

WHO WANTS TO TEACH SPECIAL NEEDS? AN ANALYSIS OF FILIPINO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' CAREER INTENTIONS

Therese June V. Aranas

University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines

Email: therese.aranas@ustp.edu.ph

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ABSTRACT. *This study examined factors influencing senior high school students' interest in pursuing the Bachelor of Science in Special Needs Education program. It aimed to generate evidence that could inform effective recruitment strategies and help address the shortage of special education teachers in the country. Inspired by the Social Cognitive Career Theory, the study employed a cross-sectional correlational design to examine how gender, specialization track, personal experience with disability, and perceptions of special needs education career pathways were associated with the interest levels of 796 senior high school students. Findings revealed a predominance of neutral interest regardless of gender. However, students from the Humanities and Social Sciences strand and General Academic strand demonstrated higher interest levels than students from other tracks, while those with personal disability experience exhibited greater interest than those without such experience. Regression analyses further showed that perceived career pathways were paradoxically associated with interest in the program, suggesting the influence of additional contextual and motivational factors on students' career interests.*

Keywords: special education teacher, career interest, social cognitive career theory, Bachelor of Special Needs Education

INTRODUCTION

Available qualitative studies and professional reports indicate that Filipino special education teachers are seeking employment opportunities abroad, particularly the United States of America or USA[1]. Current migration of teachers to that country has been driven by a shortage, which authors attribute to several factors [2]-[6]. Consequently, this growing demand for highly qualified teachers has caused increasing migration of Filipino special education teachers to the USA over the years [1]. Although such migration has provided better economic opportunities for Filipino special education (SpEd) teachers and their families, it has also contributed to a shortage of SpEd teachers in the Philippines. This potentially affects the implementation of special education laws in the country, which leaves students with disabilities or special needs underserved.

Republic Act 7277, also known as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, ensures equal access to education, employment, health care, rehabilitation, and participation in society by prohibiting discrimination and requiring appropriate support services and accommodations to persons with disabilities [7]. Republic Act No. 11650 or the Inclusive Education Act institutionalizes a system of inclusive education in the Philippines by ensuring that learners with disabilities have equitable access to quality education in regular schools through appropriate support services, reasonable accommodations, and learner-centered instruction [8]. The educational services envisioned in these laws may not be realized because of the insufficient number of trained teachers.

Although there have been studies examining the implementation of special education in the Philippines, empirical research on the factors motivating high school students to enroll in the Bachelor of Special Needs Education (BSNED) program remains limited. Previous studies identified motivational factors such as passion for teaching children with disabilities, role models, inspiration from family members with disabilities, the use of unique skills, economic benefits, and opportunities to work abroad [9]-[11]. Some studies also demonstrated

that SpEd pre-service teachers pursued BSNED for both altruistic and economic reasons and were therefore responsive to altruistic messaging and the promise of attractive compensation.

Increasing enrollment in BSNED programs is a pivotal strategy for addressing the shortage of SpEd teachers. However, effective recruitment requires an understanding of the factors that influence or motivate students to choose the BSNED program, as such understanding guides the development of targeted recruitment strategies. Findings from similar studies conducted in other countries and regions of the Philippines may not accurately reflect the local context. Thus, examining the unique local setting was necessary to develop an evidence-based marketing framework that offers a sustainable and localized solution to the shortage problem while ensuring a steady stream of prospective SpEd teachers committed to completing the academic program.

To address this gap, the present study applied the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) framework, developed by Lent, Brown and Hackett [12], to examine how specific factors predict or correlate with students' interest in pursuing the BSNED undergraduate program. A comprehensive framework that evolved from Bandura's social cognitive theory, the SCCT expands the concepts of self-efficacy and outcome expectations, weaving additional contextual and personal factors to understand career choice. Central to Bandura's theory is self-efficacy, which functions as a primary motivational mechanism that influences individuals' choices, persistence, performance, and resilience across academic, professional, and other life domains [13].

SCCT posits that career choice is influenced by factors such as interest development, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, contextual influences, and choice goals [14]. Interest develops when individuals possess strong self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations. This interest subsequently shapes choice goals, which are further influenced by contextual and environmental supports. In the context of BSNED, students may develop interest through familiarity with and empathy toward persons with

disabilities arising from prior experiences. Socialized beliefs regarding caregiving roles, together with competencies acquired from academic tracks, may likewise enhance self-efficacy related to special needs education. Moreover, positive outcome expectations associated with prospective career opportunities may strengthen students' interest.

Multiple studies have validated SCCT as an effective framework for understanding career choice processes. For example, research on early intervention teachers' career decision-making confirmed the applicability of SCCT in analyzing career choices within special needs education [15]. Additionally, another study employing the SCCT framework provided insights into the complexity of entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduate business students [16].

Guided by the SCCT, the study posits that interest in enrollment in the Bachelor of Special Needs Education (BSNED) program is shaped by personal characteristics, learning experiences, and career-related cognitions. Gender, as a personal input, and learning experiences, such as students' high school academic track /strand, and prior interactions with persons with disabilities, form the context in which students develop perceptions of the profession. These experiences influence outcome expectations, which are reflected in students' perceptions of the career path in special education. These outcome expectations subsequently shape students' career interests, as demonstrated by their intention to enroll in the BSNED program. SCCT therefore suggests that students are more likely to pursue BSNED when their personal attributes and educational experiences promote positive expectations regarding a career in special needs education, thereby increasing their interest in the program.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design with correlational components to examine the factors influencing senior high school students' interest in pursuing BSNED. The cross-sectional design was appropriate because it enabled the examination of relationships among variables within a defined population at a single point in time. The correlational component further facilitated the analysis of associations between students' interest and selected demographic, experiential, and perceptual factors.

Specifically, the study investigated differences in students' interest in the BSNED program across gender, high school track, personal experiences, and perceived career paths. The quantitative approach enabled the collection of numerical data suitable for statistical analysis, allowing the identification of patterns and relationships that could inform the development of targeted program recruitment strategies.

Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire based on the study's conceptual framework anchored on SCCT. The questionnaire measured independent variables: gender, high school academic track and strand, experience with disability, and perception of the special education career path, as well as

the dependent variable, interest in enrolling in the BSNED program. Gender, academic track and strand, and experience with disability were obtained through profile questions. Perceptions of the career path were measured using a multiple-response questionnaire item, where respondents were asked to select all career options they were considering or perceiving as possible after finishing the BSNED program. Interest in pursuing the BSNED program was assessed using a five-category ordinal response scale.

Participants and Sampling

The study targeted Grade 12 senior high school students because they were at a critical stage of making decisions regarding tertiary education. A total of 796 senior high school students from four high-enrollment national high schools in the southern Philippines participated as respondents. The schools were purposively selected based on their large student populations, availability of different academic tracks, accessibility, and willingness to participate in the study. The sample size was considered adequate because it provided sufficient statistical power for the planned analyses, including correlation and multiple regression procedures.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through the administration of a researcher-developed questionnaire in the participating schools. Prior to the conduct of the study, formal permission was obtained from the regional office of the Department of Education. Upon approval, coordination meetings were conducted with school principals and grade-level coordinators to discuss the survey procedures, ethical considerations, and appropriate schedule for data collection.

The questionnaires were distributed and retrieved on the same day to minimize disruption to class schedules. Faculty members from the university's Department of Special Education administered the instrument in the presence of class advisers from the participating schools to ensure the proper completion of the questionnaires within fifteen to thirty minutes. Instructions were delivered verbally in English, Tagalog, and Cebuano, as well as through sign language when appropriate.

Data Analysis

Prior to analysis, responses from the questionnaires were coded and keyed-in into an Excel spreadsheet. Although 796 participants responded to the survey, some responses were excluded from some of the analysis because they did not meet the requirements of the statistical validation procedures. Consequently, the number of responses analyzed varied across different analyses.

First, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to summarize the participants' demographic and academic profiles, as well as the key variables examined in the study. These analyses served as the basis for subsequent inferential procedures. Second, the chi-square test of independence was used to determine whether interest in BSNED differed across gender, high school academic track, and personal experiences with disability. This nonparametric test was deemed appropriate because both the independent variables and the dependent variable were measured as categorical data. According to Field [17], chi-square is appropriate for determining whether the distribution of one categorical variable differs

significantly across categories of another variable. Although interest was arranged in an ordinal five-point scale, the analysis focused on differences in the distribution of interest categories across respondent groups rather than on the magnitude or direction of relationships.

Third, multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the extent to which a set of predictors explained the variance in the outcome variable — interest in BSNEED. Multiple regression analysis examined the relationship between the respondents's perceived career options and their interest in pursuing the BSNEED program. As explained by Field [17], this method is suitable for assessing how independent variables collectively explain variation in a dependent variable and for identifying each predictor's unique contribution while controlling for others. In this study, career options from the multiple-response questionnaire served as predictor variables, and interest in BSNEED, measured on a five-category scale, was the outcome variable. The analysis determined whether specific career options were associated with higher or lower interest in BSNEED.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to questionnaire administration, the students were informed about the purpose of the research and their rights as respondents, including voluntary participation and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants who were assured that their individual responses would remain confidential and that only aggregated data would be presented in the reports and presentations. In addition, the participants were not required to provide identifying information such as names or addresses. Instead, questionnaires were assigned numerical codes for tracking and data management purposes. Anonymity and confidentiality regarding the participants' responses were strictly maintained throughout the conduct of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender Difference in Interest to Pursue BSNEED.

Data shown in Table 1 revealed a predominance of neutral interest for the BSNEED program by both the male and female students (40.92%). This was followed by high interest (22.25%) and very high interest (20.33%), with nearly identical distributions when segregated by gender. However, the chi-square statistic (χ^2) of 0.0923 with 4 degrees of freedom yielded a p-value of 0.921, which exceeded the alpha level of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis of independence cannot be rejected. Gender, when taken as a lone explanatory factor, did not significantly differentiate interest in the program.

The data did not provide sufficient evidence to establish a significant relationship between gender and interest in pursuing BSNEED among senior high school students. This finding is consistent with some studies of special education teacher candidates that reported limited gender differentiation in career choice [18]-[20]. Studies of broader STEM and social science choices provide additional, but less directly comparable evidence

[21],[22]. The results suggest that students' interest in the BSNEED program may be shaped more strongly by the interaction of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, personal goals, and environmental influences, as proposed by Social Cognitive Career Theory. These findings further imply that recruitment and promotional strategies for the program should adopt a gender-neutral approach that emphasizes the career opportunities and societal significance of special and inclusive education.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Interest to Pursue BSNEED According to Gender

Interest Level	Female	Male	Total
Very High	20.53	19.89	20.33
High	22.20	22.07	22.25
Neutral	41.05	40.33	40.92
Low	12.89	13.08	13.04
Very Low	2.86	4.09	3.45
Total	100.0	100.0	100.00

Chi-square $\chi^2 = 0.0923$, $p = 0.921$

Interest Across High School Specialization Strands.

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that the respondents generally exhibited moderate to strong interest in pursuing the BSNEED program, with 42.2% demonstrating high to very high levels of interest, while 40.7% clustered within the neutral category. Among the academic strands, students from the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand showed the highest representation within the high-to-very-high interest categories. Similarly, students from the General Academic Strand (GAS) demonstrated a relatively greater proportion of high interest levels in the program. In contrast, respondents from the Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) strand exhibited comparatively lower levels of interest. Although students from the Arts and Sports tracks appeared to demonstrate high interest rates, the limited sample size from these groups restricted the generalizability of the findings.

The table further demonstrates the predominance of neutral interest levels across all academic tracks. From the perspective of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), this finding suggests that most students may not have fully developed strong self-efficacy beliefs or clearly defined interests related to BSNEED. In contrast, students from strands such as HUMSS and GAS, who exhibited relatively higher interest profiles, may have been influenced by contextual factors associated with the orientation and learning experiences of their specialization tracks. This interpretation was further supported by the results of the chi-square test of independence, which revealed a statistically significant relationship between academic track and level of interest at $\chi^2 = 45.54$, $p = .019$. This indicated that interest levels differed significantly across all tracks and strands.

Table 2. Cross Tabulation of Specialization Tracks/ Strands Across Levels of Interest

Track/ Strand	No. and %	Level of Interest					Total	%
		Very high	High	Neutral	Low	Very low		
Academic Track:								
Humanities and Social Sciences Strand	Count % within	66 25.2	69 26.3	87 33.2	35 13.4	5 1.9	262 100.0	32.9
General Academic Strand	Count % within	32 24.6	24 18.5	50 38.5	19 14.6	5 3.8	130 100.0	16.3
Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Strand	Count % within	20 12.4	29 18.0	85 52.8	19 11.8	8 5.0	161 100.0	20.2
Accountancy, Business and Management Strand	Count % within	6 12.0	12 24.0	24 48.0	4 8.0	4 8.0	50 100.0	6.3
Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Track	Count % within	34 18.3	39 21.0	76 40.9	29 15.6	8 4.3	186 100.0	23.4
Arts and Sports Tracks (combined)	Count % within	4 57.1	1 14.3	2 28.6	- -	- -	7 100.0	0.9
Total	Count %	162 20.4	174 21.8	324 40.7	106 13.3	30 3.8	796 100.0	100

Chi-square $\chi^2 = 45.54$, $p = .019$

Students under the HUMSS strand develop interpersonal competencies that prepare them for careers in education, jurisprudence, psychology, journalism, and related disciplines. With its emphasis on understanding human behavior and society, the strand prioritizes the development of communication and interpersonal skills [23]. Similarly, the GAS strand shares several features with HUMSS because of its orientation toward the social sciences. Although GAS is less specialized, it offers broader learning opportunities that prepare students for various college programs. From the perspective of SCCT, students enrolled in these strands may be more likely to envision themselves in interpersonal and helping professions, such as teaching, because of their exposure to humanities- and social science-oriented subjects. In contrast, students from the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) strand, despite high enrollment rates, predominantly reported low to neutral interest in BSNEED. This finding suggests that

contextual influences may have shaped their self-efficacy beliefs and interests more strongly toward science- and mathematics-related fields.

These patterns indicate that recruitment strategies should extend beyond simple information dissemination. Instead, recruitment initiatives should adopt strand-specific approaches that strengthen self-efficacy beliefs and clarify positive outcome expectations related to BSNEED, thereby fostering greater student interest in the program. Given the predominance of neutral interest levels, recruitment efforts could incorporate early exposure programs and meaningful experiences during senior high school to cultivate interest and shape students' choice goals [24],[25]. Furthermore, a differentiated recruitment strategy that prioritizes HUMSS and GAS students in promotional campaigns, while tailoring messages to their specialization orientations and educational experiences, may prove more effective.

Table 3. Cross Tabulation of Experience with Disability Across Levels of Interest

Experience with Disability	No. and %	Level of Interest					Total	%
		Very high	High	Neutral	Low	Very low		
With Experience	Count % within	132 22.8	132 22.8	224 38.8	73 12.6	17 2.9	578 100.0	73.3
Without Experience	Count % within	27 12.8	42 19.9	98 46.4	31 14.72	13 6.2	211 100.0	26.7
Total	Count %	159 20.2	174 22.1	322 40.8	104 13.2	30 3.8	789 100.0	100.0

Chi-square $\chi^2 = 15.29$, $p = .004$

Personal Experience with Disability

Table 3 presents the distribution of senior high school students' interest in the BSNEP program according to their personal experience with disability. A larger proportion (73.3%) reported having personal experience with disability, the majority of which had a high to very high interest (45.6%). Furthermore the chi-square test of independence, $\chi^2 = 15.29$, $p = .004$, demonstrated a statistically significant association between personal experience and level of interest in the BSNEP program.

From the perspective of SCCT, the findings suggest that despite the challenges associated with disabilities, many students developed the confidence to pursue a career in the BSNEP program. This finding is consistent with the studies of Nordness et al. [19] and Reeves et al. [26], which identified prior experience as an important factor influencing the decision to pursue special education. In relation to SCCT, Bandura's self-efficacy theory further explains this association, as several studies have emphasized that experiences serve as a primary source of self-efficacy beliefs [27]. These beliefs refer to individuals' perceptions of their capacity to successfully perform a particular course of action. Moreover, personal experiences may shape outcome expectations, which subsequently influence patterns of interest and career choice [28],[29].

The large proportion of students without disability-related experiences who demonstrated neutral interest suggests that many remained in an exploratory stage regarding the choice of BSNEP, during which career goals and outcome expectations may not yet have been fully developed. From a recruitment perspective, these findings highlight the need for strategies grounded in contextual experiences that can positively influence students' career decisions toward BSNEP. Such strategies may include exposure and immersion activities, accompanied by intentional efforts to strengthen students' self-efficacy beliefs and clarify positive outcome expectations related to the profession. On the overall, the chi-square test results strongly support the implementation of differentiated recruitment strategies tailored to students with and without prior disability-related experiences.

Perceived Career Path

Table 4 indicates that career paths such as special education teacher, therapist, guidance counselor, and other related professions were negatively associated with interest in BSNEP. This finding suggests that career orientations competing with these particular special education paths may diminish students' interest in the program, underscoring the need to strengthen the positioning and distinct identity of BSNEP. The regression model, $F(6, 800) = 3.93$, $p = .001$, was statistically significant, indicating that the set of predictors explained variation in students' interest levels toward BSNEP. However, the model demonstrated limited predictive strength, as reflected by the low $R^2 = .03$ and adjusted $R^2 = .02$ values. In contrast, other predictors, including school administrator and researcher, were not

statistically significant, suggesting that students may not strongly associate these professional roles with the BSNEP program.

Table 4. Regression of Perceived Career Path Influencing Interest in BSNEP

Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficient, B	Standardized Coefficient β	p value	Association with Interest
(Constant)	3.678			
Special Education Teacher	-0.160	-0.072	.049	Small, negative
Therapist	-0.103	-0.096	.009	Small, negative
Guidance Counselor	-0.071	-0.076	.042	Small, negative
School Administrator	0.046	0.056	.129	None
Researcher	-0.021	-0.039	.278	None
Other Related Careers	-0.104	-0.114	.002	Strong, negative

$R = 0.169$; $R^2 = 0.029$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.021$; $F(6, 800) = 3.93$, $p = .001$

Viewed through the lens of SCCT, the analysis suggests that predictors negatively associated with interest in BSNEP may lose their influence when alternative career pathways become more attainable or appealing to students. The negative coefficients imply that increased awareness of competing professional fields may reduce students' interest in pursuing BSNEP. Although students may recognize the available career opportunities in special education and possess confidence in their ability to pursue them, indicating relatively high self-efficacy, comparisons with alternative career paths in terms of outcome expectations and contextual influences may contribute to declining interest levels, which were predominantly reflected in the neutral interest category.

More specifically, special education may not be viewed as an attractive career option because of several discouraging workplace realities associated with the profession [19]. One particular study showed that special education teachers frequently experience multiple occupational stressors [30].

To remain competitive, recruitment campaign messages should emphasize the advantages of pursuing a BSNEP degree relative to alternative non-BSNEP career pathways. Providing a clear career map demonstrating how BSNEP prepares graduates for diverse professional roles and complements interests in therapy, elementary or secondary education, and related fields may further strengthen recruitment efforts. In addition, negative perceptions associated with special education careers should be addressed through testimonials from practicing special education professionals, as well as mentorship and

immersion programs that provide students with meaningful exposure to the field.

CONCLUSION

The analysis revealed no significant association between gender and interest in BSNE. This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that gender does not significantly predict career choice in special education [18]-[20]. In contrast, significant relationships were identified between students' interest levels and several factors, including academic specialization track, personal experiences with disability, and perceived career pathways. Interest in pursuing the BSNE program varied across academic tracks, with students from the HUMSS and GAS strands demonstrating higher interest levels than those from other tracks and strands. Similarly, Gimarino [31] found that students enrolled in education-oriented academic tracks exhibited higher self-efficacy, which may increase the likelihood of pursuing careers in special education [32],[33]. In addition, students with disability-related experiences demonstrated greater interest than those without such experiences. These findings suggest that contextual influences, including personal and familial exposure to disability, may serve as motivating factors in choosing careers in special education [19].

Expected career pathways such as special education teacher, therapist, and guidance counselor demonstrated negative associations with interest in BSNE. This paradoxical finding suggests that although students considered career outcomes important, they may have perceived the BSNE program as limited in these areas, contributing to the predominance of neutral interest levels. Negative perceptions surrounding special education teaching may further explain the reduced attractiveness of special education careers [34]-[36].

Overall, the findings carry important implications for BSNE recruitment strategies. A differentiated recruitment approach should be considered because interest levels varied according to academic track, strand, and disability-related experiences. Furthermore, recruitment messages should emphasize how the program prepares graduates for diverse career pathways through scholarship opportunities, mentorship initiatives, and internship experiences. Implementing these strategies as early as Grade 11 may strengthen students' interest in the BSNE program and ultimately contribute to addressing the shortage of special education teachers.

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