

## Socio-Economic Condition and Aspirations in Life of Out-of-School Youths

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**Abstract:** *The study aims to describe the socio-economic condition and aspirations in life of out-of-school youths in Tarlac City and determine the correlation between these two variables. It also explores existing government programs for this demographic and their implementation. Using a descriptive-correlational research method, data were gathered through questionnaires, structured interviews, and ocular observations. Results indicate that while the social conditions of the youth are relatively good and their economic status is low, they still maintain high aspirations in life. No significant correlation was found between their socio-economic condition and aspirations in life. Government programs, such as the Alternative Learning System (ALS) and Community-Based Training Programs (CBTP), were seen as helpful despite limited resources and information dissemination. The study suggests that enhancing these programs could further support out-of-school youths in achieving their aspirations in life.*

**Keywords:** ALS, CBTP, FLEMMS, Out-Of-School Youths, Socio-Economic Condition, UNESCO

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### 1. Introduction

Education shapes an individual's perspective on life, playing a significant role not only in the acquisition of knowledge but also in developing essential skills. Funding and developing schools are crucial, as investing in education can yield substantial economic benefits, such as improved national productivity. However, studies have shown that socio-economic barriers often prevent some individuals from attending formal school, leading to an increase in the number of out-of-school youths.

The term "out-of-school youth" is defined by the Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) as individuals aged 15 to 24 who are not attending formal school or have not completed any college or post-secondary course. This population faces complex challenges, including unemployment and an uncertain future.

Historically, girls and young women were more likely to be excluded from education; however, recent global reports indicate that out-of-school youth rates for lower and upper secondary school-age populations are now nearly identical between genders. In 2016, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that 263 million children, adolescents, and youths were out of school—representing one-fifth of the global population in these age groups. Of this total, 63 million (24%) were children of primary school age (6 to 11 years old), 61 million (23%) were adolescents of lower secondary school age (12 to 14 years old), and 139 million (53%) were youths of upper secondary school age (15 to 17 years old).

Despite the Philippine Constitution mandating compulsory primary education and the provision of free public education at both primary and secondary levels (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2012), a 2016 SunStar article reported that the Philippines had 3.8 million out-of-school youths aged 6 to 24. However, this number dropped to 3.6 million in 2017, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (PSA APIS).

Several socio-economic factors contribute to individuals being unable to attend formal school, with poverty being a significant issue. Families in low-income areas often struggle to cover school-related expenses despite government-funded primary education. Additionally, the lack of nearby schools or difficult transportation can further hinder attendance. Personal factors also play a role; students' interest in school may decrease due to peer influences, insufficient parental support, poor teacher-student relationships, or negative peer pressures, all of which contribute to higher numbers of out-of-school youths.

In the Philippines, the most common reasons for not attending school among out-of-school children and youths include marriage or family matters, the high cost of education, financial concerns, and lack of personal interest (SunStar, 2016).

Despite these challenges, many out-of-school youths remain hopeful. Byun (2012) observed that while they have aspirations, these are often hindered by their socio-economic circumstances. In the Philippines, the aspirations of out-of-school youths often involve helping their parents with household chores or farm work and taking on extra jobs to support their families (Fernandez & Aboejo, 2014).

Research by Machica Jr. (2017) highlights that out-of-school youths possess educational and occupational aspirations, but their motivation and conviction to pursue these goals are often undermined by their socio-economic status. While the term “aspiration” is defined by the Cambridge English Dictionary as something that one hopes to achieve, Machica Jr. (2017) defines aspiration as a representation of patience and hope amidst socio-economic difficulties for out-of-school youths.

In Tarlac City, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported 2,315 out-of-school youths in 2015, with 47% male and 53% female, aged 15 to 24. This study aims to address existing research gaps by exploring the socio-economic conditions and aspirations of out-of-school youths in this specific context.

This study seeks to address this issue by profiling out-of-school youths in Tarlac City, describing their socio-economic conditions, and exploring how these factors correlate with their aspirations in life. It will also identify existing government programs available to out-of-school youths and evaluate how these programs are implemented. The study aims to provide recommendations to enhance these programs.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research method. Data were gathered using a questionnaire adapted from Owusu-Boateng (2015) and the Himachal Pradesh Skills Development Project (2018), supplemented by structured interviews and direct observations. A total of 150 out-of-school youths, aged 15 to 24 years, were randomly selected from Tarlac City, with 45% of the respondents enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS).

The questionnaire administered a five-point Likert scale with descriptions based on the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). For the correlation analysis, the Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation formula was applied.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Social Condition

Social condition refers to the circumstances of out-of-school youth in society that hindered them from attending formal education. Table 1 presents a description of the respondents regarding their social condition.

Statement	Mean	Description
1. Not attending formal school among youth is a common phenomenon in your barangay.	2.50	Disagree
2. There is no school located near your barangay.	2.87	Neutral
3. Your barangay is implementing programs for the out of school youth.	3.65	Agree
4. Poor academic performance leads you to stop attending formal school.	2.73	Neutral
5. Well trained and competent teachers can help minimize incidences of out of school.	3.51	Agree
6. Unhealthy condition disables you to access schooling.	2.35	Disagree
7. Lack of parental care caused you to become an out of school youth.	2.87	Neutral

Table 1: Social Condition

### 3.2. Economic Condition

Economic condition refers to the current situation of out-of-school youths in relation to their material resources, which prevented them from entering formal education. Table 2 provides a description of the respondents regarding their economic condition.

Statement	Mean	Description
1. Lack of offered scholarship in your barangay leads you to stop from school.	3.33	Disagree
2. Poverty is the largest factor which causes you to become an out of school youth.	3.54	Neutral
3. Gaining access to loans by your parents can help you to return schooling.	3.65	Agree
4. The level of education of your parents affected your willingness to attend school.	2.49	Neutral
5. You choose working rather than going to school.	2.92	Agree
6. You encountered problems in securing employment because you lack of formal school.	3.26	Disagree
7. You are more likely to be employed in low income job.	3.08	Neutral

Table 2: Economic Condition

### 3.3. Aspirations in Life

Aspiration refers to a strong desire to achieve or obtain something significant. It is a key ingredient for a successful life. Table 3 presents the life aspirations of the respondents.

Statement	Mean	Description
1. You want to go back studying and finish your formal schooling.	4.39	Strongly agree
2. You are willing to continue your studies with the help of the programs implemented by your barangay/LGU for OSY.	3.81	Agree
3. You want to have a stable job and a chance to be promoted.	4.35	Strongly agree
4. You want to earn an income that is sufficient to provide your family's needs.	4.19	Agree
5. You are willing to join the job fairs organized by the LGU for the jobless OSY.	4.15	Agree
6. You want to establish your own business after having adequate skills and knowledge to do it.	4.12	Agree
7. You want to work abroad in order to earn higher income.	3.75	Agree

Table 3: Aspirations in Life

### 3.4. Correlation Analysis

Table 4 shows that the socio-economic condition and aspirations in life of out-of-school youths in Tarlac City have no significant relationship at the 0.01 level.

Conditions of out of school youth in terms of:	Aspirations		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Social	0.073	0.372	150
Economic	-0.120	0.144	150
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Profile of the Respondents

Most respondents are aged 19 to 22 years old, with a majority being male. Almost all are single and have completed secondary education but did not graduate. Additionally, 69% are unemployed, and most have been out of school for 1 to 4 years.

### 4.2. Socio-economic Condition and Aspirations in Life of the Respondents

*Social Condition:* Respondents noted that Tarlac City implements specific programs for out-of-school youths. They highlighted the importance of well-trained and competent teachers in reducing the incidence of youth dropping out of school. Notably, respondents did not view the absence of nearby schools as a significant factor affecting their educational engagement. Instead, poor academic performance and lack of parental support were cited as the main reasons for their disengagement from formal education. While some expressed that being out-of-school is not a widespread issue in the city, they acknowledged that unhealthy living conditions did not significantly impact their school attendance.

*Economic Condition:* Poverty was identified as the primary reason for respondents leaving school, with many believing that financial assistance from their families – such as access to loans – could help them return to their studies. Respondents were neutral on other factors, such as the availability of scholarships, choosing work over school, and challenges in securing employment due to their lack of formal education. Additionally, they did not view their parents' educational background as a major influence on their willingness to attend school. However, it is evident that financial barriers play a key role in shaping the educational choices of these youths.

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#### 4.3. Aspiration

Despite the challenges they face, many respondents expressed aspirations to return to formal schooling, complete their education, and secure stable employment. They also emphasized the importance of career advancement opportunities, such as promotions in their future jobs. Additionally, they showed a strong willingness to continue their education through support from government programs. Respondents also mentioned their desire to participate in job fairs organized by the local government, acquire skills to establish their own businesses, and pursue employment opportunities abroad to improve their financial situation.

#### 4.4. Correlation Analysis

The analysis revealed no significant relationship between the socio-economic conditions of the respondents and their aspirations in life.

#### 4.5. Programs for the Out-of-School Youths

*Alternative Learning System (ALS):* The ALS is a 10-month non-formal education program aimed at individuals who have dropped out of formal schooling. At the end of the program, learners take the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test. Those who pass receive certificates equivalent to elementary or junior/secondary school graduation, allowing them to proceed to senior high school or pursue tertiary education. Learners who do not pass the test are advised to repeat the program. This initiative provides a critical second chance for out-of-school youths to reintegrate into the education system.

*Community-Based Training Program (CBTP):* The CBTP provides livelihood training and technical-vocational courses to equip participants with the skills needed for employment. It is particularly recommended for those who have completed the ALS and passed the A&E Test but do not wish to pursue further formal education. Upon completion of the program, participants receive an NCII Certification or a Certificate of Completion, which can be used for employment purposes. The program offers an alternative pathway for those seeking immediate job opportunities.

*City Manpower Development and Employment Job Fair:* The City Government of Tarlac organizes job fairs that provide numerous employment opportunities across various fields. Out-of-school youths, especially those who have completed the ALS and participated in the CBTP, are encouraged to attend these job fairs to improve their employment prospects. The job fairs serve as a bridge between the skills learned in the programs and actual job opportunities in the local labor market.

#### 4.6. Extent of Implementation

While respondents believe that government programs for out-of-school youths have the potential to significantly help them achieve their aspirations, the study identified some gaps in the implementation of these programs. In particular, there is a lack of sufficient resources and inadequate dissemination of information regarding the availability and accessibility of these programs. These shortcomings limit the ability of out-of-school youths to fully benefit from the initiatives designed to support their educational and employment goals.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that while the respondents' social condition is relatively good, their economic condition is quite low; nevertheless, they maintain high aspirations in life. The study also highlighted government programs for out-of-school youths, including the Alternative Learning System (ALS), Community-Based Training Program (CBTP), and City Manpower Development and Employment Job Fairs. According to the respondents, participating in these government programs could significantly aid them in achieving their life aspirations.

Based on these findings, it may be beneficial to improve information dissemination to ensure that all interested out-of-school youths are informed about these programs, with support from Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials. Furthermore, it may be suggested that a sufficient budget be allocated to these programs to provide necessary resources, such as learning materials, for their effective implementation.

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#### AUTHOR'S BIO-NOTE

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