

FACTORS AFFECTING RETENTION OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES OF STI GENSAN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: BASIS FOR A PROPOSED SURPASSING RETENTION PROGRAM

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Abstract: This study was carried out to determine the factors affecting the retention of Senior High School Graduates of STI Gensan during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study employed the cross-sectional survey method of research. The participants were the SHS graduates of STI College- General Santos Incorporated Batch 2020-2021. Weighted mean was used to interpret the data gathered. Results revealed that all factors affecting retention, such as Academic Integration, Financial Factors, Institutional Commitment, and Social Integration were significant indicators that made the students remain in the institution. Hence, an intervention program for surpassing retention was proposed based on the study's findings.

Keywords: Guidance and counseling, factors affecting retention, Senior High School graduates, STI Gensan, COVID-19 Pandemic, retention program, Philippines.

1. INTRODUCTION

Institutions are becoming increasingly aware of implementing a dynamic support framework to aid learner aspiration, progress, and retention. Higher education students require more support services and strategies for academic success, thus increasing institutional retention rates. Developing student success courses are one of the most effective strategies and primary motivation to keep students in the program, as demonstrated by their high retention rates. The importance of educational and social integration and perceptions of the campus environment is significantly essential in influencing retention-related decisions.

All parts of the institution must work together to develop a long-term, profoundly ingrained commitment that places the student experience at the forefront of all activities throughout the student lifecycle (Diehl, Houseworth & Grier-Reed, 2019; McCleod, 2019; Roberts, 2018).

Meanwhile, students worldwide have experienced a substantial interruption to their education during the onset of 2020 caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic. As this Pandemic continues and the situation is constantly changing, many education systems are experiencing difficulties and are facing many challenges. One is how to retain students, particularly those at risk, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and those with less than adequate financial resources to pursue higher education. Student retention continues to be a challenge in educational institutions, and

unsurprisingly, it is one of the most well-investigated occurrences in higher education. Identifying the significant factors associated with deliberate dropout, transfer, and other activities that resulted in students leaving the campus before finishing their degree has been the central focus of the study on retention (Mizrahi, 2021; OECD, 2021; St. Amour, 2021).

In like manner, students' recruitment and retention beyond their senior high school studies is also a growing concern for STI College- Gensan. The institution started tertiary education more than 20 years ago, and the Senior High School Department started five years ago. While the school was still strengthening its program to increase the enrollment rate, a pandemic struck the globe, forcing the school to stop students from attending school. Indeed, the COVID-19 Pandemic has dramatically impacted the retention rate of students during the opening of the school year in 2020. In the last academic year, 2020-2021, 501 enrollees under the Senior High School Department, and 279 graduated.

Eventually, there were only 72 students who decided to pursue and enroll in college at STI Gensan. Senior high school students are unquestionably one of the institution's most reliable markets. One issue that needs to be addressed by the school management is how to improve the institution's retention rate. This study was conducted to determine the factors affecting retention among Senior High School Graduates of STI Gensan during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Student retention is a great concern for STI since the school relies upon its operation on the number of students enrolled. The study employed the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) as the researcher thought this was a perfect fit for her research to help assess student retention.

The findings of this study would serve as a basis for a proposed intervention program to strengthen and increase the school's retention rate, which will enable the institution to continue its mission of providing knowledge through the development and delivery of superior learning systems to students. In addition, providing the highest value to students, faculty members, employees, partners, shareholders, and the community.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This study employed the Interactionalist Theory by Tinto (1975), an ideal representation that explains the importance of student retention. This theory emphasizes that academic and social integration are essential components contributing to learner aspirations for their studies and forming close associations and mutual attachments, making their college experience more enjoyable and memorable. Students who feel valued and supported by the organization where they belong will feel committed to being part of a particular group, which eventually influences their decision to continue with their course, resulting in a greater chance to finish their program.

Students needed to be integrated into academic and social integration systems to keep up and remain in their educational institutions. Their college experiences in both systems will somehow determine their initial plans and commitments that might affect their choice of whether they will continue or withdraw from the institution. This theory is notable for its approach to encouraging ongoing academic and social integration to influence students' goals and long-term institutional commitments, thus, leading students to successful completion.

Another theory supporting student involvement, which eventually leads to student retention, is the Student Involvement Theory by Astin (1984). The core belief integral to this theory includes the students' inputs, socioeconomic status, background, previous experiences, the student environment, and all the experiences students would have throughout their journey to college. It also involves students' characteristics, knowledge and accomplishments, attitudes, beliefs, and values that they carry with them even after graduating college. He believes that student involvement, which can be qualitative or quantitative, to which students' development and achievement correspond, is continuous and requires psychosocial and physical energy, which differs from student to student. Not only that, but also the proposition on student retention by Summerskill (1962), which focused on the personality attributes that include maturity, motivation, and disposition, are the primary reason why students continue their studies or drop out. Many internal and external factors can be influenced or manipulated in such a manner that it can have a positive impression on reducing student attrition. He stated that the students' tendency to drop out or leave college has resulted from complicated reasons. Psychological, familial, social, and economic issues are some reasons the likelihood of discontinuing schooling is attributed. He also cited those internal and external factors that may influence the student's behavior, attitude, and satisfaction.

In addition, Strayhorn (2008) stated that higher education institutions are social organizations that can influence the charter, which he refers to as values, personality needs, and social roles. Students will most likely be more engaged in a group and accept its different values if they belong in an organization with peers who also embrace the same values and act in ways

that demonstrate them. He also suggested that because of the idea that if a student can finish and graduate from college, he or she will have the advantage of getting privileges and prestige over those who will not, which strengthens student retention.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

Student retention is vital to any institution like STI because it gives assurance to survive and continue to provide learning to students. The retention effort should be regarded as a substantial school-wide issue that needs to be considered by school officials seriously. Therefore, it is relevant for the institution to help determine the different elements that affect student retention. There are undeniably measures or strategies that could be taken necessary to address this issue. In any instance, the school will identify the factors affecting the retention of SHS Graduates given today's crisis amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic. The researcher conceptualized that this study is crucial to increasing the school's retention rate. As an institution, this will serve as a guide for future development and improvements to student retention.

In this study, the intervention program was formulated to develop, strengthen, and improve the school's retention rate, particularly in those programs with the lowest retention percentage. This initiative will also, in a way, assist the school in increasing the enrollment rate. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study. It has shown that the upper box depicted the issue under investigation. Hence, the factors affecting the retention among SHS graduates of STI during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The lower box presents the proposed intervention program to address the problem later when all the data is gathered and analyzed. Since an intervention program is a kind of resolution to aid retention problems and a necessary process to reduce potential dropouts, the institution needs to take into account how to come about this approach to address retention issues.

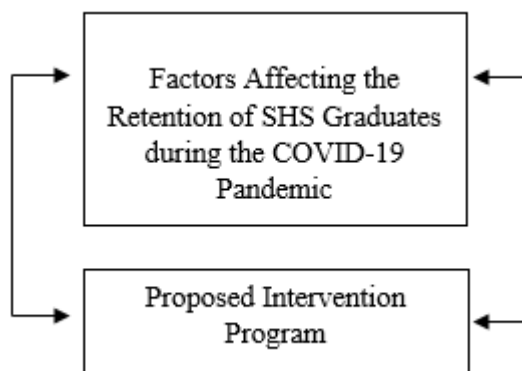


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework of the Study

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To determine the prevailing factors affecting retention of SHS graduates of STI Gensan.
2. To determine what intervention program can be proposed based on the findings of the study.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study employed the cross-sectional survey method of research. The cross-sectional survey research design is the most popular survey research form used in the educational setting. This design is convenient to use since administering the survey and collecting data or information can be done in a brief span of time (Creswell, 2012). In a cross-sectional survey design, the participants are chosen based on the study's inclusion and exclusion criteria. After the researcher identifies the participants from the target population, the researcher then goes along with the study to evaluate the vulnerability and its result. The outcome and exposure are then measured simultaneously, and the researcher can study the relationship between these variables (Setia, 2016).

Moreover, the cross-sectional research design is a technique in which the researcher analyzes the existing condition in a population at a given moment. Here, the researcher gathers data from a small portion of the target population to get the particular details or information about the sampled components of the population as a whole instead of using the absolute

or complete enumeration to get information from the target population. Frequently, the components in the sample survey are chosen and determined randomly to make a conclusion about the whole population. Researchers often use the cross-sectional survey method in various fields (Zheng, 2015). Using the cross-sectional approach, the researcher wanted to examine and look at the different factors affecting the retention of SHS graduates. This study determined the factors affecting retention among the senior high school graduates of STI College Gensan during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted at STI College- Gen. Santos, Inc. It is a franchised school operated under STI Education Services Group with head office at STI Academic Center, Ortigas-Cainta, Rizal. It started on April 7, 1995, as a merely Tutorial Center for operating computers and is spearheaded by the Rotarians. After a year, it started offering 2-year programs under the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), where Associate in Computer Technology was the first program to be delivered. In the following year, STI Gensan traversed an extra mile and offered a college course, the Bachelor of Science in Computer Science. The succeeding years meant continuous growth for STI Gensan. It soared higher and higher in its pursuit of providing quality education to the youth. Now it has diversified into ICT-enhanced programs in Information Technology, Business and Management, Tourism and Hospitality Management, and Education. Since face-to-face classes are still not yet permissible when this study was carried out, the respondents were given a survey questionnaire through a link to MS Form. The specific location where the study was conducted is located at STI College- Gen. Santos, Inc., Jose Catolico Sr. Avenue, Lagao, General Santos City, Philippines. The City of General Santos, formerly Dadiangas, also known as the Tuna Capital of the Philippines, is located in the southernmost part of the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. It is a 1st class, highly urbanized city and the center for commerce and industry in Region XII, composed of South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and General Santos City (SOCCSKSARGEN).

2.3 Research Respondents

The respondents in this study were the 72 first-year college students of STI College Gensan from different courses who graduated from Senior High School last school year, 2020-2021. This study used a stratified sampling technique. This kind of method is used in sample surveys. The components of the target population were separated into various groups. Within each group, the elements of the items are identical to each other in chosen attributes of significance to the survey (Parsons, 2017). In this sampling design, the researcher selected all first-year college students of STI Gensan who graduated from SHS last school year, 2020-2021. There were 72 SHS graduates; however, only 64 responded to the survey, which means that 64 respondents were utilized. Weighted mean was used to determine the factors affecting the retention among the SHS Graduates of STI Gensan.

3. RESULTS

Table 2 showed the overall obtained grand mean of 4.14, 4.12, 3.84, 4.08, 4.05, 3.93, 3.95, and 5.00 for BSCS, BSIT, BSBA, BSA, BSHM, BSTM, BMMA, and BTLED students, respectively.

Table 2: Prevailing Factors Affecting Retention of SHS Graduates

Indicator	BSCS	BSIT	BSBA	BSA	BSHM	BSTM	BMMA	BTLED
A.								
Academic Integration	4.30 Often	4.22 Often	4.36 Often	4.47 Often	4.33 Often	4.01 Often	4.29 Often	5.00 Always
B.								
Financial Factors	4.00 Often	3.84 Often	3.48 Some-times	3.86 Often	3.80 Often	3.63 Often	3.47 Some-times	5.00 Always
C.								
Institutional Commitment	4.10 Often	4.14 Often	3.80 Often	3.86 Often	4.10 Often	3.99 Often	3.82 Often	5.00 Always
D.								
Social Integration	4.15 Often	4.28 Often	3.72 Often	4.13 Often	3.96 Often	4.12 Often	4.19 Often	5.00 Always
Grand Mean	4.14 Often	4.12 Often	3.84 Often	4.08 Often	4.05 Often	3.93 Often	3.95 Often	5.00 Always

The identified factors affecting the retention of the respondents served as Academic Integration, Financial Factors, Institutional Commitment, and Social Integration were prevailing factors that convinced the respondents to stay at STI. The findings implied that these factors were most of the time, if not always, affecting them; hence, they are loyal to their Alma Mater. The study considered 64 respondents who were from the following Bachelor's Degrees: Multimedia Arts (BMMA), Accountancy (BSA), Business Administration (BSBA), Computer Science (BSCS), Hotel Management (BSHM), Information Technology (BSIT), Tourism Management (BSTM), and Technical and Livelihood Education (BTLED). Most respondents were from the Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management course since they have the most significant number of enrollees. The least was from the Bachelor in Technical and Livelihood Education.

All responses were considered and separated properly by courses based on the data collected. The gathered data revealed that among the programs, respondents from BSTM got the lowest mean score of 4.01 under the indicator Academic Integration. This factor often affected their decision to stay in the institution most of the time. Although, the mean scores of other programs, such as BSCS (4.30), BSIT (4.22), BSBA (4.36), BSA (4.47), BSHM (4.33), and BMMA (4.29), also suggested that this factor often affected their purpose in staying with the institution since the items under Academic Integration were most of the time applicable to them. Except for BTLED, which got the highest mean score of 5.00, this factor always affected his/her decision to stay in the same school since there was only one respondent under this program.

While indicator B, Financial Factors, showed that, among the programs, respondents from BMMA (3.47) and BSBA (3.48) got the lowest scores, which means that sometimes this factor affected their decision to stay in the institution. This factor applied to them, but not most of the time. However, the results from other programs such as BSCS (4.00), BSIT (3.84), BSA (3.86), BSHM (3.80), and BSTM (3.63) also suggested that this factor often affected their decision to remain in the institution as their scores appeared that the items under Financial Factors were most of the time applied to them. Not including the BTLED program, since there was only one respondent from this course, it has the highest mean score of 5.00, which means that this factor always affected his/her decision to stay in the institution.

The result under indicator C, Institutional Commitment, revealed that respondents from BSBA got the lowest mean score of 3.80, which means that the item often affected their option to remain in the institution most of the time. While scores from other programs such as BSCS (4.10), BSIT (4.14), BSA (3.86), BSHM (4.10), BSTM (3.99), and BMMA (3.82) also indicated that this factor often affected their decision to stay in the institution most of the time. Still, not to include the BTLED program, since there was only one respondent from this course, it has the highest mean score of 5.00, which means that this factor always affected his/her decision to persist in the institution all the time.

The last indicator, Social Integration, showed that the BSBA course got the lowest mean score of 3.72, which means that this factor often affected their decision to continue in the institution most of the time. Also, other programs such as BSCS (4.15), BSIT (4.28), BSA (4.13), BSHM (3.96), BSTM (4.12), and BMMA (4.19) revealed the same interpretation that this factor often affected their decision to remain in the institution most of the time. Except for BTLED, since there was only one respondent, it got the highest mean score of 5.00, which implied that all items under Social Integration always affected his/her decision to stay in the institution all the time.

Finally, the grand mean score from all indicators revealed that the BSBA program got the lowest score of 3.84, which connotes that all factors were often crucial in their decision to continue their schooling in the same institution, which affected the respondents most of the time. While other courses from BSCS (4.14), BSIT (4.12), BSA (4.08), BSHM (4.05), BSTM (3.93), and BMMA (3.95) also indicated that these factors were all important in their decision to remain in the institution as these were most of the time applicable to them. Not to include the BTLED program, since there was only one respondent from this course, the grand mean score was 5.00, which means that these factors always affected his/her decision to stay in the institution all the time.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Factors Affecting Retention in Terms of Academic Integration

In the survey result, most respondents were consistent in their responses that these factors were relevant in their decision to stay in the institution as they answered to most of the items: "Often," if not "Always." Among these items, item number five was the most favorable or the prevailing one for students since this has the most consistent response from BSCS (4.74), BSA (4.67), and BTLED (5.00). They said they were comfortable with STI's modern school facilities as they answered this

item "Always," which means that this factor affects them all the time. To sum it up, the total mean score from each program still falls on "Often," meaning that most of the time, the item applies to them. Also, the BTLED got a mean score of 5.00, described as "Always." It means that all items were affecting his/her decision to stay in the institution all the time.

This was based on the findings of Hamouda & Abdella (2018), Sanchez (2020); Shasavar & Sudzina (2017); Webb, Wynnes & Cotton (2017) that the most essential elements and indicators affecting student satisfaction are teaching and learning quality. When students are satisfied with their school experience in terms of school settings and student services, their motivation, recruitment, and retention improve. Institutions must also consider how their teaching contributes to students' learning and enjoyment, including curriculum design, teaching methods, student assistance, and available technologies. While student retention and engagement are closely connected, committed, engaged, and involved, students have the best chance to complete their education regardless of the factors.

4.2 Factors Affecting Retention in Terms of Financial Factors

All factors in this area were relevant to students' decision to remain in the institution. As indicated in the survey result, students from BSCS (4.50), BSA (4.67), and BTLED (5.00), respectively. They were given opportunities through different scholarships, and financial aid programs for STI as their score falls on "Always," which implies that this item was affecting their retention all the time. However, BSBA (3.20) students and BMMA (3.25) said this is less than most of the time affecting them. The same applies to item number two for students from BSBA (3.50), BSA (3.33), BSHM (3.31), BSTM (3.30), and BMMA (3.23), where they were less than most of the time could afford the things they need in school. Nonetheless, the total score from each program indicates that all items applied most of the time to them. Except for BTLED, which score showed that all items apply all the time since there was only one respondent in this program.

According to the findings of Eichelberger, Gerbing & Gillpatrick (2019); Haverila, Haverila & McLaughlin (2020); Millea, Wills, Elder & Molina (2018), students' financial situations might impact their ability to continue their education. The financial difficulties that students and their families confront because of their financial situations might negatively affect society since the general community does not recognize the potential skills of the non-degree holder. It is either incurring debt or spending their money on education but still failing to get a degree. Financial concerns are a significant factor in students' decision to leave school. Studies suggest that improving students' financial knowledge and skills might help them make better decisions to continue and remain in school.

4.3 Factors Affecting Retention in Terms of Institutional Commitment

Among the factors under this area, item number three (learned that students who graduated at STI landed good jobs) was the most favorable or prevailing factor for BSIT (4.50) and BTLED (5.00) students, which they believed that the item was affecting them all the time. On the other hand, respondents from BSBA (3.80) believed that less than most of the time, they can develop themselves through institutionalized student development programs and academic and skills competitions like Tagisan ng Talino at Sining, National Youth Convention, and others, such as their response on this item falls on "Sometimes." Nevertheless, in general, all factors under Institutional Commitment were important in the students' decision to remain in the institution as presented in the total score, wherein the items apply most of the time to them. Except for BTLED (5.00), which score on all items falls on "Always," which means that the item is affecting his/her retention all the time since there was only one respondent in this program.

The results are also related to the findings of Cooper (2021); Garcia, Garza & Yeaton-Hromada (2019); Sanchez (2020); Spitzig (2021). It stated that students who feel they are considered part of the academic activities and social networks perform better academically and are more likely to remain in school. In addition, Students' enthusiasm and endeavor throughout activities will positively impact their retention and persistence in school.

4.4 Factors Affecting Retention in Terms of Social Integration

The survey result shows that among the items under this area, item number five (I believe that STI has developed specialized extracurricular programs that allow students to exhibit their talents inside and outside their respective courses) was the most favorable for students from BSCS (4.50) and BTLED (5.00). Their score in this item described as "Always" means that this item is affecting them all the time. However, students under BSBA (4.20) said that not most of the time, they feel a sense of connectedness with the others like faculty, students, and staff in the institution. Overall, the score from each program indicates that the items apply to students most of the time. Except for BTLED (5.00), the total score indicates that all items apply all the time since there was a lone respondent in this program.

As stated in the findings of Shahsavar & Sudzina (2017) and Hamouda & Abdella (2018), they claimed that students' satisfaction and a sense of belongingness to a particular organization or group in school significantly impact how students perceive success in the institution. Students' relatedness to others and integration or how they blend into the school community is one of the essential elements of student happiness and retention that institutions need to consider to keep their students. In the same way, the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning delivery and how well the teachers take part in their students' lives are among the most critical elements of student satisfaction. Schools must assess how curriculum design, teaching techniques, student aid, and accessible technology contribute to students' learning and enjoyment. Students with a positive school experience are more likely to stay and complete their education at the same institution. In addition, when students are happy with their knowledge and experiences in college, their motivation, recruitment, and retention improve.

Finally, according to Shahsavar & Sudzina (2017); Hamouda & Abdella (2018); Millea, Wills, Elder & Molina (2018); Eichelberger, Gerbing & Gillpatrick (2019); Haverila, Haverila & McLaughlin (2020); Sanchez (2020), and Spitzig (2021), academic and social integration have a significant role on why students remain in the institution. Students who are committed, engaged, involved, and feel recognized in the organization have a greater chance to remain and finish their studies. Not only that but also, the institution must have a better grasp on the different factors that affect student retention. Understanding these factors could help the institution develop strategies, create programs, and build student support services, making the student experience enjoyable and memorable, leading to a higher retention rate.

4.5 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are made:

1. The prevailing factors, which are the Academic Integration, Financial Factors, Institutional Commitment, and Social Integration affecting the retention of SHS graduates of STI Gensan, were all essential indicators for students' decision to remain in the institution, as reflected in the survey result.

4.6 Recommendation

The following recommendations are given based on the findings and conclusion of this study.

1. The school administration may continue developing local programs, strengthening academic and social support, and continuously improving school services such as curriculum and instruction, faculty development, student services, organization, and administration. In addition, strengthen the relationship between the local government and other private institutions that provide scholarship grants to students and continue local school initiatives in providing grant-in-aid programs for students. This way, financially challenged students will be given chances to pursue their education.
2. Faculty members may be more creative and innovative in preparing instructional materials. They may use the appropriate and effective teaching strategies to make students' learning experience enjoyable and, most importantly, learn practical skills and valuable knowledge.
3. The Guidance office may conduct regular academic advising and career planning programs to help students, especially those at risk of retention, develop their competencies in self-realization, educational exploration, and occupational considerations, thus, overcoming their academic difficulties and motivating them to finish college.
4. The Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) Department may organize different programs like training and seminar- workshops to create opportunities for students to develop their skills, make social connections, and improve cooperativeness.
5. The Student Affairs office may strengthen student involvement in different school activities to encourage them to be more active and participative. Participating in various extracurricular activities will allow students to improve in areas that do not include academics. It may also encourage them to build their confidence and help lessen their apprehensiveness about possible academic demands.
6. The proponent would like to recommend implementing the proposed surpassing retention program to help students achieve their academic goals, eventually helping the school attain a higher retention rate and improving the percentage of enrollment.

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