



Shaping futures: A qualitative exploration of the factors influencing career aspiration among out-of-school youth

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Abstract

The majority of young Filipinos are facing different obstacles in achieving their educational and career aspirations. The issue of out-of-school youth (OSY) is a growing concern in the Philippines, where access to quality education and economic opportunities remains unequal. This paper explores the factors affecting the career aspirations of out-of-school youth and their implications for future career trajectories. Using a qualitative research design, the study examines the experiences and perspectives of out-of-school youth aged 15 to 24. Data were collected through in-depth personal interviews, guided by a validated interview framework. Thematic analysis of transcriptions identified key influences, including family, peers, personal interests, and financial constraints. Family emerged as the most significant factor, followed by the impact of peers and economic challenges. These findings emphasize the interplay of social and economic dynamics in shaping career aspirations, underscoring the need for targeted support. Recommended interventions include educational assistance, voluntary teaching programs, free skills training, and organizational partnerships to facilitate career advancement. Limitations of the study include its qualitative scope and focus on a specific demographic, which may restrict generalizability. Future research should incorporate mixed methods and broader populations to deepen understanding and validate the results. The study highlights the necessity of culturally relevant and comprehensive strategies to empower out-of-school youth in pursuing meaningful and sustainable careers.

Keywords: *qualitative, factors, influence, career aspirations, out-of-school youth*

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1. Introduction

Many young Filipinos face considerable obstacles in achieving their educational and career aspirations. The issue of out-of-school youth (OSY) is a growing concern in the Philippines, where access to quality education and economic opportunities remains unequal. According to data from the Department of Education (DepEd), nearly 4 million students were unable to enroll in the 2019-2020 school year, reflecting the widespread impact of systemic barriers. Additionally, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reports that 9%, or 3.53 million, of the estimated 39.2 million Filipinos aged 6-24 years are classified as OSY. Within this demographic, a significant majority (83.1%) are aged 16-24 years, while 11.2% are aged 12-15 years, and 5.7% are aged 6-11 years. These statistics underscore a pressing issue that carries long-term ramifications for both the individuals affected and society. In particular, the study of David and Albert (2015), Rodríguez-Hernández et al. (2020), and Pesado et al. (2024) suggests the relationship between socioeconomic status and school participation, highlighting the current issue in the Philippines with regard to education access and quality. Moreover, the impact of the pandemic is also one of the considerable factors on the increased number of Out of School Youth (U.S. Embassy in the Philippines, 2022).

The increasing number of out-of-school youth raises concerns not only about individual futures but also about the broader societal implications. The lack of formal education and skills development contributes to a cycle of poverty and unemployment. It is supported by the study of Mihai et al. (2015) stating that education is one of the most important factors in breaking the vicious circle of intergenerational transmission of poverty. Furthermore, this population is more vulnerable to engaging in criminal activities or becoming victims of societal disadvantages. Similarly, a study by Albert et al. (2017) investigates the relationship between crime rates and educational attainment, indicating that OSYs are more likely to be involved in illegal activities. As a result, the inability to address the needs of OSY has broader economic and social impacts, which necessitates targeted and sustainable interventions. Inoue et. al (2015) states that staying out-of-school youth will be impactful to the next generations, since these youths are poor in economic growth. This topic is particularly important because understanding and addressing the career aspirations of OSYs can pave the way for developing more effective support systems that contribute to national development.

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the factors affecting the career aspirations of out-of-school youth and to contribute to the body of knowledge on this critical issue. The research investigates the specific factors that influence these aspirations and analyzes how these factors impact the feasibility of pursuing career goals. Kobia-Acquah et al. (2020), identify several key factors including a person's psychosocial make-up, societal expectations, job availability and personal ethos that can influence an individual's career decision. By examining these elements, the study seeks to provide insights that can inform strategies and programs to support OSYs in making informed career choices. USAID (2023) reveals that identifying any gaps or challenges could lead to the implementation of different programs that can strengthen the ecosystem. These findings could ultimately contribute to reducing societal disparities and fostering a more equitable future for all.

The structure of this paper is as follows: First, a comprehensive literature review provides a theoretical framework and contextual understanding of the issues affecting OSYs. Next, the methodology section details the qualitative research design, data collection, and analysis processes used in the study. The results and discussion sections present and interpret the findings, focusing on the key factors influencing career aspirations. Finally, the conclusion outlines practical recommendations and suggests avenues for future research. Most importantly, this study intends to develop actionable findings that will directly benefit the community. Marris and Rein (2018), suggest that creating programs for education is very essential to contribute not only in improving the life of every individual but also to national development. And by identifying different challenges and factors affecting OSY career aspirations. This research will inform the development of specific interventions, including education and training courses, mentorship initiatives, and community-based support networks. These interventions have a potential to empower OSYs, increase their career prospects, and thus contribute to a more equitable and sustainable future for the affected communities.

2. Literature review

2.1. Career Aspirations of Out-of-School Youth

Understanding the career trajectories of out-of-school youth (OSY) is crucial, particularly in contexts where young individuals participate in employment training programs, such as those offered by the Center for Employment Training. Existing research

highlights this population's demographic characteristics, skills development, and job outcomes. It also identifies barriers such as socioeconomic constraints and limited access to resources significantly impacting career advancement. Previous research on career adaptability by Rossier et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of developing resilience and a flexible career perspective for individuals, particularly those facing limited resources and uncertain career paths.

The Center for Employment Training replication project sites have revealed patterns and trends in career outcomes among OSY (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). Studies emphasize the importance of policy development, program improvements, and strategic resource allocation to enhance career opportunities for these youth. The influence of role models and social support as discussed by Zhou et al. (2024), could be leverage within training programs to enhance participants career decision making self-efficacy and aspirations. Furthermore, the broader social impact of career choices among OSY underlines the need for targeted interventions to ensure a successful transition into the workforce.

2.2. Factors Influencing Career Aspirations of Out-of-School Youth

Career aspirations and trajectories among youth are shaped by socio-cognitive influences, particularly self-efficacy beliefs and perceived parental support. According to Bandura et al. (2001) as cited in Xing and Rojewski (2018), children's perceptions of their academic, social, and self-regulatory efficacy are pivotal in shaping occupational interests. These self-efficacy beliefs influence their career choices directly and through their impact on educational aspirations.

Bandura et al. argue that various factors, including parental and occupational efficacy, significantly affect career decision-making. The study focuses on identifying these factors and understanding how efficacy beliefs, molded by social and familial contexts, shape career aspirations. Recognizing these influences can inform strategies to boost self-efficacy among OSY and support their career development.

2.3. Influence of Key Factors on the Current Career Path of Out-of-School Youth

Several factors influence the career paths of out-of-school youth, with family social capital playing a significant role. Quick et al. (2021) state that family social capital encompasses social relationships, values, and norms shared within a family, positively

affecting children's mental and physical well-being. Broschinski et al. (2022) further emphasize that family-based social capital, such as parent-child intimacy and conflict dynamics, critically impacts school-to-work transitions. Their study underscores the variability of family interactions and the separation of parents as influential elements in career trajectories.

The role of family social capital is particularly pronounced for OSY who have discontinued schooling and entered the workforce. These youths often rely on familial support and values to navigate employment challenges. Therefore, understanding the family's influence provides insights into the broader social determinants affecting OSY career outcomes.

Peers also significantly influence career trajectories. A peer is someone at the same level, and peer relationships can affect career aspirations (Vocabulary.com, n.d.). Rüschoff et al. (2021) argue that peer networks shape young people's transitions by influencing goal striving and achievement. The characteristics of these networks, such as peers' career goals and appraisals, are critical in determining the extent of their influence. Their findings suggest that peers provide a social context that can either facilitate or hinder career development.

Peer-related factors, alongside family influences, are pivotal in shaping the career choices and trajectories of out-of-school youth. Understanding these influences can inform interventions to support OSY in making informed career decisions and overcoming barriers to employment.

2.4. Theoretical framework

This study draws on the self-efficacy and social cognitive career development theories outlined by Bandura et al. (2001) as cited in Xing and Rojewski (2018). According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, an individual's behavior, environment, and personal factors interact to influence career choices and aspirations. Self-efficacy, a person's belief in their ability to perform tasks and achieve goals, is pivotal in shaping these decisions. For out-of-school youth (OSYs), self-efficacy is often influenced by a complex interplay of environmental constraints and personal circumstances.

The Career Development Model by Bandura et al. (2001) emphasizes that individual traits are not solely determined by aspirations but are also shaped by external influences, such as family expectations, peer relationships, and socioeconomic conditions. These

external factors can either support or hinder the development of self-efficacy and career planning. In the case of OSYs, limited access to formal education and financial hardships create significant barriers to developing a strong sense of self-efficacy. As a result, these youths may feel disempowered and struggle to pursue their career goals.

Moreover, vicarious learning and social modeling are central to Bandura's theory. OSYs who lack positive role models or exposure to diverse career options may have difficulty envisioning successful career paths. Environmental reinforcements, such as support from family members or access to community resources, can either promote or impede the career development of these individuals.

This theoretical framework is critical for understanding the complex dynamics that affect career aspirations among OSYs. Any effective intervention must enhance self-efficacy through skill-building and mentorship and address environmental factors, such as financial support and community engagement. By grounding the study in these theories, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive view of the challenges OSYs face and inform evidence-based solutions to empower them to make informed career choices.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a phenomenological research design to explore the essence of human experiences and understand the meanings individuals assign to those experiences (Deakin University Library, n.d.). This design was chosen to deeply investigate the factors influencing career aspirations among out-of-school youth, as it allows for capturing the unique and personal perspectives of the participants.

3.2 Research Locale and Participants

The research was conducted in Barangay Malabanban Sur, Candelaria, Quezon. The initial pool consisted of 28 out-of-school youths aged 15 to 24 years. Creswell and Poth (2018) reiterated that estimated participants between 10 and 50 is enough depending on the type of research and research question. From this group, purposive sampling was employed to select 15 participants who met the following criteria: they had to be between 15 and 24 years old and currently employed. This sampling method ensured that participants were well-suited to provide insights into the study's objectives.

3.3 Corpus of the Study

The corpus of this study comprises 15 sets of verbatim transcriptions, each derived from interviews conducted with individual out-of-school youth participants. These transcriptions were meticulously prepared to maintain the integrity and authenticity of the participants' responses, adhering to the Jefferson Transcription System (2009) to ensure technical accuracy (University Transcription Services, 2021).

The study utilized a set of corpora with three parts to address the research objectives: career aspirations, factors influencing these aspirations, and the impact of identified factors on both the feasibility and pursuit of career aspirations among out-of-school youth. These corpora were obtained through in-depth interviews with respondents who voluntarily agreed to share their experiences and insights.

Each interview was recorded and carefully transcribed to transform the audio content into text without compromising meaning or context. The transcriptions served as the foundation for analyzing the data and drawing meaningful conclusions, with each corpus explicitly addressing the specific research questions posed in the study.

3.4 Research Instrument

A validated, non-standardized research instrument was used, developed specifically to align with the study's aims. The instrument consisted of eight open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the career aspirations of the out-of-school youth, the factors shaping these aspirations, and how these factors influence their current career trajectories. The open-ended format also allowed for follow-up questions, enhancing the reliability and depth of the data collected. To ensure the validity of the instrument, the researcher sought consultation and validation to the experts within five days.

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

Upon validating the research instrument, the researcher sought and received approval from the Barangay Chairman of Malabanban Sur, Candelaria, Quezon. Following approval, potential participants were approached and informed about the study, emphasizing confidentiality and ensuring their willingness to share personal information and experiences related to their career aspirations. Consent was obtained from all participants prior to data

collection. The data was gathered within five days after conducting a personal interview with the study's participants.

3.6 Data Analysis

The study employed the analytical framework developed by Miles and Huberman (2014, as cited in Hashimov, 2014), a well-established method for qualitative research analysis. The analysis began with raw data generation through detailed transcriptions of the recorded interviews. The transcriptions were reviewed carefully to ensure that the participants' responses were accurately captured. Following this, the data were coded and chunked into meaningful units, with each segment reflecting specific ideas or recurring concepts related to the participants' career aspirations and influencing factors. During this coding phase, particular attention was paid to the nuances in participants' descriptions, ensuring that all relevant information was categorized appropriately.

The next step involved clustering the coded data into themes, which were identified based on patterns and the significance of the emerging concepts. For instance, factors like family influence, economic barriers, and peer relationships were grouped to highlight their impact on career decision-making among out-of-school youth. This thematic clustering enabled the researcher to draw connections between different experiences and situational influences described by the participants.

Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions and objectives. This step involved analyzing how these influencing factors affected the feasibility and shaping of the participants' career aspirations. By synthesizing these themes, the analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between personal, familial, and social factors that guide the career paths of out-of-school youth. This systematic and iterative process ensured that the data analysis was rigorous and aligned with the study's goals, ultimately yielding insights that could inform targeted interventions for this vulnerable population.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Identified Career Aspirations of the Out-of-School Youth

The table presents empirically derived themes concerning the career choices of out-of-school youth, categorized into three primary classifications: knowledge-based, skills-

based, and entrepreneur-based careers. The analysis indicates a pronounced inclination among out-of-school youth toward knowledge-based career aspirations. This theme encompasses aspirations to professions such as police officer, nurse, flight attendant, seaman, stewardess, teacher, military personnel, electrical engineer, and doctor, demonstrating a strong preference for careers traditionally associated with academic qualifications and higher education.

The empirical evidence further underscores that the remaining career choices of the out-of-school youth are distributed across skills-based and entrepreneur-based categories. Skills-based careers highlight roles that require specialized vocational training and practical competencies, while entrepreneur-based careers reflect a desire for self-employment and business ownership.

Supporting these findings, the literature suggests that involvement in structured training and educational activities is critical for youth pursuing these pathways. According to Abe (2005), some of out-of-school youth were consistently engaged in training or educational programs. These include vocational skills training, on-the-job training, high school classes, English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, General Educational Development (GED) preparation, and higher education courses. This stability in engagement highlights the importance of accessible educational and training opportunities in shaping the career trajectories of out-of-school youth and informs the empirical contributions of this study. In addition, Gairal-Casadó et al. (2019) pursuing a higher education can lead to a better well-being.

4.2. Factors Influencing Career Aspirations of the Out-of-School Youth

The key themes generated around the factors influencing the career choices of out-of-school youth are categorized into experience and skills, peer influence, teachers, financial constraints, family, and personal interest. The research question regarding the primary factors influencing career aspirations of out-of-school youth is directly addressed through the findings, which emphasize that family influence is the most significant determinant. This aligns with the study's aim to explore these factors comprehensively. Additionally, peer influence is identified as the second major factor, demonstrating how social circles impact career decisions and providing a clear response to the research problem. These factors reveal

that the youth's career choices are often deeply rooted in their desire to provide for their families or are shaped by the influence of their friends.

Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018), explain that the empirical findings of this study align with established theoretical frameworks in career development. The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) explains how self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and social influences interplay in career decision-making Lent et al. (1994, as cited in Lent & Brown, 2019). Carpenter and Foster (1977) categorized career-influencing factors into intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal dimensions. Intrinsic factors pertain to personal interests and the societal value of a profession. Extrinsic factors relate to the desire for social recognition and financial security, while interpersonal factors include the influence of family, teachers, and peers.

Further supporting this study's outcomes, also cited in the study of Pesado et al (2024), emphasizes the critical role of socialization agents, such as family members, educators, and peers, in shaping career aspirations. These interpersonal influences are evident in how out-of-school youth perceive and pursue their career paths, validating that social and economic contexts are crucial in understanding career decision-making among this population.

4.3. Influence of the Identified Factors on the Career Aspirations and Feasibility of Career Pursuit among Out-of-School Youth.

The study identified four distinct themes that illustrate how various factors influenced the participants' career paths: (a) Financial Matters, (b) Aims to Provide, (c) Inspiration, and (d) Influence. The findings reveal that Financial Matters emerged as a significant contributing factor, emphasizing the economic responsibilities and constraints faced by out-of-school youth. Participants highlighted that their career choices were often driven by the need to support their families and achieve financial stability, demonstrating how economic pressures shape their decisions.

This aligns with more recent research, such as Laroco (2022), which underscores the significant impact of socio-economic status on the career aspirations of adolescents. Furthermore, in this context, Pascual (2017) emphasized that career success can be best attained if career aspirations is suited to personality, ability, and intellect. Thus, it is can significantly serve as an influential guide in choosing future related career paths. In essence, a student's career success improves when their goals align to their own needs, strengths, and

circumstances. Within this approach, it allows OSY's to find fulfilling and careers which will potentially lead to greater career satisfaction and success.

Themes related to inspiration and influence underscored the importance of role models and significant figures, such as parents or peers, who inspire or guide the youth's career choices. Despite this, some participants reported that external factors did not directly influence their decisions, emphasizing a more personal or independent approach to their career paths. Moreover, the findings illustrate the nuanced and multifaceted ways financial, familial, and social factors intersect to shape the career trajectories of out-of-school youth. These insights highlight the interplay between economic necessity, the desire to contribute meaningfully to one's family, and the influence of inspirational figures and personal experiences in career decision-making. Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018) on their study on the factors influencing youths career choices highlights several factors contributing to the youths' aspiration including financial factors, and interpersonal factors such as family and peers.

5. Conclusion

The findings from this study reveal that out-of-school youth exhibit a pronounced aspiration toward knowledge-based careers, which are heavily influenced by financial constraints, familial responsibilities, peer dynamics, and personal interests. Financial matters emerged as the most impactful determinant, often dictating not only the types of careers they aspire to but also the practicality and feasibility of achieving these aspirations. The altruistic desire to provide for their families surfaced as a driving force behind their career decisions, reflecting a complex interplay between personal ambition and a sense of social responsibility. This study underscores the necessity of developing targeted support systems to aid out-of-school youth in overcoming financial and social barriers. Recommended interventions include scholarships and funding opportunities to alleviate financial constraints, vocational training to equip youth with practical skills, and mentorship programs that connect them with inspiring figures in their fields of interest. Furthermore, community engagement initiatives should aim to educate families about the significance of education and career development, fostering a supportive environment for youth.

The implications of these findings extend to policymakers, educators, and social workers who must consider the multifaceted influences shaping youth aspirations. Future

research should explore the longitudinal impact of these influences on career outcomes, delving deeper into how sustained support can alter life trajectories. Additionally, a more in-depth examination of gender-specific or culturally influenced career aspirations could further illuminate the nuanced needs of this demographic.

Limitations of this study include a focus on a specific geographic area, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the qualitative design provides rich descriptive insights but limits the ability to infer causality. Expanding the study across diverse contexts and integrating mixed methods could enhance the understanding and applicability of the results.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Due to the nature of the study, with no significant harm to the participants, the ethical review and approval is waived. However, the data gathering has been approved and given relative clearance(s) by the chairman of the locale under study.

Author Contributions

All authors equally contributed to the conception, design, preparation, data gathering and analysis, and writing of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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