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Factors Affecting Senior High Students' Acceptance of Dentistry Programs in Lucena City's Private Schools: Basis for Policy Formulation

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Abstract

Aim: The research investigated the factors influencing graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City to pursue dentistry.

Methodology: Quantitative methods were employed, utilizing purposive sampling and a Raosoft calculator to administer a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire covered aspects such as academic readiness, aspirations, socioeconomic backgrounds, and awareness of dentistry.

Results: Pearson's correlation test revealed a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .107$, $p = .017$) between influencing factors and acceptance of dentistry programs. This result underscored the interdependence of these variables in students' decisions.

Conclusion: The study's insights suggest several targeted strategies for educational institutions and policymakers. These include gender-specific outreach initiatives, tailored support programs based on income levels, enhancements in career guidance services, and the establishment of a dedicated Dentistry Information Center. These strategies aim to better support prospective dentistry students from senior high school.

Keywords: Senior High School, Private School, Dentistry Program, Acceptance Factors

INTRODUCTION

Dental professionals are essential in promoting oral health, addressing community needs, and contributing to global well-being. Their expertise extends beyond treating dental diseases to include preventive care and health education, critical in mitigating oral health issues before they become severe. By advocating for proper oral hygiene practices, dental professionals help reduce common problems such as cavities and gum disease, which can have broader health implications if left untreated (Shmarina et al., 2023; Mills et al., 2023).

Globally, dental professionals are increasingly recognized for their contribution to community health. They engage in outreach programs, school-based initiatives, and public health campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of oral hygiene. These efforts are particularly significant in underserved areas where access to dental care is limited (Molete et al., 2024; Casamassimo & Flaitz, 2013).

Moreover, dental professionals' role is crucial in addressing the interconnectedness between oral health and systemic conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and respiratory infections. By managing oral health, they help reduce the risk of these chronic conditions, thereby enhancing overall health outcomes. Dental professionals are integral to the healthcare system, contributing to a holistic approach to health and well-being that benefits individuals and communities worldwide (Yonel & Sharma, 2017).

In the Asian context, the significance of dental professionals is underscored by the diverse challenges and needs across different countries. Rapid urbanization, varying levels of access to healthcare, and cultural differences in health practices all influence the approach to dental care. Countries like Japan and South Korea have advanced dental care systems and emphasize preventive measures. At the same time, other nations may face barriers such as limited access to dental services and lower public awareness about oral health (Takahashi et al., 2020).

Shifting the focus to the Philippine setting, dental professionals operate within a unique landscape influenced by socioeconomic factors and healthcare policies. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) regulates dental education, ensuring standardized practices across national dental schools. The Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) further maintains consistency in dentistry and its various specializations. Influenced by American

530



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models, Philippine dental education has evolved to include the Board of Dental Examiners (BDE) and the Dentist Licensure Exam (Dalanon, 2018).

Although dental health services have historically been a low priority in the Philippines, recent initiatives have spotlighted preventive dental programs. School-based oral health initiatives address prevalent issues such as dental care and periodontal disease among Filipino children, emphasizing the need for proactive preventive measures (Alazmah, 2017). In this context, dental professionals are crucial in bridging the gap between healthcare access and community health needs, striving to enhance oral and overall health outcomes nationwide.

In the context of Lucena City's private schools, a critical knowledge gap exists regarding the factors influencing SHS students' acceptance into dentistry programs. This research seeks to uncover these factors, providing insights to bolster acceptance rates and enhance dental education and healthcare practices in the Philippines.

Motivated by the imperative to align educational programs with student aspirations, especially in specialized fields like dentistry, this study investigates the factors shaping acceptance into dentistry programs among graduating SHS students in Lucena City's private schools. The findings aim to inform educational institutions, policymakers, and career counselors, guiding the development of targeted strategies to support students in transitioning smoothly into dentistry programs and achieving success in their academic and professional endeavors. Ultimately, this research seeks to optimize educational practices that align with the career aspirations of high school students pursuing dentistry.

Objectives

The research investigated the factors influencing graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City to pursue dentistry.

Specifically, it addressed the following key questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1 Gender and
 - 1.2 Socioeconomic background (Annual Household Income)?
2. What are the primary factors influencing the acceptance of graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City towards pursuing a dentistry program in terms of:
 - 2.1 Academic preparedness;
 - 2.2 Career guidance and counseling services; and
 - 2.3 Parental Support?
3. What is the level of respondents' acceptance towards pursuing a dentistry program in terms of:
 - 3.1 perceived usefulness;
 - 3.2 perceived ease of use; and
 - 3.3 Behavioral Intention (contextual support)?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the influencing factors and the acceptance of graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City towards pursuing a dentistry program?
5. What implications arise for educational institutions and policymakers from this study on factors influencing the acceptance of senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City towards pursuing a dentistry program?

Theoretical Underpinning

The Technology Acceptance Model (T.A.M.) is a well-established theoretical framework for understanding how individuals adopt and accept new technologies. Initially developed by Fred Davis in the 1980s, TAM posits that perceived usefulness and ease of use are primary determinants of an individual's intention to use a technology, influencing actual usage behavior. Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which a person believes that using a particular technology will enhance their job performance or achieve their goals, while perceived ease of use relates to the degree to which using the technology is perceived as effortless or free from effort. TAM has been widely applied across various domains to study technology adoption, including educational settings where it has been used to explore students' acceptance of academic programs or platforms.

In the context of the study on graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City toward pursuing a dentistry program, TAM provides a structured approach to understanding students' perceptions of the dentistry program as akin to adopting a new technology. By assessing perceived usefulness (such as benefits for future careers and personal development) and perceived ease of use (including aspects like application processes and academic requirements), the study aims to predict students' behavioral intention to enroll in the dentistry



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program. This application of TAM helps uncover the cognitive processes underlying students' acceptance of the dentistry program and informs strategies to enhance enrollment rates.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), on the other hand, complements TAM by focusing on broader psychological factors influencing career decision-making. Developed by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett, SCCT emphasizes the role of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals in career development. According to SCCT, individuals' career choices are influenced by their beliefs in their capabilities to perform tasks (self-efficacy), their expectations about the outcomes of their actions (outcome expectations), and their career goals. Additionally, SCCT integrates social and environmental factors such as family influences, peer relationships, and mentorship into its framework, highlighting their impact on shaping career aspirations and decisions.

In the context of the dentistry program study, SCCT offers a deeper understanding of why students may perceive the dentistry program as helpful or easy to pursue; beyond the immediate technological aspects addressed by TAM, SCCT suggests that students' perceptions and decisions regarding career paths, including dentistry, are influenced by their confidence in their abilities, their expectations of success in the field, and their personal career goals. By incorporating SCCT alongside TAM, the study gains a comprehensive perspective on the multifaceted factors driving students' acceptance and intention to pursue a dentistry program, thereby enriching the understanding of career decision-making processes in educational contexts.

The study justifies employing the Technology Acceptance Model (T.A.M.) to examine graduating senior high school students' acceptance of a dentistry program in Lucena City's private schools. TAM, known for its application in understanding technology adoption, assesses perceived usefulness, ease of use, and behavioral intention regarding the program. This approach aims to uncover influences on students' decisions, including career prospects, personal growth, and practical considerations. Focusing on local private school seniors highlights contextual factors shaping acceptance and underscores the need for targeted educational strategies. TAM ensures systematic exploration, providing insights into the cognitive processes driving students' acceptance and intention to pursue dentistry (mseuf.edu.ph, n.d.; Academia.edu, n.d.; pidswswebs.pids.gov.ph, n.d.; Scribd, n.d.)

Conceptual Framework

The study "Factors Affecting Senior High Students' Acceptance of Dentistry Programs in Lucena City's Private Schools: Basis for Policy Formulation" is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (T.A.M.) and incorporates ideas from educational psychology and career decision-making theories. The Technology Acceptance Model (T.A.M.) provides a framework for understanding how individuals accept and adopt new technologies. In this study, the Technology Acceptance Model (T.A.M.) is a theoretical framework for exploring the acceptance of a dentistry program as a career choice. The framework also integrates educational psychology to consider factors such as academic self-efficacy, perceived educational value, and personal interest in dentistry. Additionally, theories of career decision-making contribute by examining the influence of career guidance, parental influence, and societal perceptions on the dental profession. The study's comprehensive nature ensures a thorough examination of the various factors contributing to the decision-making process of graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City when considering pursuing a dentistry program. By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between technological, educational, and psychosocial factors that influence career choices in dentistry within this particular demographic.

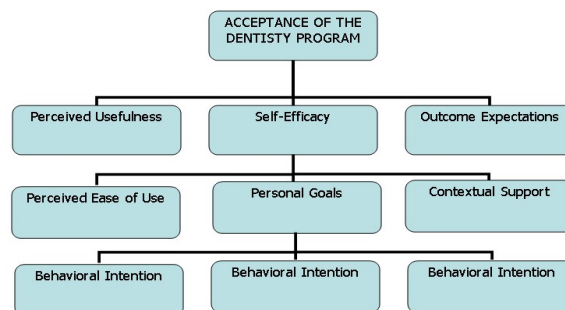


Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework Diagram



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The central focus of this conceptual framework is on the acceptance of a dentistry program among senior high school students. The Technology Acceptance Model (T.A.M.) assesses students' perceptions of the program's usefulness for their educational and career goals and their views on the ease of pursuing it. Concurrently, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) explores students' self-efficacy beliefs, personal goals in dentistry, outcome expectations, and the contextual supports influencing their career decisions. Arrows between these constructs illustrate how perceived usefulness and ease of use from TAM contribute to students' behavioral intentions to enroll in the dentistry program. In contrast, SCCT constructs like self-efficacy, personal goals, outcome expectations, and contextual supports further shape these intentions. This integrated approach provides a structured understanding of the factors driving students' acceptance and intention to pursue dentistry, underscoring the theoretical underpinnings of the study and offering a clear depiction of its conceptual framework.

Hypotheses

The researchers formulated and tested the following hypotheses using a 0.05 significance level.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the influencing factors and the acceptance of graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City towards pursuing a dentistry program.

Ha: There is a significant relationship between the influencing factors and the acceptance of graduating senior high school students into private schools in Lucena City to pursue a dentistry program.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive design, which allowed for direct participant responses. The data were examined and interpreted using descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, percentages, and Pearson correlation.

Locale of the Study

The study was based in Lucena City and focused on graduating senior high school students from local private schools. The geographical backdrop for this extensive study was Lucena City. The study aimed to investigate the various elements that influenced students' decisions to pursue a dental degree and to understand the factors that shaped senior high school students' preferences and choices for enrolling in a dentistry program at private schools in Lucena City. Known as the "Cocopalms City of the South," Lucena City is a major fishing port and a regional hub for wholesale distribution. The city is home to coconut oil mills that produce essential household products such as cooking oil, soap, lard, margarine, and oil-based medicines. Committed to transparent governance, the City Government of Lucena aims to enhance investment opportunities and improve the quality of health and education.

Lucena City boasts 18 higher educational institutions in the Philippines, including 16 private and two public schools. These institutions play a crucial role in serving not only the residents of Lucena City but also those from neighboring cities, municipalities, and provinces. The interconnectedness of Lucena City's economic activities, governance principles, and educational landscape contributes to the rich context of the study on factors influencing the acceptance of graduating senior high school students toward pursuing a dentistry program.

Population and Sampling

The study focused on senior high school students enrolled in private institutions in Lucena City, explicitly targeting Calayan Educational Foundation, Sacred Heart College, St. Anne College, Tong Ho Institute, Mary Hill College, and STI. Lucena, Holy Rosary, and Enverga University. Purposive sampling was employed to capture insights into acceptance factors among graduating senior high school students considering a dentistry program. This method ensured the inclusion of individuals directly involved in career decision-making related to dentistry, facilitating a detailed exploration of their perceptions, attitudes, and motivations. Purposive sampling also enabled efficient data collection from a diverse yet manageable sample, enhancing the study's relevance to similar educational settings. A representative sample of 500 respondents was selected based on their relevance to the study objectives, employing the sample proportion approach and using Raosoft's calculator to determine the required sample size. The tool considers the estimated population size of graduating senior high school students in Lucena City's private schools, a



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95% confidence level, and a margin of error to ensure the sample adequately represents the population, with adjustments made to maintain precision in survey findings as needed.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection process for this comprehensive study on the factors influencing the acceptance of graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City involved a systematic approach. A structured questionnaire was developed using the theoretical frameworks of the Technology Acceptance Model (T.A.M.) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). The questionnaire included items designed to measure students' perceptions of the dentistry program's usefulness and ease of use, aligned with TAM, their self-efficacy beliefs, personal goals in dentistry, outcome expectations, and contextual support, aligned with SCCT. The questionnaire was piloted to ensure clarity and validity before being administered to the target population. Data collection occurred through face-to-face surveys conducted in private schools across Lucena City, providing a representative sample of graduating senior high school students. After addressing ethical considerations and securing institutional review approval, the study employed a purposive sampling technique to select a diverse sample from several prominent private schools, such as Calayan Educational Foundation, Sacred Heart College, St. Anne College, Tong Ho Institute, Mary Hill College, and STI. Lucena, Holy Rosary, and Enverga University. Researchers developed a thorough, structured questionnaire comprising demographic information, academic preparedness, career advice, parental support, socioeconomic situation, attitude, intention, and perception. They conducted a pilot test to refine it. Researchers conducted a data collection process utilizing online and offline approaches, with carefully scheduled sessions to avoid disrupting academic activity. The study aims to evaluate, report, and thoroughly document the results in a comprehensive research report once completed, using statistical tools and quantitative analysis methodologies.

Instruments

The research instrument used in this study consisted of a custom-designed questionnaire, which included statements formulated based on insights gathered from the reviewed literature. The instrument underwent meticulous procedures, including instrument validation, pilot testing, and reliability and validity assessment. The instrument was designed to address the research problem and consisted of four distinct parts. The first section focused on the demographic profile of respondents, including their gender and socioeconomic background.

The second section discussed the main factors influencing the decision to graduate senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City to pursue a dentistry program. These factors included academic preparedness, career guidance and counseling services, parental support, and socioeconomic status.

The third section focused on the extent to which respondents accepted the idea of pursuing a dentistry program, considering their attitudes, intentions, and perceptions. The last section addressed the implications for educational institutions and policymakers from this study on factors influencing the acceptance of senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City towards pursuing a dentistry program.

Data Analysis

This study utilized a multifaceted approach that included both quantitative and qualitative methods. The main goal was to interpret and extract meaningful insights from the collected data. The analysis involved various methodologies, including descriptive statistics to summarize critical data characteristics, frequency analysis to scrutinize categorical variables, and correlation analysis using Pearson's coefficient to explore relationships among variables, particularly those related to academic preparedness, career guidance, parental support, and socioeconomic status influencing acceptance. Additionally, cross-tabulation examined the relationships between demographic variables, such as gender, socioeconomic background, and acceptance. Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings provided a comprehensive interpretation, ensuring a holistic understanding of the factors influencing acceptance.

Furthermore, data visualization through charts and graphs enhanced interpretation and accessibility. The ultimate goal was to draw meaningful conclusions by interpreting results in the context of research questions, discussing implications, and deriving comprehensive findings from the combined quantitative and qualitative analyses. This approach provided a detailed examination of the factors influencing the acceptance of graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City who were pursuing a dentistry program.



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Statistical Treatment

The thorough statistical analysis of the study "Exploring the Factors Influencing the Acceptance of Graduating Senior High School Students in Private Schools in Lucena City Towards Pursuing a Dentistry Program" entailed a detailed series of quantitative analyses to reveal relationships, patterns, and trends within the gathered data. The objective was to summarize essential data characteristics, including demographic information, academic preparedness, and socioeconomic status, starting with descriptive statistics. This study accomplished its goals through mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and range measures. When conducting frequency analysis, the researchers examined responses for categorical variables such as gender and socioeconomic background, using frequency tables and charts. Subsequently, correlation analysis utilized Pearson's coefficient to explore the strength and direction of relationships, specifically focusing on the correlation between influencing factors such as academic preparedness, career guidance, parental support, socioeconomic status, and acceptance. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) is particularly suited for testing relationships between continuous variables, making it ideal for exploring associations among factors like academic preparedness, career guidance, parental support, socioeconomic status, and acceptance of a dentistry program. Unlike first-generation statistical tools that may be limited in scope or assumptions, Pearson's r is robust in assessing linear relationships and providing a quantitative measure of the strength and direction of associations between variables. This tool makes it appropriate for analyzing how variations in one factor relate to changes in another. It offers insights into which factors may significantly influence acceptance behaviors among graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City. Data visualization techniques, such as charts and graphs, enhanced the interpretation and accessibility of significant findings. Integrating these quantitative methods led to a comprehensive analysis of the factors that impact the acceptance of graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City. This undertaking offered valuable insights for educators and policymakers.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, researchers ensured compliance with all research protocols involving ethics to protect all individuals and institutions involved. The study involved obtaining necessary approvals from relevant authorities, ensuring participant confidentiality by anonymizing their identities and data, and securing informed consent from respondents before administering the survey questionnaire.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile:

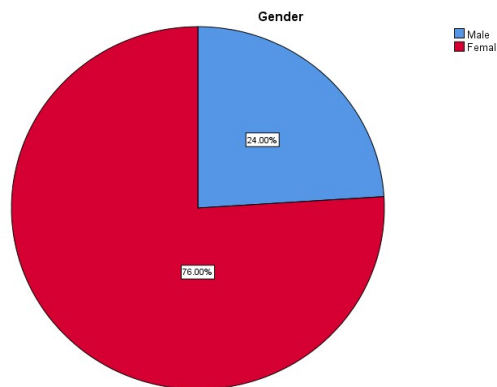


Figure 2: The Demographic Profile of Respondents in terms of gender

Figure 2 illustrates the results of a study that examined the gender distribution among a sample of 500 participants.

The results showed that most participants identified as female, comprising 76.0% of the samples, while male participants accounted for 24.0%. The total sample size was 500 individuals.



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Solana (2022) reported a notable surge in the female student population within dentistry programs, indicating a consistent upward trend in recent years. The data from 2021 underscored this trend, revealing that women constituted an impressive 56% of first-year dental students in the United States. This result represented the highest proportion ever recorded, highlighting a significant and progressive shift in the gender composition of dental student cohorts. Building on Zapata's (2022) findings, the landscape of dental education continued to evolve. In 2022, there was a substantial increase in the presence of female students, with a remarkable 63% comprising the first-year dental student cohort at specific institutions. This trend underscored a continued and noteworthy progression toward greater gender diversity within dental education. Cheng (2023) revealed a global phenomenon by highlighting that the observed trend of increased female representation in dental education was not exclusive to the United States but resonated across international borders. In Taiwan, the study highlighted a significant shift from historical gender norms, showing that the percentage of female dental graduates has surpassed that of their male counterparts. This finding further accentuated the broader, cross-cultural shift toward greater gender inclusivity within dental education.

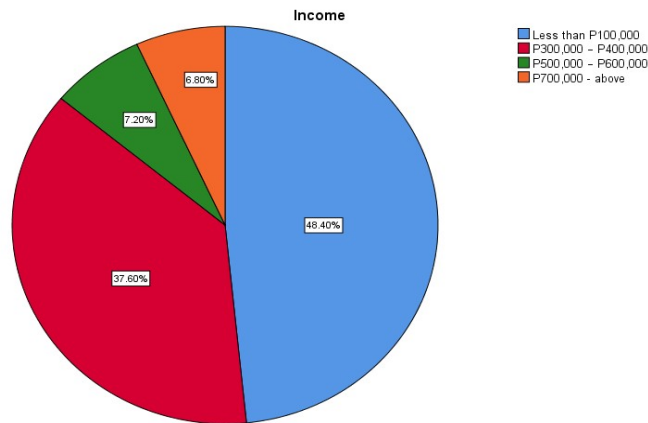


Figure 3: The Demographic Profile of Respondents in terms of Family Annual Income

The second most common income range was P300,000 – P400,000, representing 37.6%. The income distribution within the sample provided valuable insights into the economic diversity of the surveyed population.

Kailembo (2018) underscored a nuanced relationship between annual income and engagement with dentistry programs. The research delved into the intricate dynamics of socioeconomic factors, asserting that income and wealth were crucial indicators of disparities in dental visits within the United States. By examining these variables, the study sheds light on the multifaceted nature of factors influencing access to dental care. It highlighted the interconnectedness between financial aspects and oral health-seeking behaviors among individuals in the US. Building upon the findings from Leap Scholar Journal (2022), the study revealed a notable 7% decline in the annual average net income of general dentists in private practice for 2022. This dip was attributed, at least in part, to the escalating expenses associated with dental practice management. As presented in the study, the comprehensive overview of dentist salaries in the USA indicated a diverse spectrum, with earnings ranging from \$117,000 to \$372,000 annually. This range underscored the significant influence of specialized fields within dentistry on practitioners' income, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the financial landscape in the dental profession..

Factors Affecting Lucena City Private High School Graduates Choosing Dentistry

Table 1 - The Primary Factors Influencing the Acceptance of Graduating Senior High School Students in Private Schools in Lucena City Towards Pursuing a Dentistry Program in Terms of Academic Performance

Statement: Academic Performance	SDA	D	A	SA	WM
I am confident in my academic abilities to pursue a dentistry program after high school.	0	194	270	36	2.684
The curriculum and resources in my senior high school	0	372	128	0	2.256



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prepared me for dentistry program challenges.	0	138	362	0	2.724
Academic support in senior high school equipped me with the necessary skills for dentistry.	0	80	420	0	2.84
Quality teaching in senior high positively influenced my readiness for a dentistry program.	0	94	406	0	2.812
I am well-prepared from senior high for academic excellence in dentistry.	0	92	408	0	2.816
Senior high exposed me to relevant subjects, contributing to my dentistry readiness.	0	92	408	0	2.816
Assessments in senior high accurately reflect my capabilities for a dentistry program.	0	92	408	0	2.816

Table 1 presents the distribution of responses from Lucena City Private High School graduates regarding the factors that influenced their choice of dentistry, with a specific emphasis on academic performance. Notably, graduates expressed moderate confidence in their academic abilities for pursuing dentistry, with a weighted mean (WM) of 2.684. While perceptions varied regarding the preparedness of the curriculum (WM: 2.256), academic support (WM: 2.724), and teaching quality (WM: 2.840), graduates generally felt well-prepared (WM: 2.812) and acknowledged the relevance of subjects (WM: 2.816) and assessments (WM: 2.816) in senior high school for their readiness for dentistry. These numerical values provided a quantitative dimension to the qualitative responses, offering comprehensive insights into graduates' perspectives on their dental program preparedness.

The findings suggested that Lucena City Private High School graduates generally expressed confidence in their academic abilities to pursue a dentistry program after high school, as indicated by a Weighted Mean (WM) of 2.684.

Khalaf (2022) unveiled insights from a comprehensive study that delved into intricate aspects of dental students' career choices—the investigation aimed to evaluate multifaceted influences and motivators shaping the decision to pursue dental education. The findings underscored a broad spectrum of socioeconomic factors, job prestige, and security considerations as critical determinants in students' career choices. The study revealed a notable impact of parental influence, with mothers playing a particularly significant role. While overall confidence in the chosen career path was prevalent among students, the study also highlighted variations in motivation and confidence levels among different demographic groups, adding a nuanced layer to our understanding of dental career decision-making.

In Sng's (2023) study, an in-depth examination was conducted to assess the myriad influences and motivating factors guiding dental students' career choices within dental education. The investigation aims to comprehensively explore and analyze the multifaceted aspects involved in these decisions. Noteworthy findings revealed that career choices among dental students are shaped by a diverse range of factors, encompassing broad socioeconomic considerations alongside job prestige and security. The study also unveiled the impact of parental influence, underscoring the particularly significant role of mothers in this regard. Despite overall confidence among students in their chosen career paths, Sng's study highlighted nuanced variations in motivation and confidence levels, bringing valuable insights into the diverse perspectives within different demographic populations considering dentistry as a career.

Table 2 - The Primary Factors Influencing the Acceptance of Graduating Senior High School Students in Private Schools in Lucena City Towards Pursuing a Dentistry Program in Terms of Career Guidance and Services

Statement: Career Guidance and Services	SDA	D	A	SA	WM.
Career services in my high school effectively guided my decision to pursue a dentistry program.	0	451	49	0	2.098
I received sufficient information about dentistry program requirements through high school career guidance.	0	451	49	0	2.098
Career guidance positively influenced my understanding of dentistry and its career opportunities.	0	412	88	0	2.176
Advice from high school career counselors contributed to my confidence in pursuing a dentistry program.	0	451	49	0	2.098
Career services addressed my concerns about dentistry, enhancing my decision-making process.	0	412	88	0	2.176



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Career services will support me in exploring various paths within the field of dentistry.	0	451	49	0	2.098
Career guidance played a crucial role in fostering a realistic understanding of challenges and rewards in dentistry.	0	260	240	0	2.48

Table 2 presents the perspectives of Lucena City Private High School graduates on the impact of career guidance and services on their decision to pursue dentistry. The findings revealed that graduates generally acknowledged the effectiveness of career services in guiding their decision to pursue dentistry, with a weighted mean (WM) of 2.098. Sufficient information about dentistry program requirements provided through high school career guidance also maintained a consistent weighted mean of 2.098. Moreover, career guidance was perceived to positively impact graduates' understanding of dentistry and its career opportunities, as indicated by a weighted mean (WM) of 2.176. The advice provided by high school career counselors was said to boost graduates' confidence in pursuing a dentistry program, with a WM of 2.098.

Additionally, career services were reported to effectively address concerns related to dentistry, thereby enhancing the decision-making process, with a weighted mean (WM) of 2.176. Graduates felt well-supported by career services in exploring various paths within dentistry, maintaining a weighted mean (WM) of 2.098. Finally, career guidance was recognized for playing a crucial role in fostering a realistic understanding of the challenges and rewards in dentistry, as indicated by a weighted mean (WM) of 2.480. These numerical values provided a quantitative measure of the graduates' perceptions of career guidance and services, highlighting the significance of these factors in influencing their decisions regarding dentistry.

The results indicated that Lucena City Private High School graduates generally perceived career guidance and services as influential factors in their decision to pursue dentistry. Specifically, graduates consistently acknowledged the effectiveness of career services in guiding their choices, received sufficient information about dentistry program requirements, and felt well-supported by the career services.

In Kalaf's (2022) investigation, a comprehensive exploration unfolded regarding the motivation and confidence shaping dental students' choices of dentistry as a career. The study illuminated diverse influences on career decisions, encompassing broad socioeconomic factors, job prestige, and security. Notably, the impact of parental influence, with a particular emphasis on mothers, emerged as a significant aspect. While students, on the whole, exhibited confidence in their chosen career path, Khalaf's research underscored nuanced variations in motivation and confidence levels across different demographic populations contemplating dentistry as a career choice. This study offered valuable insights into the multifaceted dynamics influencing the career decisions of dental students.

In McGhee's seminal work (2006), a comprehensive investigation unfolded, delving into effective career education within secondary schools. The study advocated for the initiation of career guidance as early as 9th grade, emphasizing its continuity until high school graduation. This prolonged exposure was envisioned as a transformative process, fostering the holistic development of students by cultivating self-awareness, nurturing interests, honing skills, and imparting crucial knowledge about various career choices. McGhee's findings underscored the pivotal role of sustained career education throughout the high school years, equipping students with practical insights and facilitating their personal and professional growth as they navigated the intricate landscape of career decisions.

Table 3 - The Primary Factors Influencing the Acceptance of Graduating Senior High School Students in Private Schools in Lucena City Towards Pursuing a Dentistry Program in Terms of Parental Support

Statement: Parental Support	SDA	D	A	SA	WM.
My parents support my choice to pursue a dentistry program after high school.	0	398	84	18	2.24
My parents understand the importance of a dentistry program for my academic and career goals.	0	131	369	0	2.738
Parental encouragement significantly influences my interest in pursuing a dentistry program.	0	412	88	0	2.176
My parents actively discuss the benefits and challenges of pursuing a dentistry program.	0	451	49	0	2.098
Parental support is crucial in boosting my confidence to succeed in dentistry.	0	412	88	0	2.176
My parents provide financial support for my dentistry	0	451	49	0	2.098



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program, including tuition expenses.

My parents prioritize and value my education, especially in pursuing dentistry.

0 260 240 0 2.48

Table 3 presents the viewpoints of Lucena City Private High School graduates on the significant role of parental support in their decision to pursue dentistry. The findings revealed a generally positive atmosphere, with graduates indicating that their parents supported their choice to pursue a dentistry program after high school (WM = 2.240).

Moreover, parents demonstrated a significant recognition of the importance of a dentistry program for their children's academic and career goals, as evidenced by a notably high Weighted Mean (WM = 2.738). Parental encouragement significantly impacted graduates' interest in dentistry (WM = 2.176). Parents were said to actively engage in discussions about the benefits and challenges of pursuing a career in dentistry (WM = 2.098). Graduates also emphasized the critical role of parental support in boosting their confidence to succeed in dentistry (WM = 2.176). Graduates acknowledged financial support, including tuition expenses (WM = 2.098). There was a prevalent sense that parents prioritized and valued their education, particularly in pursuing dentistry, as reflected by a Weighted Mean of 2.480. These numerical values enhanced our understanding of the subtle dynamics of parental support in influencing graduates' decisions regarding dentistry.

Based on the results from Table 3, there was a pervasive theme of positive parental support among Lucena City Private High School graduates in their pursuit of dentistry. Most respondents confirmed that their parents supported their decision to pursue a dentistry program after high school.

A 2023 publication from the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry explored the nuanced experience of balancing parenthood with dental education. This insightful piece delved into the challenges and rewards encountered by students who navigated the dual roles of parenting and academic pursuits. The article emphasized balancing scholarly commitments and personal responsibilities, which is remarkable parenting. It highlighted the positive repercussions of this intricate balance in personal and professional development. It underscores the transformative impact parenthood can exert on a student's journey, contributing to a holistic and enriching educational experience.

In a 2018 publication from the College of Dentistry, UI Health, the spotlight was placed on the crucial role of parental involvement in fostering positive oral health habits among children. The article delved into the intricacies of this subject, underscoring the significance of parental engagement while examining the challenges families faced in securing dental care. Moreover, it sheds light on community partnerships' pivotal role in bridging gaps, offering educational initiatives, and providing essential resources to families. This comprehensive narrative emphasized the broader context of oral health, going beyond individual habits to address systemic challenges and community-level solutions, thereby contributing to a more holistic approach to dental care.

Acceptance to Dentistry Program

Table 4 - The Level of Respondents' Acceptance Towards Pursuing a Dentistry Program in Terms of Perceived Usefulness

Statement: Perceived Usefulness	SDA	D	A	SA	WM.
Pursuing a dentistry program is beneficial for my future career.	0	0	157	343	3.686
A dentistry program will significantly enhance my skills and knowledge.	0	0	157	343	3.686
A dentistry program has practical value for my personal and professional development.	0	0	157	343	3.686
Pursuing a dentistry program is relevant and applicable to my career goals.	0	0	157	343	3.686
Completing a dentistry program will provide me with valuable real-world skills.	0	0	157	343	3.686
A dentistry program is a practical and valuable choice for advancing my professional aspirations.	0	0	157	343	3.686
Pursuing a dentistry program is a valuable investment in my future success and fulfillment.	0	0	276	224	3.448

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Table 4 presented an insightful snapshot of Lucena City Private High School graduates' perspectives on the acceptance and perceived usefulness of choosing dentistry as their educational path. Responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree were accompanied by Weighted Mean values, offering a nuanced quantitative analysis. Graduates uniformly expressed a resounding belief in the advantageous impact of pursuing a dentistry program on their future careers, skills enhancement, and personal and professional development, with each statement attaining a high Weighted Mean of 3.686. This consensus extends to a dentistry program's perceived relevance and practicality in achieving career goals and its potential to impart valuable real-world skills. Additionally, graduates viewed dentistry as a practical and functional choice for advancing their professional aspirations, reflecting a consistent Weighted Mean of 3.686. The final statement emphasized that pursuing a dentistry program was a valuable investment in future success and fulfillment, supported by a Weighted Mean of 3.448. These numerical values underscored graduates' robust conviction in the manifold benefits and practicality of choosing dentistry, providing a comprehensive understanding of their collective mindset.

The results indicated a strong consensus among Lucena City Private High School graduates regarding dentistry's perceived usefulness and acceptance as their educational pursuit.

According to Rashmi's (2014) research on "Dentistry as a Career: Motives and Perception of Dental Students," the study thoroughly examined the factors and influences that shaped dental students' career choices and their confidence in those decisions. A key focus of the investigation revolved around uncovering the motives driving individuals to pursue dentistry, with particular emphasis on the perceived nature of dentistry as a "caring profession" and the allure of private practice. An intriguing trend surfaced in the study, revealing a nuanced shift in confidence levels across the academic spectrum, as agreement scores progressively decreased from 1st-year BDS students to postgraduate students. This nuanced exploration sheds light on the evolving perceptions and considerations that accompany students through various stages of dental education, offering valuable insights into the complex landscape of factors influencing dental career choices. In the investigation conducted by AnbuSelvan (2013) the study aimed to discern the factors influencing career choices among dental students in India. The findings revealed that a predominant factor guiding dental students toward choosing dentistry as their career was rooted in self-interest.

Additionally, a notable trend emerged, indicating that many students turned to dental science as an alternative path when faced with the unavailability of a medical degree. These insights shed light on the intricate considerations that mold career decisions within the dental profession, offering valuable perspectives for understanding the dynamics of career choice among aspiring dental professionals in India. According to Al-Asmar's (2021) investigation, the study delved into the predictive value of high school grade point average (GPA) concerning academic achievement and career satisfaction among dental graduates. The research affirmed the enduring significance of GPA as a reliable performance predictor across the entire dental curriculum. Notably, the findings emphasized that the overall college GPA and the specific science GPA stood out as the most influential predictors of success in dental education. This insight, grounded in empirical evidence, contributed meaningful perspectives to the ongoing discourse on factors shaping academic outcomes and fostering career satisfaction among individuals pursuing dental careers.

Table 5 - The Level of Respondents' Acceptance Towards Pursuing a Dentistry Program in Terms of Perceived Ease of Use

Statement: Perceived Ease of Use	SDA	D	A	SA	WM.
Pursuing a dentistry program is uncomplicated and manageable.	0	194	270	36	2.684
Processes and requirements for dentistry program enrollment are user-friendly.	0	372	128	0	2.256
The application process for a dentistry program is easily understandable.	0	138	362	0	2.724
The overall structure of a dentistry program is designed for simplicity.	0	80	420	0	2.84
The steps involved in pursuing a dentistry program are manageable and straightforward.	0	0	157	343	3.686
Information about the dentistry program is presented in an easily understandable way.	0	0	157	343	3.686



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I am confident in navigating the requirements and processes of pursuing a dentistry program.	0	0	157	343	3.686
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Table 5 provides valuable insights into the perceived ease of choosing dentistry as an educational path. The responses revealed a nuanced spectrum of opinions, ranging from moderately favorable to notably high levels of agreement. Graduates expressed a moderate perception regarding the uncomplicated nature of pursuing a dentistry program, with a weighted mean (WM) of 2.684. While the user-friendliness of enrollment processes received a somewhat neutral stance (WM = 2.256), graduates exhibited favorable perceptions regarding the understandability of the application process (WM = 2.724) and the overall simplicity of the dentistry program structure (WM = 2.84). Notably, a strong consensus emerged with high weighted means (WM = 3.686) for statements affirming the manageable steps in pursuing dentistry, easily understandable presentation of information, and a high confidence level in navigating program requirements.

Table 5 highlighted a robust consensus among the participants based on the results. Specifically, graduates overwhelmingly perceived the steps in pursuing a dentistry program as highly manageable and straightforward.

The comprehensive examination conducted by Zitzmann (2020), titled "Digital Undergraduate Education in Dentistry: A Systematic Review," focused on assessing dental students' study patterns utilizing self-directed web-based learning modules with dedicated self-study time instead of traditional lectures. The review brought attention to the intricate challenges and demands of integrating digital tools and applications into dental education, particularly in a discipline heavily reliant on hands-on practical training. Moreover, the study delved into the correlation between practice time and test performance, underscoring the crucial significance of ample training within digital learning environments. This examination offered valuable insights into the evolving landscape of undergraduate dental education, shedding light on the complexities and opportunities introduced by digital modalities in the learning process. According to Kerkstra (2022), in the scoping review titled "Dental education practices during COVID-19," the examination delved into the merits and obstacles associated with online dental education. Noteworthy advantages were identified, including enhanced accessibility and a heightened receptiveness toward adopting innovative assessment techniques. However, the review also sheds light on prevalent challenges, encompassing technological issues, the absence of hands-on training opportunities, and the inherent difficulties in time management during synchronous online coursework. This comprehensive analysis provided valuable insights into the multifaceted landscape of dental education, particularly in the context of the transformative adjustments prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As Rodrigues (2022) supported, this investigation evaluated the usability, acceptance, and educational effectiveness of a novel tool among dentistry professionals. It served as a preliminary assessment before its introduction to dental students.

Table 6 - The Level of Respondents' Acceptance Towards Pursuing a Dentistry Program in Terms of Behavioral Intention

Statement: Behavioral Intention	SDA	D	A	SA	WM
I am actively seeking information about the dentistry program.	0	0	157	343	3.686
I have a solid intention to apply for a dentistry program.	0	194	270	36	2.684
I am motivated to take steps in preparation for pursuing a dentistry program.	0	372	128	0	2.256
I am committed to enrolling in a dentistry program shortly.	0	138	362	0	2.724
I have a clear plan and intention to meet the requirements for a dentistry program.	0	0	157	343	3.686
I am actively considering the dentistry program as a realistic option for my future.	0	0	157	343	3.686
I am determined to overcome challenges in pursuit of a dentistry program.	0	0	157	343	3.686

Table 6 presents the distribution of responses from Lucena City Private High School graduates regarding the acceptance of dentistry in terms of behavioral intention. The Weighted Mean (WM) values indicated the average level of agreement among respondents for each statement. Notably, a consistently high WM across all statements suggested a strong overall inclination and commitment among the graduates towards actively seeking information (WM = 3.686), applying for a dentistry program (WM = 2.684), preparing for its pursuit (WM = 2.256), enrolling



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shortly (WM = 2.724), meeting requirements (WM = 3.686), considering it as a realistic option for their future (WM = 3.686), and overcoming challenges in the pursuit of a dentistry program (WM = 3.686).

The responses of Lucena City Private High School graduates indicated a strong inclination and commitment toward pursuing a dentistry program. Among the behavioral intention statements, the majority consistently expressed high agreement levels. The most prominent finding was the graduates' determination to seek information about the dentistry program.

The study by Alabdullah (2020) applied the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model to predict dental students' behavioral intention to use teledentistry. The research revealed significant associations between students' perceptions of performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions with their behavioral intention to adopt teledentistry. This study contributes valuable insights into the factors influencing students' intentions to embrace teledentistry, shedding light on broader behavioral intentions within dental education and practice.

3.5

Influencing Factors and Acceptance Relationship Among Graduating Senior High School Students in Private Schools in Lucena City Toward Pursuing a Dentistry Program

Table 7 - The Relationship Between Acceptance Levels and Influencing Factors Among Senior High School Students Pursuing a Dentistry Program

Influencing Factor		Acceptance Sig. (2-tailed)	N	Level of Significant
Academic Preparedness	.365**	0	500	Significant
Career Guidance and Counseling Services	.099*	0.027	500	Significant
Parental Support	.099*	0.027	500	Significant

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 revealed that academic preparedness has a correlation coefficient of .365, indicating a significant positive correlation at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This strong positive relationship suggests that higher levels of academic preparedness are associated with higher acceptance levels among students. In contrast, career guidance and counseling services have a correlation coefficient of .099, showing a significant positive correlation at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Although this indicates that career guidance and counseling services positively relate to acceptance levels, academic preparedness is stronger than correlation. Similarly, parental support, with a correlation coefficient of .099, also shows a significant positive correlation at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). This result suggests that parental support has a modest but positive impact on acceptance levels, comparable to the influence of career guidance and counseling services.

The Pearson correlation coefficient between the average influencing factors and acceptance is .107 (p = .017), indicating a statistically significant positive correlation at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). This result means that overall, as the influencing factors (academic preparedness, career guidance, counseling services, and parental support) increase, the acceptance levels among students also tend to increase.

These findings align with Chen's (2010) work, highlighting the robust correlation between peer acceptance and academic proficiency. The current study's results similarly suggest that positive social interactions and relationships can enhance acceptance levels and, in turn, academic performance. This study underscores the interconnected nature of social and academic dynamics and the importance of fostering supportive environments for students to enhance their educational experiences.



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Summary

The findings revealed meaningful patterns and insights, clearly demonstrating the research outcomes.

Demographic Profile:

Regarding demographic composition, the investigation involved a sample of 500 individuals, with 76.0% self-identifying as females and 24.0% as males. Concerning income distribution, 48.4% of respondents reported an income below P100,000, while the second most prevalent income range, encompassing 37.6% of respondents, fell within the P300,000 to P400,000 range.

Factors Affecting Lucena City Private High School Graduates Choosing Dentistry:

In the context of factors influencing the choice of a dentistry program, noteworthy findings underscored the prevailing confidence among graduates, as evidenced by a Weighted Mean (WM) of 2.684, in their academic capabilities for pursuing dentistry after high school.

Moreover, the research highlighted the substantial impact of career guidance and services on decision-making. Lucena City Private High School graduates consistently recognize the effectiveness of these services in providing advice, furnishing crucial information about dentistry program requirements, and ensuring robust support throughout the decision-making process.

Additionally, a salient theme emerged concerning positive parental support among Lucena City Private High School graduates in their pursuit of dentistry, with most respondents affirming significant parental endorsement for their decision to enroll in a dentistry program post-high school. In summary, these findings collectively illuminated the multifaceted factors shaping the decision dynamics of Lucena City Private High School graduates as they embarked on the path of dentistry in their academic and professional journey.

Acceptance to Dentistry Program

The findings revealed a substantial consensus among Lucena City Private High School graduates regarding the perceived utility and acceptance of choosing dentistry as their educational pursuit. Additionally, Table 5 underscored a strong consensus among participants, with graduates overwhelmingly viewing the steps in pursuing a dentistry program as highly manageable and straightforward. Moreover, the responses indicated a pronounced inclination and commitment among graduates toward pursuing a dentistry program, with a notable majority expressing high agreement levels across various behavioral intention statements. The most prominent consensus was graduates' unwavering determination to seek information about a dentistry program.

Relationship of Acceptance Level and Factors Influencing Dentistry Program Pursuit

The correlation analysis investigated the relationship between influencing factors and acceptance levels among graduating senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City concerning pursuing a dentistry program. The Pearson correlation coefficient, calculated at .107 ($p = .017$), revealed a statistically significant positive correlation at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). This positive correlation suggested that as the influencing factors increased, there was a concurrent tendency for acceptance levels to rise among students.

Conclusion

1. In conclusion, the demographic analysis of the study sample, consisting of 500 individuals, revealed a predominant representation of females at 76.0%, contrasting with the 24.0% representation of males. Regarding income distribution, 48.4% of respondents reported incomes below P100,000. In contrast, the second most prevalent income range, accounting for 37.6% of respondents, fell within the bracket of P300,000 to P400,000.
2. In conclusion, Lucena City Private High School graduates had shown strong confidence in their academic abilities when considering dentistry after high school. This research emphasized the significant impact of career guidance and services, with graduates consistently recognizing their effectiveness in providing essential information and robust support. A common theme regarding positive parental support has emerged, with the majority affirming significant parental endorsement for their decision to enroll in a dentistry program post-high school. These findings shed light on the various factors influencing the



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decisions of Lucena City Private High School graduates as they pursue dentistry in their academic and professional journey.

3. In conclusion, Lucena City Private High School graduates strongly agreed to choose dentistry as their educational pursuit. The steps involved in pursuing a dental program were widely perceived as manageable and straightforward. The responses also revealed strong inclination and commitment among graduates, with a notable majority expressing high agreement levels across various behavioral intention statements. Notably, graduates showed unwavering determination to seek information about dentistry programs.
4. In conclusion, the correlation analysis among graduating senior high school students in Lucena City's private schools indicated a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .107$, $p = .017$). This study suggested that, as influencing factors increased, acceptance levels tended to rise, highlighting the interconnected nature of these variables in pursuing a dentistry program.

Recommendations

Drawing from the study's summary, findings, and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Implement gender-specific outreach in educational and career programs to address female needs and ensure equity. Develop targeted support programs based on income distribution analysis, focusing on the P300,000 to P400,000 range for effective educational and professional interventions.
2. Improve school career guidance by offering dentistry program prerequisites, mentorship opportunities, and skill development workshops. Encourage collaboration with parents to create a supportive environment that aligns with graduates' aspirations and prepares them for success in dentistry.
3. Establish a Dentistry Information Center at Lucena City Private High School, offering detailed information, workshops, and personalized guidance sessions for graduates interested in dentistry. This targeted approach ensures easy access to essential information and mentorship, supporting well-informed decision-making for their academic and professional journey in dentistry.
4. Conduct a longitudinal study of dentistry program graduates to assess their academic performance, career satisfaction, and professional achievements, gaining insights into the effectiveness of identified factors.

Implications of the Study

The research findings regarding the factors affecting the enrollment of senior high school students in private schools in Lucena City dentistry programs have important implications for education institutions and policymakers. The study indicates that educational institutions can improve their career guidance and support services by customizing them to meet the unique needs and preferences of students interested in pursuing dentistry. Implementing specialized programs that provide comprehensive information and mentorship related to dentistry is essential for promoting well-informed decision-making among students.

Understanding the factors influencing students' acceptance of dentistry programs is crucial to providing policymakers with valuable insights to shape policies supporting and promoting dental education. By considering initiatives such as scholarship programs, outreach activities, or partnerships with dental institutions, policymakers can improve accessibility and affordability for students interested in pursuing a career in dentistry. Ultimately, aligning educational and policy initiatives with the identified factors is essential for creating a supportive environment for students who aspire to enter the field of dentistry.

Policy Implications of the Dentistry Program

Policy components:

1. Collaborate with dental school institutions, local dental groups, and educational experts to provide comprehensive educational materials outlining the benefits, career opportunities, and educational prerequisites of pursuing a dentistry program.
2. Outreach Programs: Organize outreach programs in private high schools around Lucena City to raise awareness about dentistry as a career option. These seminars should include interactive sessions, career



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advice, and testimonies from current dentistry students and professionals who can provide firsthand information.

3. Online Presence: Create and maintain an online platform that gives information about dental programs, admission processes, scholarship options, and graduate success stories. Use social media, websites, and online forums to reach a larger group of senior high school students.
4. Collaboration with Guidance Counselors: Work closely with private high school guidance counselors to provide information about dentistry programs in career counseling sessions and courses. Provide counselors with training and tools so that they may successfully advise students interested in pursuing dentistry.
5. Mentorship Programs: Create mentorship programs that allow senior high school students to connect with current dental students or professional dentists for advice, support, and insights into the field. These mentoring relationships can assist students in making informed decisions regarding their educational and professional pathways.
6. Implement an evaluation and feedback mechanism to assess the success of information distribution activities, such as surveys, focus groups, and feedback sessions with students, instructors, and stakeholders. Use this input to tweak and improve the outreach strategies continuously.
7. Implementation and Monitoring: Form a task group made up of members from dental education institutions, local dental associations, private high schools, and appropriate government agencies to oversee the implementation of the expanded information distribution strategy. Regular monitoring and evaluation should be conducted to assess the policy's impact and make any required revisions to fulfill its objectives properly.

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