

Positive Experiences at School and Career Development of Senior High School: The Mediating Role of Career Orientation

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Abstract

Career Development Competencies (CDC) are vital for enhancing employability, career satisfaction, and adapting to 21st-century demands, including digital and soft skills. This study investigated the mediating role of career orientations in the relationship between positive school experiences and CDC among randomly selected senior high school students from three public schools in Malita District, Davao Occidental, Region XI, Philippines (SY 2023–2024). Employing a non-experimental, descriptive-correlational design, data were gathered using standardized, modified questionnaires assessing positive school experiences, career orientations, and career development competencies. Statistical analyses included weighted mean, Pearson's r , and Sobel's test. The results indicated high levels across all three variables and revealed significant positive correlations. Sobel's test confirmed a partial mediating effect of career orientations, aligning with Holland's Theory of Vocational Types. These findings emphasize the importance of aligning educational experiences and career orientations to foster students' career readiness and satisfaction. The study offers insights for educators and policymakers in addressing global challenges related to skills mismatch and youth unemployment.

Keywords: technology and livelihood education, positive experiences at school, career development competence, career orientation, quantitative, Philippines

1. Introduction

Career Development Competencies (CDCs) are essential for career success because they boost employability, improve post-graduation outcomes, and meet modern demands for digital and soft skills. Employees are more satisfied when their roles match their career paths and competencies (Presti et al., 2022). CDCs include the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to reach professional goals and manage careers effectively (Guo et al., 2021). However, many graduates lack these key competencies (Witteveen & Attewell, 2021). Limited job opportunities also occur when curricula do not match labor market needs. Soft skills are often neglected, with too much focus on theory and too little on internships, practical training, and industry partnerships. Career readiness is rarely assessed, and misaligned competencies can hinder professional growth (Al-Shehab et al., 2021).

The importance of CDC cannot be overstated, as they ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of students, teachers, and society. These competencies align the curriculum with national, institutional, and social goals, supporting key learning outcomes such as knowledge, skills, and personal growth (Ashraf, 2023). CDC helps students adapt to a changing world shaped by new technologies and labor market demands. It builds essential skills like adaptability, problem-solving, and lifelong learning. It also improves teaching by helping educators deliver content clearly through a well-structured curriculum (Catacutan et al., 2023). Moreover, it addresses diverse learner needs, making education more engaging and meaningful, while promoting culturally responsive and fair practices (Yetti, 2024).

Consequently, education is widely recognized as a key factor in a person's success. Research shows that higher education improves social and economic status (Erfayliana et al., 2022). Although it often leads to better opportunities, many schools still fail to provide graduates with the skills required in their fields (Borg & Scott-Young, 2020), creating a gap between expectations and outcomes. This highlights the vital role of education and training in helping societies stay competitive (Bejaković & Mrnjavac, 2020). Planning a career path is also essential, as future success depends on developing strong career competencies (Derakhshan et al., 2020). Many schools emphasize graduation rates and licensure exam results, but positive learning experiences are equally important because they shape students' skills, attitudes, and reasoning (Ramzan et al., 2023). However, inadequate infrastructure and a shortage of qualified teachers continue to hinder learning, despite students showing improved performance and motivation (Jacob & Ndayebom, 2022). Academic success depends on multiple factors, including classroom quality, facilities, teacher competence, and school location (Ikegbusi, 2021), while a positive school climate further boosts learning outcome (Gao et al., 2021). This issue affects many countries, including the United States, Singapore, China, and the Philippines. Although positive school experiences improve performance and career readiness, only 68% of students perform well, leaving a 32% gap (Russell et al., 2022). This gap is largely due to the misalignment between Senior High School strands and college pathways, which contributes to job insecurity. Addressing this requires better curriculum alignment, stronger career guidance, and school–industry partnerships to ensure students gain relevant skills for employment. Low-demand college programs often result in graduates whose skills do not match their jobs (Park et al., 2020).

Furthermore, positive school experiences—such as supportive teachers, safe environments, and engaging activities—boost senior high school students' motivation and career development skills (Ngai et al., 2023). These experiences strengthen career orientations by building awareness, self-discovery, and confidence, helping students set ambitious goals. Career orientations and development competencies reinforce each other; orientations guide students' aspirations, while competencies help them achieve them (Rasool et al., 2020; Hirschi & Koen, 2021; Okolie et al., 2020). Employers now look for graduates with strong skills and positive attitudes (Diokno & Peprah, 2021), emphasizing the need for continuous competency development. Overall, career growth—shaped by positive school experiences and career orientation—supports motivation, satisfaction, and effective decision-making (Malinao & Agustin, 2023). In addition, students must continually learn and adapt to new situations, especially as they prepare for future careers. Career orientation should support their professional development and positive school experiences (Gouda, 2022). With effective career orientation, both school experiences and career development competencies are expected to improve.

Positive education integrates academic learning with well-being skills, which is vital amid rising youth depression (Shorey et al., 2022), as students with stronger well-being tend to perform better

academically (Bortes et al., 2021). Supportive school environments that build belonging enhance both healthy living and learning, and while positive emotions boost well-being, genuine moral growth can also involve negative thoughts (Goodman, 2022). Learning experiences—shaped by curriculum, teaching, and support—include both positive and negative events that affect motivation and classroom diversity (Phibzia, 2020) and emphasize the value of reflecting on past and present learning to improve future outcomes (Oke & Fernandes, 2020). A strong sense of belonging and positive interpersonal engagement encourages active participation (Rees et al., 2020), whereas exclusion fosters dissatisfaction and discouragement (Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2020), and performance pressure can create stress and frustration (Porter et al., 2024). Building an equitable learning environment requires mutual respect, active listening, openness to diverse perspectives, and shared understanding, which, when practiced by teachers, leads to more productive and engaging classrooms (Calp, 2020).

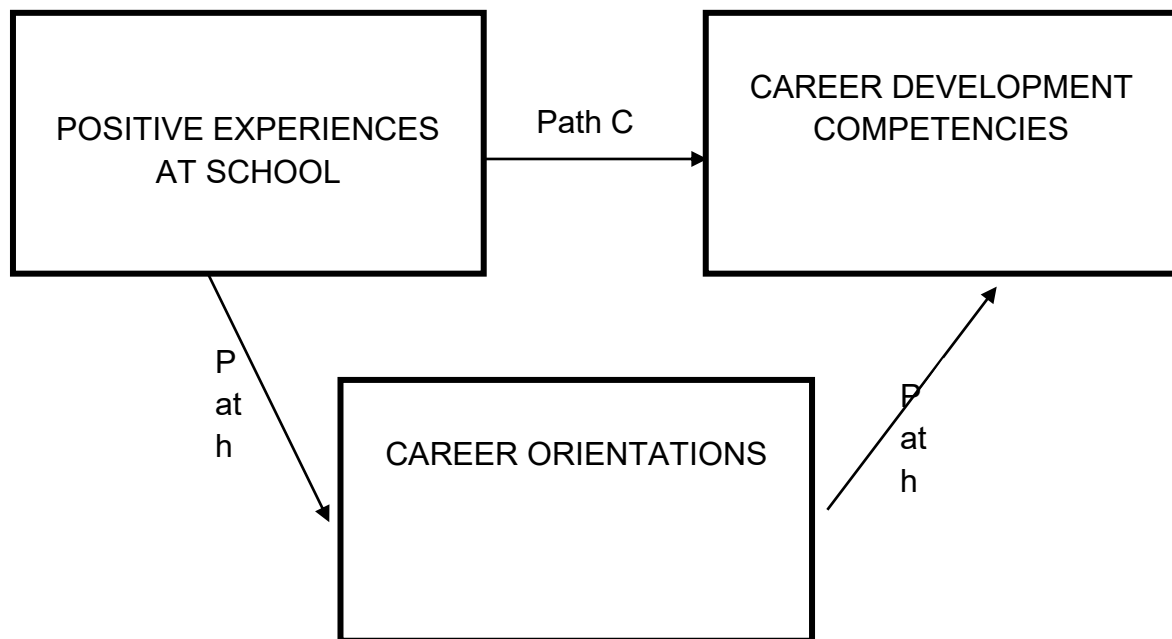
Positive school experiences—supported by a conducive learning environment, school culture, and school climate—strongly influence students' career orientation (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; Ismail et al., 2020; Kalkan & Dagli, 2021). Such experiences drive changes in higher education that push students to engage more actively and develop higher levels of knowledge (Zhoc et al., 2020), which can enhance their employability (Doyle, 2023) by helping them choose courses aligned with future job demands (Bérubé & Gendron, 2022). Aligning career orientation with future work increases the likelihood of success and job satisfaction, as workers who follow career paths that match their values and goals tend to achieve greater professional well-being (Tamers et al., 2020; Boehnlein & Baum, 2022). Thus, clear career direction—supported by self-management and contemporary, flexible career orientations—is essential for effective career development (Das & Chandrasekaran, 2024).

1.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This study draws on Holland's Theory of Vocational Types, which links career satisfaction to how well personality matches the work environment, identifying six types—Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional—each aligned with specific career preferences (Birt, 2023). Supporting this, Super's Developmental Self-Concept Theory (1963) highlights that careers reflect one's self-concept and that satisfaction comes from expressing it. Career development involves self-awareness, connecting personal identity with career choices, and ongoing exploration of work and life opportunities (Hansen, 1976, cited by Woerner & Kowalczyk, 2022). Schools, social influences, and higher education play vital roles in guiding students, building confidence, and preparing them for successful career paths (Barnes et al., 2022).

Figure 1 shows the study's conceptual framework, with positive school experiences (gratitude, zest, optimism, persistence) as the independent variable, career development competencies (self-assessment, career awareness, goal setting, skills, career management) as the dependent variable, and career orientations (technical/managerial competence, autonomy, security, entrepreneurship, service, challenge, lifestyle) as the mediator. Strong positive school experiences are assumed to enhance career competencies, reflecting the development of skills and talents essential for professional growth. However, career orientation can influence or alter this relationship, as individuals' attitudes and approaches to work shape their career choices and self-management.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Showing the Variables of the Study.



Path A assumes that positive school experiences shape students' career orientations by boosting confidence, motivation, and skills through supportive teachers, engaging lessons, and extracurricular activities, aligning aspirations with abilities and easing career anxiety through meaningful relationships and real-world opportunities (Sides & Cuevas, 2020; Cheng et al., 2023; Hellín et al., 2023). Path B emphasizes that career orientations and development competencies are closely linked, enhancing career readiness as students set goals, build skills, and adapt to changes through practical experiences (Khattab et al., 2022; Hirschi & Koen, 2021; Gati & Kulcsár, 2021). Path C highlights that positive school environments foster key career skills, including critical thinking, leadership, planning, and persistence, while guidance, mentoring, internships, and hands-on projects connect academic learning to workplace demands and provide valuable career insights (Dickinson et al., 2021; King et al., 2021; You, 2020).

While research has linked positive school experiences to career development competencies, few studies have examined the role of career orientations in this relationship. Most research considers career orientations or competencies in isolation, often focusing on college students or young professionals, and largely in Western contexts, leaving gaps in understanding how these factors influence career readiness among senior high school students in diverse cultural and educational settings. Many studies are cross-sectional, limiting insight into how school experiences shape career orientations and, in turn, career competencies over time. This study is timely as skills-based economies make early career competency development crucial for high schoolers. Exploring how career orientations connect school experiences to career readiness can inform educators and policymakers, improve career education programs, and help counselors provide targeted guidance to students struggling with career choices due to unclear interests and abilities.

1.2 Research Objectives

The study aimed to determine the mediating effect of career orientations on the relationship between positive experiences at school and career development competencies among senior high school students. Specifically, it sought:

1. To determine the level of positive experiences at school among senior high school students in terms of gratitude, zest, optimism, and persistence;
2. To ascertain the level of career development competence of senior high school students in terms of self-assessment, career awareness, goal setting, skills development, and career management;
3. To assess the level of career orientation among senior high school students in terms of functional or technical competence, managerial competence, autonomy or independence, security and stability, entrepreneurship and creativity, service or dedication, pure challenge, and lifestyle;
4. To establish the significance relationship between positive experiences and career development competencies, between positive experiences at school and career orientations, and between career orientations and career development competencies; and
5. To determine the significance of the mediation of career orientation on the relationship between positive experiences at school and career development competencies of senior high school students.

1.3 Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is a significant relationship among three variables: (a) positive experiences and career development competencies, (b) positive school experiences and career orientations, and (c) career orientations and career development competencies.

Ho₂: There is a significant mediation of career orientation on the relationship between positive experiences at school and career development competencies of senior high school students.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study holds global significance, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals—especially SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)—and offers social value. Understanding how career orientations link positive school experiences to career development is vital worldwide. Education systems work to give students skills needed for today's changing job market. Such efforts help create better career education policies, reduce youth unemployment, and prepare a more workforce-ready generation. Making smart career choices helps people meet job demands. Positive school experiences build career readiness, employability, and long-term success, supporting lifelong learning and closing skill gaps. Socially, it ensures smooth moves from school to work and equal access to career guidance. When careers match employees' skills, they are happier and work better. Employers also save on hiring and training costs, which supports the long-term growth of both workers and businesses.

Stakeholders who may benefit from this study include schools, principals, students, teachers, parents, local governments, and the community. Understanding career orientations emphasizes the need for holistic education policies that integrate career guidance. Schools may improve career readiness by creating positive experiences and aligning activities with career goals. School leaders may use this to support better learning environments and guidance programs. Teachers may address students' skill gaps more effectively. Students may gain confidence in career choices, boosting employability. Career orientations may help disadvantaged students access guidance equally. Parents may support career decisions, and local governments can align education with industry needs. Communities may benefit from a skilled workforce. Researchers may use the study to explore career competence further.

2. Method

2.1 Respondents

The study involved senior high school students from three public secondary schools in Malita, Davao

Occidental, totaling about 720 students in the 2023–2024 school year. Using simple random sampling with standard guidelines (95% confidence, 5% margin of error, 0.5 population proportion), 244 students were selected to ensure a representative, unbiased sample (Rashid et al., 2021). The study included only Grade 12 students aged 18 and above from the designated locality, excluding minors, foreign nationals, those outside the area, and pilot test participants. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any time without affecting the research or its findings.

2.2 Research Design

The study employed a non-experimental descriptive-correlational design to examine the mediating effect of career orientations on the relationship between positive school experiences and career development competencies among 244 randomly selected senior high school students in 2023–2024. Using a quantitative approach with statistical mediation analysis, the study investigated how the independent variable (positive school experiences) influences the mediator (career orientations), which in turn affects the dependent variable (career development competencies). This analysis determined whether the mediation was full or partial, highlighting the role of career orientations in translating school experiences into employability skills and providing insights for improving career guidance programs and policy strategies to enhance career readiness.

2.3 Research Locale

The study was conducted in the first semester of 2023–2024 in Davao Occidental, purposively chosen for its strong senior high school programs and career development initiatives (Taherdoos, 2022). Its relevance and accessibility allowed efficient coordination with schools and stakeholders, ensuring timely and effective implementation of the research. Schools were labeled A, B, and C to ensure confidentiality, and respondents were randomly selected regardless of sex, ethnicity, or academic performance (Szucs & Ioannidis, 2020;). This method aimed to generate quantifiable results, detecting even the smallest meaningful effects (Lakens, 2022).

2.4 Research Instrument

The study used a standardized questionnaire, modified and contextualized to align with the research objectives. The questionnaire measured positive school experiences (adapted from Furlong et al., 2013, 20 items), career development competencies (adapted from Staff Career Development – Counseling and Psychological Services, 25 items), and career orientation (adapted from Cortes-Sanchez & Grueso-Hinestroza, 2017, 40 items), with permission obtained from the authors via email. It comprised four parts: instructions and consent, positive school experiences, career development competencies, and career orientation.

The questionnaires on positive school experiences, career development competencies, and career orientation used a five-point Likert scale: Very High (4.20–5.00) indicated consistent demonstration or strong agreement, High (3.40–4.19) indicated frequent demonstration or agreement, Moderate (2.60–3.39) indicated occasional demonstration or neutrality, Low (1.80–2.19) indicated seldom demonstration or disagreement, and Very Low (1.00–1.79) indicated rare or no demonstration of the behavior. The modified and contextualized questionnaire underwent content validation by a panel of experts, followed by pilot testing with students outside the study to assess clarity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha showed excellent internal consistency for all scales: 0.861 for positive experiences, 0.888 for career development competencies, and 0.991 for career orientations, confirming the instrument's reliability.

2.5 Data Collection

Data collection followed a structured procedure. After the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC) approved the questionnaire, a letter was sent to the Schools Division Superintendent of Davao Occidental requesting permission to conduct the study, followed by permission letters to the principals of the three selected senior high schools. Validated questionnaires were then personally distributed and administered to respondents who provided consent, with instructions and clarifications provided to ensure accurate and reliable responses. Collected data were retrieved, processed, and analyzed at a 0.05 significance level, and the results were reviewed to formulate findings and recommendations.

2.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed at a 0.05 significance level using various statistical tests. Weighted mean and standard deviation measured students' levels of positive school experiences, career development competencies, and career orientations. Pearson's correlation assessed relationships among these variables, while a Sobel Z-test via Medgraph tested the mediating effect of career orientation between positive school experiences and career development competencies.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

The study strictly followed ethical guidelines from the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC) and Republic Act 10173 (Data Privacy Act of 2012). Participation was voluntary, with respondents able to withdraw at any time, and informed consent was obtained through a clear, jargon-free letter. Surveys were distributed safely with proper instructions, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, with secure storage and disposal of data. Only eligible participants were included, and collected data were verified for accuracy, free from bias or plagiarism. School and institutional approvals were secured, and authorship was properly acknowledged under the guidance of the thesis adviser.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Level of Positive Experiences at School

Table 1 presents the level of positive school experiences among senior high school students from three public secondary schools in one district of Malita, Davao Occidental, for the 2023–2024 school year. The overall mean score was 4.21 (SD = 0.43), described as “Very High,” indicating that students consistently demonstrated positive experiences. Among the domains, gratitude scored the highest (\bar{x} = 4.59, SD = 0.48, “Very High”), while persistence (\bar{x} = 4.14, SD = 0.57) and zest (\bar{x} = 4.03, SD = 0.55) were rated “High,” and optimism scored the lowest (\bar{x} = 4.08, SD = 0.59).

Table 1: Level of Positive Experiences at School

| Indicators | SD | Mean | Descriptive Level |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Gratitude | 0.48 | 4.59 | Very High |
| Zest | 0.55 | 4.03 | High |
| Optimism | 0.59 | 4.08 | High |
| Persistence | 0.57 | 4.14 | High |
| Overall | 0.43 | 4.21 | Very High |

Results showed that respondents felt appreciated, supported, and approached life with optimism and perseverance, reflecting high levels of gratitude for their education, teachers, and peers. Positive school experiences enhanced their well-being, motivation, and cognitive growth, connecting past, present, and future learning while supporting academic and social-emotional development. Supportive communities and positive school environments foster health, belonging, resilience, social skills, and self-esteem, with family and teacher support contributing to student success (Shorey et al., 2022). Optimism further enhances well-being, engagement, and adaptive coping during challenging times, motivating students to learn and participate actively (Porter et al., 2024). Optimism encourages proactive behaviors and good health, while pessimism is linked to unhealthy habits (Skakni et al., 2020). Zest enhances learning, adaptability, social interactions, and self-perception, allowing students to engage fully, create lasting memories, and develop new skills for emotional and intellectual growth (Zeidan & Prentice, 2022).

3.2 Level of Career Development Competencies

Table 2 presents the level of career development competencies among senior high school students from three public secondary schools in Malita, Davao Occidental, for the 2023–2024 school year. The overall mean score was 4.05 (SD = 0.50), described as “High.” All domains were rated “High,” with self-assessment scoring the highest (\bar{x} = 4.07, SD = 0.55) and career awareness the lowest (\bar{x} = 3.99, SD = 0.66).

Table 2: Level of Career Development Competencies

| Indicators | SD | Mean | Descriptive Level |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Self-Assessment | 0.55 | 4.07 | High |
| Career Awareness | 0.66 | 3.99 | High |
| Goal Setting | 0.61 | 4.06 | High |
| Skill Development | 0.54 | 4.10 | High |
| Career Management | 0.60 | 4.01 | High |
| Overall | 0.50 | 4.05 | High |

Results showed that senior high school students demonstrated awareness of their interests, strengths, work values, and career growth, enabling effective self-assessment, career planning, and exploration of opportunities. They balance career goals with personal priorities and continually reassess their plans, reflecting that career development is a lifelong process of growth and adaptation. This is particularly important for senior high school students, who are at the start of their careers and face risks such as temporary employment, unsatisfactory jobs, poor workplace socialization, and underemployment (Yang et al., 2023; Smaldone et al., 2022). Students who deliberately plan their education and training are more likely to lead meaningful, fulfilling lives, as a clear vision enhances focus, improves the ability to identify opportunities, and strengthens determination to pursue them (Grosemans & De Cuyper, 2021).

3.3 Level of Career Orientations

Table 3 presents the level of career orientation among senior high school students from three public secondary schools in Malita, Davao Occidental. The overall mean score was 4.05 (SD = 0.49), described as “High.” All domains were rated “High,” with entrepreneurship/creativity scoring the highest (\bar{x} = 4.11, SD = 0.63) and managerial competence the lowest (\bar{x} = 3.92, SD = 0.58).

Table 3: Level of Career Orientations

| Indicators | SD | Mean | Descriptive Level |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Functional/Technical Competence | 0.57 | 4.08 | High |
| Managerial Competence | 0.58 | 3.92 | High |
| Autonomy/Independence | 0.65 | 3.95 | High |
| Security/Stability | 0.61 | 4.04 | High |
| Entrepreneurship/Creativity | 0.63 | 4.11 | High |
| Service/Dedication | 0.61 | 4.10 | High |
| Pure Challenge | 0.60 | 4.09 | High |
| Lifestyle | 0.64 | 4.09 | High |
| Overall | 0.49 | 4.05 | High |

Results showed that senior high school students consider career guidance essential for understanding educational and career opportunities and making informed choices. They value entrepreneurship and creativity over managerial roles, finding fulfillment in building ventures from their own ideas. With proper guidance, students can pursue careers more efficiently and productively, developing the skills to lead, innovate, and make meaningful contributions. Commitment, dedication, and hard work strongly influence motivation and timely completion of responsibilities (Shekar, 2023). Students prioritize balancing personal and professional demands over attaining high-level managerial positions (Widayati et al., 2021), favoring senior functional roles that allow them to develop technical and functional skills to high competence (Anand et al., 2023). Functional skills are essential for daily responsibilities (Ashraf, 2023), and opportunities to work freely, without excessive rules or constraints, are valued more than job security (Maroto et al., 2021).

3.4 Significance of the Relationship Between Positive Experiences at School and Career Development Competencies

Table 4 presents the results of the relationship between positive school experiences and career development competencies among senior high school students from three public secondary schools in Malita, Davao Occidental, Region XI, Philippines.

Table 4: Significance on the Relationship between Positive Experiences at School and Career Development Competencies of Senior High School Students

| Positive Experiences at School | Career Development Competencies | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| | Self-Assessment | Career Awareness | Goal Setting | Skill Development | Career Mngt | Overall |
| Gratitude | .314** .000 | .473** .000 | .397** .000 | .283** .000 | .283** .000 | .417** .000 |
| Zest | .440** .000 | .433** .000 | .490** .000 | .343** .000 | .322** .000 | .480** .000 |
| Optimism | .449** .000 | .505** .000 | .524** .000 | .432** .000 | .476** .000 | .565** .000 |
| Persistence | .554** .000 | .497** .000 | .508** .000 | .373** .000 | .346** .000 | .538** .000 |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Overall | .560** .000 | .603** .000 | .610** .000 | .456** .000 | .455** .000 | .636** .000 |
|----------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|

**Significant at 0.05 significance level.

The overall positive experiences at school significantly correlated with career development competencies ($r = 0.636, p < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Among the domains, optimism showed the strongest correlation ($r = 0.565, p < 0.05$), while gratitude had the weakest ($r = 0.417, p < 0.05$), though both contributed to career skill development. These results suggest that students with more positive school experiences—such as optimism, persistence, zest, and gratitude—are better prepared for career planning, decision-making, and skill development. A supportive learning environment, engaging activities, and encouraging teachers enhance decision-making, adaptability, and goal setting, highlighting the importance of integrating career guidance, mentorship, and skill-building programs to boost confidence, career readiness, and long-term success. These findings indicate a strong link between positive school experiences and career development competencies, showing that students' career choices are influenced by factors such as a supportive learning environment, school culture, and school climate (Birknerová & Uher, 2022). Positive school experiences can enhance teaching strategies, maintain student engagement, and increase employability compared to peers (Doyle, 2023).

3.5 Significance of the Relationship Between Positive Experiences at School and Career Orientations

Displayed in Table 5 were the results of the test of relationship between positive experiences at school and career orientations of the senior high school students in the three identified and selected public secondary schools in one district of the Division of Malita, Davao Occidental, Region XI, Philippines for the school year 2023-2024. The overall positive experiences at school significantly correlated with overall career orientations ($r=0.481, p<0.05$). All domains of positive experiences at school significantly correlated with career orientations but highest on optimism ($r=0.432, p<0.05$), and lowest on persistence ($r=0.337, p<0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming a significant relationship.

The results revealed that positive school experiences significantly influence students' career orientations, with optimism showing the strongest correlation, indicating that students with a positive outlook are more confident in exploring career paths and making informed decisions. While persistence showed the lowest correlation, it still contributes to shaping career direction. These findings underscore the importance of a supportive learning environment, highlighting how career guidance, mentorship, and skill-building programs help students understand educational and career opportunities, make informed choices, and potentially increase future job satisfaction and success (Das & Chandrasekaran, 2024).

Table 5: Significance on the Relationship between Positive Experiences at School and Career Orientations of Senior High School Students

| Positive Experiences at School | Career Orientations | | | | | | | | Overall |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| | Functional/ Technical Competence | Managerial Competence | Autonomy/ Independence | Security/ Stability | Entrepreneurship/ Creativity | Service/ Dedication | Pure Challenge | Lifestyle | |
| Gratitude | .327** .000 | .255** .000 | .282** .000 | .363** .000 | .285** .000 | .244** .000 | .345** .000 | .265** .000 | .366** .000 |
| Zest | .352** .000 | .330** .000 | .281** .000 | .365** .000 | .281** .000 | .290** .000 | .284** .000 | .319** .000 | .387** .000 |
| Optimism | .409** .000 | .303** .000 | .369** .000 | .390** .000 | .258** .000 | .341** .000 | .337** .000 | .384** .000 | .432** .000 |
| Persistence | .319** .000 | .174** .007 | .195** .002 | .383** .000 | .271** .000 | .234** .000 | .320** .000 | .278** .000 | .337** .000 |
| Overall | .446** .000 | .335** .000 | .356** .000 | .474** .000 | .345** .000 | .352** .000 | .405** .000 | .396** .000 | .481** .000 |

**Significant at 0.05 significance level.

3.6 Significance of the Relationship Between Career Orientations and Career Development Competencies

Table 6 presents the relationship between career orientations and career development competencies among senior high school students from three public secondary schools in Malita, Davao Occidental, Region XI, Philippines. Overall career orientations were positively and significantly correlated with career development competencies ($r = 0.717, p < 0.05$). All domains of career orientations also significantly correlated with career development competencies, with the strongest correlation in functional/technical competence ($r = 0.652, p < 0.05$) and the weakest in entrepreneurship/creativity ($r = 0.537, p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, confirming a significant relationship.

The results suggest that students with clear career orientations are more likely to develop essential career competencies. Strong correlations indicate that understanding one’s career path supports skill acquisition, informed decision-making, and job readiness. Functional/technical competence showed the highest correlation, reflecting the development of specialized skills, while entrepreneurship/creativity showed a lower but still significant correlation. These findings emphasize the value of career guidance programs in aligning students’ career goals with skill development for long-term success.

Career development programs are essential for equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for professional growth. These programs help students explore career paths, understand job market demands, and develop competencies aligned with their goals. By integrating career education with skill-building, students gain insights into industries, work environments, and employment trends, enabling informed career decisions (Bakker et al., 2020). For example, a senior high school student interested in engineering can benefit from workshops, mentorship, and internships that clarify job requirements, challenges, and suitability, helping them decide if engineering is the right career path (Chien et al., 2020).

Similarly, students interested in entrepreneurship can benefit from seminars on business management, financial literacy, and innovation, which help develop problem-solving, creativity, and leadership skills

(Birknerová & Uher, 2022). Linking career development programs with job-related skills ensures that students are aware of career options and equipped with the competencies needed to succeed in their chosen fields (Newell & Bain, 2020).

Table 6: Significance on the Relationship between Career Orientations and Career Development Competencies of Senior High School Students

| Career Orientations | Career Development Competencies | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| | Self-Assessment | Career Awareness | Goal Setting | Skill Dev. | Career Mgt. | Overall |
| Functional/ Technical Competence | .382** .000 | .550** .000 | .560** .000 | .654** .000 | .617** .000 | .652** .000 |
| Managerial Competence | .407** .000 | .475** .000 | .507** .000 | .537** .000 | .534** .000 | .580** .000 |
| Autonomy/ Independence | .347** .000 | .472** .000 | .504** .000 | .569** .000 | .567** .000 | .580** .000 |
| Security/ Stability | .432** .000 | .550** .000 | .532** .000 | .590** .000 | .588** .000 | .635** .000 |
| Entrepreneurship/ Creativity | .375** .000 | .419** .000 | .468** .000 | .506** .000 | .513** .000 | .537** .000 |
| Service/ Dedication | .347** .000 | .441** .000 | .524** .000 | .541** .000 | .520** .000 | .559** .000 |
| Pure Challenge | .393** .000 | .485** .000 | .451** .000 | .490** .000 | .480** .000 | .543** .000 |
| Lifestyle | .385** .000 | .531** .000 | .423** .000 | .453** .000 | .540** .000 | .553** .000 |
| Overall | .475** .000 | .607** .000 | .614** .000 | .670** .000 | .674** .000 | .717** .000 |

**Significant at 0.05 significance level.

3.7 Significance of the Mediation of Career Orientation on the Relationship Between Positive Experiences at School and Career Development Competencies

Table 7 presents a Medgraph using the Sobel Z-test, demonstrating the significant mediating effect of career orientation on the relationship between positive school experiences and career development competencies among senior high school students from three public secondary schools in Malita, Davao Occidental, Region XI, for the 2023–2024 school year.

Table 7: Regression Analysis showing the Influence of Positive Experiences at School on Career Development as Mediated by Career Orientation.

| Step | Path | B | S.E. | β |
|------|------|------|------|---------|
| 1 | C | .737 | .058 | .636*** |
| 2 | A | .546 | .064 | .481*** |
| 3 | B | .548 | .046 | .536*** |

| | | | | |
|---|----|------|------|---------|
| 4 | C' | .438 | .053 | .378*** |
|---|----|------|------|---------|

* $p < 0.05$

The study found partial mediation, indicating that positive school experiences partly explain how career orientation influences career development among senior high school students. With a ratio index of 0.741, the results suggest that positive school experiences both directly impact career development and indirectly enhance career competencies through career orientation.

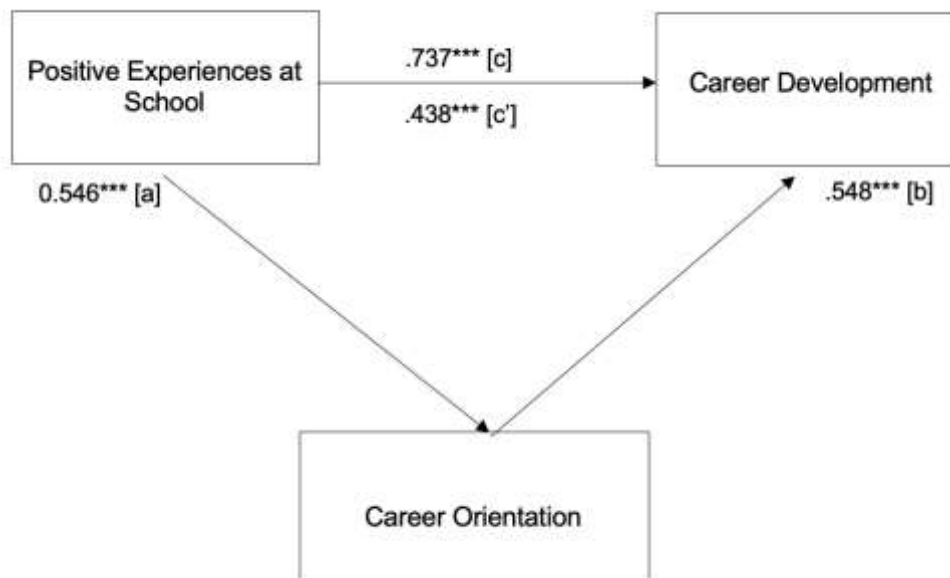
Table 8: Results of Statistical Analysis on Presence (or Absence) of Mediating Effect

| Combination of Variables | Sobel z | p-value | Mediation |
|--|----------|---------|-------------------|
| positive experiences at School → career orientation → career development | 6.895129 | <0.05 | Partial mediation |

* $p < 0.05$

In Step 1 (Path C), positive school experiences (IV) significantly predict career development (DV). In Step 2 (Path A), positive school experiences significantly predict career orientation (MV), and in Step 3 (Path B), career orientation significantly predicts career development. Steps 1–3 establish that zero-order relationships exist among the variables, as mediation is unlikely if these relationships are absent. In Step 4, the combined effect of positive school experiences and career orientation on career development is tested and found to be significant, confirming the mediation process.

Figure 2: Medgraph showing the variables of the study.



Even after accounting for career orientation as a mediator, positive school experiences (IV) continue to significantly influence career development competencies (DV), with a beta value of 0.438. The total effect is 0.737, with a direct effect of 0.438 and an indirect effect of 0.546, calculated as a $a \times c$, where “a” represents the path from positive school experiences to career orientation and “c” represents the path from career orientation to career development competencies. Further path analysis using AMOS

can confirm the mediator's significance. If the IV no longer affects the DV after including the mediator, full mediation occurs; if the effect is reduced but still significant, partial mediation is indicated. In this study, the IV still significantly affects the DV after accounting for the mediator, confirming partial mediation.

The significant direct effects observed in this study contribute to the existing research on career orientation (McGarry, 2023) and career development competencies (Khan et al., 2023). Additionally, the study's findings on positive school experiences and career orientation support prior research indicating that teaching both academic skills and those that enhance student well-being—a core goal of positive education—is strongly influenced by career orientation (Zibbell, 2023).

4 Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

The study revealed that senior high school students experience high levels of positive school experiences, with Gratitude emerging as the dominant trait, reflecting feelings of appreciation, motivation, and optimism. Career development competencies were also high, particularly in self-assessment, though students showed a need for deeper career awareness and understanding of labor market trends. Strengthening these areas is essential for effective career planning, skill development, and long-term success, helping prevent future underemployment and job dissatisfaction.

Findings further showed that students demonstrate strong inclinations toward entrepreneurship and creativity, yet exhibit lower levels of managerial competence, suggesting a preference for innovation and independence rather than corporate leadership roles. With proper mentorship and training, these strengths can be developed into viable career paths as entrepreneurs or technical specialists. The study also confirmed a significant relationship between positive school experiences and career development competencies, where optimism enhanced career readiness, and Gratitude influenced work ethics, emphasizing the importance of integrating career guidance, mentoring, and skill-building initiatives into school programs.

Additionally, the results established significant relationships among positive school experiences, career orientations, and career development competencies. Optimism boosted confidence in career exploration, while persistence contributed to shaping students' career paths—highlighting how a supportive environment fosters better career outcomes. Career orientations were also strongly linked to competencies, with functional/technical competence showing the highest correlation, underscoring the need for career guidance programs aligned with students' strengths and interests. The Sobel Z-test confirmed partial mediation, indicating that career orientation partly explains how positive school experiences influence career development competencies. This suggests the importance of strengthening both career orientation programs and positive school climates to enhance students' career readiness.

The study's findings support major career development theories. Holland's Theory of Vocational Types is reinforced by students' strong entrepreneurial and creative tendencies, which align with Enterprising and Artistic personality types, while lower managerial competence corresponds to a weaker alignment with Conventional roles. Similarly, Super's Developmental Self-Concept Theory is affirmed through students' high self-assessment skills and the positive effects of Gratitude and optimism on career readiness, illustrating how self-concept evolves through lived experiences. Overall, the significant linkages among school experiences, career orientations, and competencies highlight the need for

supportive environments and targeted career guidance to enhance planning, skill development, and future employability.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1. For School Administrators, Heads, and Principals

School leaders are encouraged to strengthen and expand career guidance and mentorship programs to help students develop clearer career visions and align their competencies with labor market needs. Enhancing skill-building initiatives—particularly in career awareness, managerial competence, and functional/technical skills—is recommended to prepare students for diverse career pathways. Schools should continue fostering a supportive and motivating environment that cultivates Gratitude, optimism, and persistence, as these traits contribute to academic success and career readiness.

It is further recommended that administrators establish partnerships with industries, local businesses, professionals, and higher education institutions to provide students with authentic career exposure, workplace immersion, training, and internship opportunities.

4.2.2. For Teachers

Teachers should integrate career awareness and exploration activities into classroom instruction. Examples include career research tasks, labor market analyses, decision-making workshops, and entrepreneurship projects. These activities can help strengthen students' career development competencies.

Teachers are also encouraged to promote a growth mindset and resilience among students by incorporating reflective practices that enhance self-assessment, perseverance, and informed decision-making skills. Providing real-life applications of functional and technical skills within subject areas is likewise recommended to ensure students can effectively transfer classroom learning to future career contexts.

4.2.3. For Parents

Parents are advised to actively support their children in exploring career interests and options by engaging in open discussions about career pathways, strengths, aspirations, and needed skills. Reinforcing core values such as Gratitude, optimism, and persistence at home can be achieved by celebrating achievements, modeling resilience, and encouraging positive responses to challenges.

Parents may also guide their children in developing independence, creativity, and sound decision-making, helping them build confidence as they navigate future academic and career choices.

4.2.4. For Students

Students are encouraged to actively participate in career guidance activities, mentorship programs, and skill-building opportunities offered by the school. Developing a growth-oriented mindset through the consistent practice of Gratitude, resilience, and persistence can improve both academic performance and career readiness.

Students should explore various career paths, develop functional and technical skills, and seek internships or hands-on experiences to enhance employability. Participation in entrepreneurial, leadership, and innovation-focused activities is also recommended to strengthen creativity, problem-solving, managerial competence, and overall career development.

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