.00</i>

As shown in Table 1, a clear hierarchy of postsecondary goals emerges among the 89 respondents. Higher Education is the predominant aspiration, chosen by 51 learners (57.30%), followed by Vocational Training (23 learners, 25.84%), Entrepreneurship (9 learners, 10.11%), and Employment (6 learners, 6.74%). This pattern aligns with national tracer data showing that a large majority of SHS graduates pursue college (Manila Bulletin, 2023) and that TVL graduates frequently view their strand as a foundation for further academic study (Robles & Hebron-Ariston, 2024; Hasigan & Accad, 2025). It should be noted that the TVL

track is explicitly designed to prepare learners for all four curriculum exits, so the strong aspiration for Higher Education reflects one legitimate pathway that learners actively choose.

Level of Interest of SHS Learners in TVL Specializations

The second problem required determining how interested learners are in their TVL specialization, both overall and across different groups. Table 2 shows the mean interest scores and their interpretations.

Table 2: Level of Interest of Senior High School Learners When Taken as a Whole and Grouped According to TVL Specialization and Career Pathway

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Specialization			
ICT	4.06	0.48	High
Home Economics	3.88	0.52	High
Carrer Pathway			
Employment	4.17	0.20	High
Entrepreneurship	3.60	0.69	High
Higher Education	4.01	0.50	High
Vocational Training	3.98	0.42	High
<i>As a whole</i>	<i>3.97</i>	<i>0.50</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Note: 1.00 – 1.80 Very low, 1.81 – 2.60 Low, 2.61 – 3.40 Moderate, 3.41 – 4.20 High, and 4.21 – 5.00 Very high</i>			

Summary of Findings

The overall level of interest among TVL learners is High ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.50$), indicating that respondents collectively show strong and consistent enthusiasm for their chosen specializations. This finding is consistent with the theoretical assertion of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) that intrinsically motivated learners engage more deeply with their educational context. It also aligns with Philippine studies reporting that TVL learners who select their strand based on personal interest demonstrate high task commitment (Kilag et al., 2023; Nazareno et al., 2021).

Across specializations, the mean scores for ICT (4.06) and Home Economics (3.88) both fall within the High range, suggesting that learners across strands perceive a genuine

connection between their personal interests and the vocational skills they are developing. Among the career pathways, all subgroups registered High interest. The Entrepreneurship pathway, while still High, recorded the lowest mean (3.60) and the greatest variability ($SD = 0.69$), consistent with the interest-development literature suggesting that interest alone may not translate into a coherent career plan if learners do not perceive a direct connection between their specialization and a viable career path (Quinlan & Renninger, 2022).

Level of Acquired Competencies: Technical Skills and Soft Skills

The third problem called for assessing the competencies that TVL learners have acquired, separately for technical skills and soft skills. Table 3 displays technical skills competency, and Table 4 displays soft skills competency.

Table 3: Level of Acquired Technical Skills Competency of Senior High School Learners When Taken as a Whole and Grouped According to TVL Specialization and Career Pathway

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Specialization			
ICT	87.36	5.95	Very Satisfactory
Home Economics	89.80	4.87	Outstanding
Carrer Pathway			
Employment	90.00	6.26	Outstanding
Entrepreneurship	86.67	7.38	Very Satisfactory
Higher Education	89.33	4.79	Very Satisfactory
Vocational Training	87.35	6.08	Very Satisfactory
<i>As a whole</i>	<i>88.60</i>	<i>5.54</i>	<i>Very Satisfactory</i>
<i>Note: 89.50–100 = Outstanding, 84.50–89.49 = Very Satisfactory, 79.50–84.49 = Satisfactory, 74.50–79.49 = Fairly Satisfactory, Below 74.49 = Did Not Meet Expectations.</i>			

Overall, technical skills competency is Very Satisfactory ($M = 88.60$, $SD = 5.54$), indicating that learners have attained a commendable level of domain-specific skill mastery aligned with TESDA NC II standards. The Home Economics group recorded an Outstanding mean (89.80), while ICT scored Very Satisfactory (87.36). The Entrepreneurship subgroup showed the highest standard deviation (7.38), suggesting uneven technical skill

acquisition among learners aiming for self-employment. This variability aligns with school-based studies indicating that technical skill development is heavily mediated by structural factors such as teacher quality, resource availability, and alignment between instruction and assessment (Arban et al., 2024; Villacorta & Arnado, 2023).

Table 4: Level of Acquired Soft Skills Competency of Senior High School Learners When Taken as a Whole and Grouped According to TVL Specialization and Career Pathway

Variables	M	SD	Interpretation
Specialization			
ICT	3.88	0.56	High
Home Economics	3.79	0.64	High
Carrer Pathway			
Employment	3.96	0.55	High
Entrepreneurship	3.60	0.67	High
Higher Education	3.88	0.62	High
Vocational Training	3.81	0.56	High
<i>As a whole</i>	<i>3.84</i>	<i>0.60</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Note: 1.00 – 1.80 Very low, 1.81 – 2.60 Low, 2.61 – 3.40 Moderate, 3.41 – 4.20 High, and 4.21 – 5.00 Very high</i>			

The overall soft skills competency is High ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.60$), suggesting that learners collectively perceive themselves as proficient in essential interpersonal and professional competencies such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability. The DepEd 21st Century Skills Framework (DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019) emphasizes the integration of these competencies across all TVL domains, which may partly explain the uniformly high perceptions. The Entrepreneurship pathway displayed the lowest mean (3.60) and the highest variability ($SD = 0.67$), mirroring the pattern seen

in technical skills, suggesting that the entrepreneurial subgroup faces challenges in consistently developing both technical and soft skills.

Relationship Between the Level of Interest and the Level of Acquired Competencies

The fourth problem examined whether there is a significant relationship between interest and acquired competencies. Table 5 presents the Spearman's rho correlation results.

Table 5: Spearman's Rho Correlation Results on the Relationship between the Level of Interest and the Level of Acquired Competencies of Senior High School Learners

Variables	df	r_s	p
Level of Interest vs Technical Skills	87	0.073	0.494
Level of Interest vs Soft Skills	87	0.802	<.001

Note: $p < 0.05$

No significant correlation was found between level of interest and technical skills ($r_s = .073$, $p = .494$). This result suggests that vocational interest and technical performance operate largely independently within this sample. Although the theoretical frameworks of SCCT and SDT propose a positive link between interest and competency, empirical studies have shown that this relationship is not automatic. Arban et al. (2024) and Villacorta and Arnado (2023) documented that technical skill acquisition is heavily mediated by structural and institutional factors such as teacher quality, access to equipment, and curriculum alignment, which may override any direct effect of learner motivation.

A strong, statistically significant positive correlation emerged between interest level and soft skills ($r_s = .802$, $p < .001$). This finding aligns with SDT's assertion that intrinsic motivation

drives the autonomous, sustained engagement that fosters the development of interpersonal and professional skills. Learners who are more interested in their strand are likely to participate more actively, collaborate more effectively, and communicate more confidently, behaviors that are directly reflected in the soft skills assessment. The result is consistent with Carada et al. (2022), who found that self-assessed soft skills were strongly linked to learner engagement.

Predictive Value of Soft Skills on Learners' Level of Interest

Given the significant correlation between interest and soft skills, a simple linear regression was performed to determine whether learners' level of acquired soft skills could predict their level of interest. Table 6 displays the model summary and coefficients.

Table 6: Predictor of Learners' Level of Interest

Model	R	R ²	F	df	p
	0.800	0.640	154.80	1, 87	<.001
	B	SE	β	t	p
(Intercept)	1.4	0.209		6.698	<.001
Soft Skill Self-Assessment	0.67	0.054	0.8	12.442	<.001

Note. $R^2 = .640$; $**p < .001$

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 87) = 154.80$, $p < .001$, with soft skills accounting for 64.0% of the variance in learners' interest ($R^2 = .640$). For every one-unit increase in self-assessed soft skills, interest increased by 0.67 units ($B = 0.67$, $\beta = .80$, $p < .001$). This substantial effect size confirms soft skills as a strong, positive predictor of vocational interest among Grade 12 TVL learners and is consistent with SCCT's proposition that competency beliefs reinforce interest formation (Lent et al., 1994). The finding that soft skills predict interest suggests a reciprocal relationship: learners who perceive themselves as competent communicators and collaborators are more likely to sustain and deepen their vocational interest.

Summary of Findings

This descriptive-correlational study assessed the career aspirations, levels of vocational interest, and levels of acquired competencies of 89 Grade 12 TVL learners in a large secondary school in the Negros Island Region during School Year 2025–2026. The salient findings are as follows:

1. Higher Education was the most frequently chosen postsecondary pathway (57.30%), followed by Vocational Training (25.84%), Entrepreneurship (10.11%), and Employment (6.74%), confirming that TVL learners exercise the flexibility built into the K to 12 program.
2. The overall level of vocational interest was High ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.50$) across all subgroups by TVL specialization and career pathway. Both ICT ($M = 4.06$) and Home Economics ($M = 3.88$) fell within the High range. Among career pathways, Employment recorded the highest mean ($M = 4.17$) while Entrepreneurship had the lowest ($M = 3.60$) with the greatest variability ($SD = 0.69$).
3. The overall technical skills competency was Very Satisfactory ($M = 88.60$, $SD = 5.54$). Home Economics learners achieved an Outstanding ($M = 89.80$), while ICT learners achieved a Very Satisfactory ($M = 87.36$). The Entrepreneurship subgroup showed the greatest variability ($SD = 7.38$), suggesting uneven acquisition of technical skills.
4. The overall soft skills competency was High ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.60$), with all subgroups falling within the High range. The Entrepreneurship subgroup again recorded the lowest mean ($M = 3.60$) and the greatest variability ($SD = 0.67$), mirroring the pattern observed in technical skills.

5. Spearman's correlation showed no significant relationship between interest and technical skills ($r_s = .073$, $p = .494$), but a strong, statistically significant positive correlation between interest and soft skills ($r_s = .802$, $p < .001$).
6. Simple linear regression confirmed that soft skills significantly predicted interest ($R^2 = .640$, $F(1, 87) = 154.80$, $p < .001$). For every one-unit increase in self-assessed soft skills, interest increased by 0.67 units ($B = 0.67$, $\beta = .80$, $p < .001$), accounting for 64.0% of the variance in learners' level of interest.

Conclusions

The analysis of the data obtained from this study revealed the following findings:

1. Career aspirations of TVL learners predominantly point toward higher education but span all four curriculum exits, reflecting intentional pathway choices aligned with their long-term goals.
2. Vocational interest is genuinely high across all specializations and career pathways, indicating personal investment in their chosen strand.
3. Technical skills are at a commendable level, though greater variability in the Entrepreneurship subgroup signals the need for more targeted instructional support.
4. Soft skills are consistently strong across all specializations and career pathways, indicating an effective learning environment for the development of interpersonal and professional competencies.
5. Vocational interest is significantly related to soft skills but not to technical skills; technical mastery depends more on instructional quality and structured practice than on interest alone.
6. Soft skills significantly predict vocational interest, underscoring the value of embedding explicit soft skills instruction within the TVL curriculum.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following are hereby recommended:

1. School heads and administrators should institutionalize interest-competency mapping and allocate bridging resources, with priority support for the Entrepreneurship subgroup.

2. Guidance counselors should shift from interest-only inventories to competency-integrated pathway planning, using the CRCDP as a ready-to-use framework.
3. TVL teachers should combine scaffolded technical instruction with explicit soft skills teaching, with differentiated support for the Entrepreneurship subgroup.
4. The Department of Education should integrate competency-based interest profiling into career assessments, such as the NCAE, and strengthen Grade 9–10 career orientation to prevent misalignment between aspiration tracks.
5. TESDA should review NC II alignment with school performance outcomes and expand certification access for Senior High School completers.
6. Future researchers should replicate this study across regions and TVL strands, use multi-rater competency measures, include additional predictors such as grit and self-efficacy, and conduct longitudinal tracking of CRCDP participants.
7. The Comprehensive Career Readiness and Competency Development Program (CRCDP) is proposed, comprising four components: Career Reality Orientation, Competency Gap Analysis and Bridging, Grit and Growth Mindset Development, and Preventive Track Selection Guidance at Grade 10, grounded in RA 11206, DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2015, and DepEd Order No. 55, s. 2016.

The Comprehensive Career Readiness and Competency Development Program (CRCDP)

Based on the findings, the Comprehensive Career Readiness and Competency Development Program is proposed. The program is grounded in Republic Act No. 11206 (Secondary School Career Guidance and Counseling Act), DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2015 (Senior High School Career Guidance Program), and DepEd Order No. 55, s. 2016 (K to 12 Assessment Framework).

Program Objectives

1. Provide Grade 12 TVL learners with accurate, evidence-based information on all four post-secondary pathways.
2. Generate a personal Interest-Competency Profile for each learner.
3. Deliver targeted bridging and remediation activities addressing identified competency gaps.
4. Develop learners' non-academic success factors (grit, self-regulation, growth mindset).
5. Implement preventive, NCAE-based career guidance for Grade 10 learners.

Program Components

Component 1: Career Reality Orientation. Structured sessions presenting accurate information on all four post-secondary pathways, including TESDA NC II briefings, college admission requirements, labor market panels, and alumni career talks.

Component 2: Competency Gap Analysis and Bridging. Each learner receives a personal Interest-Competency Profile. Learners below Very Satisfactory receive remediation workshops. The Entrepreneurship subgroup receives targeted Financial Literacy and Business Planning Seminars, enterprise simulations, and TESDA NC II mock assessments.

Component 3: Grit, Self-Regulation, and Growth Mindset Development. Workshops on growth mindset, perseverance, time management, goal setting, and peer mentoring to bridge the gap between interest and sustained competency development.

Component 4: Preventive Track Selection Guidance (Grade 10). Implemented during the 4th Quarter of Grade 10 using NCAE results for interest and aptitude profiling, TVL Track Immersion Sessions, individual pathway advising conferences, and a Parents' Career Orientation Forum.

Implementation Schedule

CRCDP is designed for staggered implementation across two school years, beginning at Grade 10 and continuing through Grade 12. Component 4 is implemented during the 4th Quarter of Grade 10. Components 1, 2, and 3 are delivered sequentially during the first two quarters of Grade 12. The Guidance Counselor serves as the overall program coordinator, with TVL subject teachers and the Master Teacher serving as co-facilitators.

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