

Demographic Variations in Confidence and Career Skills Preferences of ABM Strand Senior High School Students

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Abstract. Student confidence affects academic engagement, while career skills preferences drive educational and professional choices, but the gap between these two crucial aspects is understudied. This study examined the confidence levels and career skills preferences of ABM strand senior high school students in Balingasag, Misamis Oriental, Philippines. Using a descriptive research design, data were collected from fifty senior high school students through an expert-validated and reliability-tested instrument. The analysis used descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings indicated that students were generally “fairly confident” in their ABM subjects, with accountancy career skills being rated higher than business and management – no significant differences in confidence level and career skills preferences when grouped by sex and year level. However, when grouped by age, significant differences emerged in both confidence level and career skills preferences, with younger students reporting lower confidence and differing career preferences compared to older peers. These results provide insights for teachers and guidance counselors in addressing confidence development and career preparation among ABM students.

Keywords: Confidence level; Career skills preferences; ABM strand; Demographic differences; Senior high school

1.0 Introduction

Personal and social factors influence high school academic success. Confidence is crucial to pupils' academic success, learning, and perseverance. Previous study shows that self-confidence boosts school performance and achievement (Uu & Mocan, 2018; *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2019; Nunes et al., 2022). Students who believe in themselves are more likely to participate in class, handle failures, and stay motivated. Despite these benefits, many students have poor confidence, which hinders involvement, resilience, and academic success. This difference highlights the need to recognize confidence as a key high school success factor.

From secondary school to college, students generally prioritize career-related abilities over academic performance. Students' adaptability and job readiness depend on these qualities. Studies imply that academic experiences, personal interests, and social circumstances influence job skill preferences. Student confidence in job choices helps them overcome field problems (Chen et al., 2023). Significant educational transfers require self-confidence and career preparation. The history-making Philippine Basic Education Act of 2013 equipped students for jobs, entrepreneurship, and further education. Senior High School (SHS) and its specific academic streams were designed to teach students career-related skills. Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) covers business basics, financial literacy, and management, offering doors to numerous occupations. Strand specialization has

benefits, but learners have challenges when linking their personal and professional aspirations to these academic courses (Mingala-Pagay et al., 2019).

Interest in high school students' confidence and career skills preference is expanding, but research is sparse. Most studies have focused on socio-economic factors rather than demographics like sex, age, and year level. Most research is from Western countries, raising issues about its application to the Philippines (Doe & Smith, 2019; Chen et al., 2021). It is important to examine Filipino students' confidence and job skills preferences, especially ABM strand students, after over a decade of K-12 reform, and whether they vary by certain groups.

This study examined ABM senior high school students' confidence and career skills preferences in Misamis Oriental. It sought to (1) describe the students' sex, age, and year level profile; (2) determine their confidence levels in ABM-related subjects; (3) assess their career skills preferences in accountancy, business, and management; and (4) determine whether significant differences exist in confidence levels and career skills preferences when students are grouped by sex, age, and year level.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study examined ABM strand senior high school students' confidence and career skills preferences using a descriptive-quantitative design. Descriptive design describes the situation, while quantitative methods statistically analyze group differences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Means, t-tests, and ANOVA were used to define student characteristics and compare demographics. This strategy allows researchers to provide objective findings to school leaders, teachers, and guidance counselors. Quantitative research has been utilized extensively to quantify student differences and guide educational decision-making (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017).

2.2 Research Locale

Two secondary schools in Balingasag, Misamis Oriental, Philippines, participated in the study. These schools were selected because they offer the ABM strand of Senior High School, which provides a background for exploring confidence and career skills preference. This study reflects the realities of provincial school students, who may have different academic pathways than urban students (Pagay et al., 2019). The researcher maximized school authority accessibility and collaboration by choosing the location. Research in familiar settings improves feasibility and ensures data validity despite time and resource restrictions (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Thus, the chosen schools offered practical and contextual advantages for the study.

2.3 Research Participants

The study included 50 Grades 11 and 12 ABM strand students from both institutions. The respondents were selected using stratified random sampling to represent sex, age, and year groups proportionally. Stratified sampling reduces bias and improves small sample representativeness (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The inclusion of younger, older, male, and female students allowed demographic differences to be investigated appropriately. Although small, t-tests and ANOVA can be used to compare group differences when data match normality and independence requirements (Field, 2018).

2.4 Research Instrument

A three-part validated questionnaire with a reliability value of .891 showed high internal consistency. The first part collected sex, age, and year level. The second section measured students' confidence using 15 items from Finch's (2004) Confidence Questionnaire, adjusted for the ABM strand. The last portion assessed career skills preferences using 15 researcher-developed items evenly divided among accountancy, business, and management domains. Many educational studies use structured questionnaires to standardize responses and reduce researcher bias (Cohen et al., 2018). Using a four-point Likert scale discouraged neutral responses and encouraged emphatic agreement or disagreement. A Likert scale is helpful in educational psychology research since it is simple and can capture complex attitudes and perceptions (Joshi et al., 2015). Field specialists validated content relevance and clarity for validity.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

School heads approved the data collection protocol as part of the ethical guidelines. To ensure good questionnaire retrieval, the researcher personally gave students the questionnaires in class after obtaining permission. Face-to-

face administration was advised for school-based survey research to reduce misconceptions and clarify instructions (Bryman, 2016). The responses were encoded and analyzed statistically. The demographic characteristics, confidence levels, and career skills preferences of students were described by descriptive statistics, while independent sample t-tests and ANOVA were used to measure demographic differences. Following educational research standards, the significance level was 0.05 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study followed educational research ethics. Students gave informed consent for voluntary participation. School officials facilitated parental consent for students under 18. Ethics stress informed consent, especially when working with school children (American Psychological Association, 2020). To protect privacy, no identifying information was gathered, and replies were examined and reported on in groups. Students were also told that they might withdraw at any time without any adverse effects on their grades. Maintaining anonymity and voluntary involvement is crucial for safeguarding the rights and welfare of participants (Israel & Hay, 2006). The data acquired was kept safe for academic purposes, with access restricted to those with permission.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Students' Profile

Table 1 shows the demographics of the ABM strand students. Out of the 50 respondents, 27 (54%) were male and 23 (46%) were female, suggesting a slight predominance of male enrollment in the strand. In terms of age, most were within the expected range for senior high school, with 16 students (32%) aged 17 and 22 students (44%) aged 18. A smaller group of respondents were younger at 16 years old (10%) or older at 19 and above (14%). The distribution by year level was nearly equal, with 26 students (52%) in Grade 11 and 24 (48%) in Grade 12.

Table 1. Profile of ABM Strand Senior High School Students (N = 50)

Profile Category	Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex at Birth	Male	27	54.0
	Female	23	46.0
Age	16	5	10.0
	17	16	32.0
	18	22	44.0
	19 and above	7	14.0
Year Level	Grade 11	26	52.0
	Grade 12	24	48.0

The ABM strand in the participating institutions was more appealing to males, as evidenced by the slight predominance of male respondents. This pattern was previously observed in studies where specific specializations attracted a greater number of one gender (Schoon & Polek, 2011). Nevertheless, it appears that gender disparities in track preferences are beginning to diminish, as both male and female students are placing a greater emphasis on the career opportunities that exist in the disciplines of accountancy, business, and management (Wang et al., 2023). In accordance with the Department of Education's (2013) standard progression, the concentration of pupils between the ages of 17 and 18 is consistent. Abella (2019) posits that the diverse trajectories of Filipino students, which are frequently influenced by delayed entry, grade repetition, or early promotion, are reflected in the presence of younger learners at 16 and senior students at 19 and above. This is significant because research suggests that confidence and career preparedness vary by age, with younger students generally reporting lower levels of self-assurance than their older counterparts (Bozgun & Kosterelioglu, 2023).

The nearly equal distribution of Grade 11 and Grade 12 students ensured balanced representation across levels, which is essential for the examination of differences in confidence and career preferences. Galotti (1999) and Omer et al. (2023) have previously suggested that senior students who are on the brink of graduation exhibit a higher degree of maturation and decisiveness in their career planning processes than their younger peers. Consolidated, the demographic profile establishes a robust foundation for comprehending the subsequent analysis. The results suggest that age is a critical factor that may impact students' confidence and career orientation, even though the sample is balanced in terms of sex and year. Consequently, the necessity of targeted support for young individuals is illustrated.

3.2 Confidence Level of ABM Strand Students

Table 2 shows the confidence level of ABM students measured through fifteen indicators. The responses show

that students' self-assessment ranged from being "Fairly Confident" to "Completely Confident," with no indicators falling below the threshold of moderate confidence. The overall mean score of 3.12 (SD = 0.95) suggests that ABM students generally hold a fair degree of confidence in their ability to succeed in their strand subjects. Among the indicators, the highest-rated statement was "I can learn my ABM subjects" (M = 3.56, SD = 0.76), interpreted as "Completely Confident." This result demonstrates that students perceive themselves as capable learners within their specialization. On the other hand, the lowest-rated item, "I keep trying to learn my ABM subjects, even if I feel nervous," recorded a mean of 2.90 (SD = 0.97), which still falls within the "Fairly Confident" range, suggesting that while nervousness and anxiety affect persistence, students maintain a resilient learning stance.

Table 2. *Confidence Level of ABM Strand Students (N = 50)*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I can learn my ABM subjects.	3.56	0.76	Completely Confident
I will improve in my ABM subjects if I continue to study.	3.16	0.68	Fairly Confident
I enjoy participating in my ABM classes.	3.12	1.00	Fairly Confident
I enjoy collaborating with others in my ABM classes.	2.96	1.16	Fairly Confident
My contribution is as important as anyone else's in my ABM subjects class.	3.26	1.07	Completely Confident
Even when ashamed or nervous, I attend ABM classes.	3.02	1.02	Fairly Confident
I participate in all ABM class activities.	3.18	0.83	Fairly Confident
In ABM, I say what I do not understand.	3.16	0.89	Fairly Confident
No matter what, I do my best in ABM.	3.02	0.98	Fairly Confident
Despite my worries, I study ABM subjects.	2.90	0.97	Fairly Confident
It is okay to make mistakes while learning my ABM subjects.	3.30	0.93	Completely Confident
I do not worry about what other students think of my work in my ABM subjects.	3.08	1.03	Fairly Confident
I do not worry about what the teacher thinks of my work in my ABM subjects.	3.04	0.92	Fairly Confident
I believe in myself as a learner of the ABM strand.	3.14	0.93	Fairly Confident
As an ABM strand student, I trust my emotions.	2.98	1.04	Fairly Confident
Total Measure	3.12	0.95	Fairly Confident

Legend: 1.0-1.75 (Not Confident at All), 1.76-2.50 (Slightly Confident), 2.51-3.25 (Fairly Confident), 3.26-4.00 (Completely Confident)

The findings support prior research that shows students' subject-specific confidence increases when they see an intense match between their ability and their academic route. Heiberger et al. (2021) observed that specialization increases efficacy and dedication, which matches ABM students' high learning confidence. However, lower scores in persistence-related tasks, such as trying while feeling nervous, reflect performance anxiety, a common adolescent issue. The American Psychological Association (2024) notes that fear and self-doubt can lower self-efficacy without support. This supports Bozgun and Kosterelioglu (2023), who found that student confidence fluctuates with emotional resilience and coping mechanisms.

ABM students have high academic confidence and embrace mistakes as part of learning. They are careful in situations that cause evaluation anxiety. This trend shows that the strand boosts confidence, but more interventions could increase students' emotional regulation, resilience, and coping skills. Positive confidence promotes academic performance, self-image, assertiveness, and criticism tolerance, according to Lone (2024). The combination of peer cooperation, mentoring, and reflective practices could boost ABM students' self-efficacy, preparing them for career and college challenges.

3.3 Career Skills Preferences of ABM Strand Students

Table 3 indicates the Career Skills Preferences of ABM Strand Students. These preferences were based on their specialization in Accounting, Business, and Management. The results show that among the three components, accountancy emerged as the most preferred career skill area (M = 3.34, SD = 0.79, Very High Preference), followed by business (M = 3.11, SD = 0.95, High Preference), and lastly management (M = 3.02, SD = 0.93, High Preference). This indicates that students feel most inclined toward accountancy-related competencies, while management-related skills received the lowest endorsement. These results resonate with earlier studies. Dayao and Almario (2017) found that accountancy is among the most preferred courses for senior high school graduates due to its perceived job stability and alignment with student abilities. Uyar et al. (2011) said students choose accountancy

because they think it offers good possibilities and complements their numerical and analytical skills. Magpulong et al. (2023) found that family influence and support systems influence business job preferences.

Table 3. *Career Skills Preferences of ABM Strand Students (N = 50)*

Career Skills Area	Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Accountancy	I enjoy mathematics and finance.	3.42	0.93	VHP
	I am interested in learning more about financial jobs.	3.36	0.60	VHP
	I think I am good at math and in money matters.	3.44	0.73	VHP
	I would be interested in learning about money jobs through internships or workshops.	3.28	0.86	VHP
	I can imagine myself enjoying a job where I handle money.	3.22	0.82	HP
	Overall Mean for Accountancy	3.34	0.79	VHP
Business	I want to learn how to start and run a business.	3.02	0.96	HP
	I enjoy leading group projects and discussions.	3.06	1.10	HP
	I believe I can communicate effectively in a business setting.	3.32	0.84	VHP
	I am curious about how products are made and sold.	3.04	1.11	HP
	I could come up with good ideas for businesses.	3.10	0.76	HP
	Overall Mean for Business	3.11	0.95	HP
Management	I like organizing events or activities.	3.16	0.93	HP
	I am interested in how businesses make decisions.	2.90	0.95	HP
	I think I can work well with others in managing things.	3.14	0.88	HP
	I want to learn about how companies manage their employees.	3.00	0.97	HP
	I can see myself making important decisions for a company someday.	2.90	0.93	HP
	Overall Mean for Management	3.02	0.93	HP

Legend: 1.0-1.75 (LP-Low Preference), 1.76-2.50 (MP-Moderate Preference), 2.51-3.25 (HP-High Preference), 3.26-4.00 (VHP-Very High Preference)

Senior high students may be less exposed to leadership and decision-making roles due to their reduced preference for management abilities. They were willing to work in teams and organize, but their low confidence in their ability to become decision-makers suggests they are still developing managerial skills. Leadership, problem-solving, and managerial simulations may be lacking in ABM program delivery. The findings show that ABM students prefer accountancy, followed by business and management. This layered preference shows that while their preferred strand efficiently cultivates a financial and business orientation, active methods are needed to balance exposure across all three domains. The department targets ABM strand graduates to have holistic skills for higher education and employment; therefore, doing so would prepare them for broader job paths.

3.4 Differences in Confidence Levels Across Demographic Profiles

In Table 4, the study compared students' scores in relation to sex, age, and year level using independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA to determine whether confidence levels vary across demographic characteristics.

Table 4. *Differences in Confidence Levels by Sex, Age, and Year Level*

Profile Variable	Group	n	Mean	Test	df	p-value	Interpretation
Sex at birth	M	27	3.19	t = 1.399	48	0.168	ns
	F	23	3.03				
Age	16	5	2.68	F = 3.94	49	0.000*	s
	17	16	3.20				
	18	22	3.16				
	19 & up	7	3.10				
Year Level	Grade 11	26	3.14	t = 0.351	48	0.727	ns
	Grade 12	24	3.10				

*p < .05, Highly Significant; ns- no significant difference; s- significant difference

The findings reveal that sex and year level did not significantly differ in students' confidence levels, while age resulted in a significant difference. As shown, male students reported slightly higher confidence ($M = 3.19$) than female students ($M = 3.03$), but this difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.168$). This aligns with Omer et al. (2023), who found no significant sex differences in self-confidence levels in school settings. However, some studies suggest that males tend to exhibit marginally higher self-assessments of ability (Doe & Smith, 2024).

For age, however, results indicated a highly significant difference ($p = 0.000$). Sixteen-year-old students reported the lowest confidence ($M = 2.68$), while those aged 17 scored highest ($M = 3.20$), followed closely by 18-year-olds ($M = 3.16$). This suggests that younger students, particularly those entering the ABM strand at 16, may struggle more with self-assurance in academic performance compared to their older peers. These findings parallel Kay, Shipman, and Riley (2018), who noted that adolescents experience fluctuations in confidence, with levels tending to stabilize and improve as they mature. In the context of this study, confidence appears to strengthen as students progress through late adolescence, possibly due to increased exposure to academic tasks and peer interactions.

Finally, year level did not significantly differentiate confidence, with Grade 11 students ($M = 3.14$) and Grade 12 students ($M = 3.10$) reporting nearly identical scores ($p = 0.727$). This outcome is consistent with Bozgun et al. (2023), who observed that confidence levels in high school students did not vary substantially between upper grade levels, except for notable differences among younger cohorts such as ninth graders. This indicates that once students are acclimated to the senior high school environment, their confidence levels remain relatively stable across year levels. Taken together, these results reveal that age is the primary demographic factor associated with significant variations in student confidence, while sex and year level exert little to no influence. This highlights the importance of designing targeted interventions for younger ABM students, who may require additional mentoring and support to build confidence during the critical early stages of their senior high journey.

3.5 Differences in Career Skills Preferences Across Demographic Profiles

To examine whether demographic characteristics influence students' career skills preferences in Accountancy, Business, and Management, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were conducted.

Table 5. *Differences in Career Skills Preferences by Sex*

Career Skills	Mean	t	df	p-value	Interpretation
Accountancy	3.35	1.00	48	0.321	ns
Business	3.11	1.58	48	0.121	ns
Management	3.02	1.09	48	0.282	ns

* $p < .05$; ns- no significant difference

The preferences of male and female respondents for accountancy ($M = 3.35$), business ($M = 3.11$), and management ($M = 3.02$) are nearly identical, as illustrated in Table 11. The career skills preferences are not influenced by gender, as evidenced by the non-significant p-values (all > 0.05). This implies that the career aspirations of the ABM strand are gender-neutral, which is consistent with the findings of Omer et al. (2023), who noted that academic and career preferences are being influenced more by opportunity structures than by gender stereotypes. Although the mean for accountancy is slightly higher, this confirms previous research that students frequently perceive accounting as a means to achieve professional prestige and stable employment (Uyar et al., 2011; Dayao & Almario, 2017).

Table 6. *Differences in Career Skills Preferences by Age*

Career Skills	Mean	F	df	p-value	Interpretation
Accountancy	3.35	2.65	49	0.000*	s
Business	3.11				
Management	3.02				

* $p < .05$, Highly Significant, s-significant difference

Table 6 indicates that career skills preferences were substantially influenced by age ($F = 2.65$, $p = 0.000$). The preference for accountancy was substantially higher ($M = 3.35$) than that of business ($M = 3.11$) and management ($M = 3.02$). This finding suggests that older students have a greater affinity for accountancy than their younger peers, which implies that career orientations may be refined by maturation and increased exposure to academic requirements. Dayao and Almario (2017) found that senior high school students prefer accountancy for its perceived professional reputation and career security. Uyar et al. (2011) further note that labor market assumptions make accountancy appealing to students because of its financial stability.

Table 7. *Differences in Career Skills Preferences by Year Level*

Career Skills	Mean	t	df	p-value	Interpretation
Accountancy	3.35	-0.75	48	0.455	ns
Business	3.11	1.41	48	0.165	ns
Management	3.02	0.56	48	0.575	ns

*p < .05, ns-no significant difference

Table 7 shows that Grade 11 and Grade 12 job skill inclinations were not significantly different (all $p > 0.05$). In grades 11 and 12, students showed similar interest in accountancy, business, and management, demonstrating that their interests remain consistent in the ABM strand. Sex showed no demographic disparity. This shows that academic exposure and age-related maturity influence vocational skills preferences more than grade level development. Hence, older students favor accountancy skills more than other demographics, indicating that age determines professional skill preferences. This discovery highlights the necessity of age-appropriate career advising for senior high school students. Younger ABM students may benefit from a better awareness of the strand's career pathways, while older students may prefer more focused accountancy-related training.

4.0 Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of developmental preparedness in academic engagement and job choice by demonstrating that ABM senior high school students' confidence and career skills preferences are more influenced by age and maturity than by gender or year level. Academic exposure affects self-belief and specialty, as older pupils were more confident and oriented toward accountancy. The study suggests a hierarchy associated with labor market prospects; accountancy is most preferred, business is somewhat valued, and management is least preferred. This can help educators and guidance counselors adapt interventions. Early career advising and confidence-building initiatives might help younger students make educated ABM strand decisions because of their lower confidence and less established preferences.

Based on these findings, career guidance may consider age-specific tactics. Exposure to all ABM-related occupations may help younger students make better decisions, while older students may benefit from accountancy and the associated route preparation. Early confidence-building treatments, including peer mentoring, structured workshops, and collaborative learning activities, can boost academic and career confidence. Also recommend practical, applied experiences to augment the curriculum. Internships, project-based learning, and business simulations may increase student appreciation of all ABM disciplines. Engagement with parents and community stakeholders may broaden students' perspectives and aid career planning. To better understand the dynamic association between age, confidence, and job preference among ABM strand students, future research should use bigger and more diverse samples and longitudinal and qualitative methods.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The author conceived the study, created the research instrument, and oversaw data collection while adhering to ethics. An academic professional supervised the research to ensure rigor and validity.

6.0 Funding

Research was conducted without external or institutional funding, using available resources to meet its goals.

7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author discloses no conflicts of interest related to research or findings.

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