

Lifelong Learners: Their Profile, Issues, and Concerns

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Abstract

Lifelong learners, though believed to be large in number, are scattered across the country. These were graduates from high school prior to 2016, under the basic education curriculum before K12, and who failed to enroll or complete their undergraduate degrees. This makes it difficult for institutions to forecast demand and identify the financial viability of opening of classes during the K12 transition years. Hence, the study was conducted in order to find out the possible number this group within the municipality, their profile, and needs as well as gauge the capacity of the higher education system to accommodate this special cohort. Results revealed that the potential lifelong learners are young females, single, unemployed college undergraduate who stopped schooling due to lack of financial resources. They are aware that SY 2017-2018 is their last chance to enroll or return to college. Scholarships/financial assistance was cited as top incentives that could encourage them to return and enroll in college. Majority signified definite willingness in returning to school, enroll in CapSU - Pilar Campus and take Agriculture in the first semester of SY 2017-2018.

Keywords: financial aid, K12 transition, lifelong learners, undergraduate

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INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning, as a concept espouses a shift from the common but erroneous belief that individuals stop learning after having gone through the basic education cycle. On the contrary, lifelong learning stands for a continuously supportive process which empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, and skills they will acquire throughout their lifetimes (Watson 2003). Therefore, individuals who are constantly motivated to acquire new knowledge and skills are called lifelong learners. Borrowing from this definition, students under the Lifelong Learner Track during the K to 12 Transition Period are referred to as Lifelong Learners because of their willingness to pursue higher education despite previously being unable to do so.

In 2010, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) estimated the number of Filipino high school graduates who do not have a college degree at 10.2 million. In the recent study of initiated by Capiz State University on the demographic profile, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the residents in the Municipality of Pilar, it was found out that three in every four of the OSY are high school graduates and college undergraduates (Buenvendida 2016).

Lifelong learners, though believed to be large in number, are scattered across the country. These were graduates from high school prior to 2016, under the basic education curriculum before K12, and who failed to enroll or complete their undergraduate degrees. This makes it difficult for institutions to forecast demand. Thus, HEIs identified the financial viability of opening of classes to an unpredictable and potentially limited number of students as the primary challenge. HEIs also expressed doubts as to whether Lifelong learners can commit to finishing the degrees that they will set out to pursue. Through CHED Resolution No. 264, series of 2015, these group were allowed to enroll and finish their baccalaureate degrees from SYs 2016-2017 to 2017- 2018, as their “last chance to go to college”. In Capiz State University, they comprised 15% of the total enrollment for SY 2016-2017, and 25% for CapSU-Pilar Campus. As a whole, they represent a potentially huge untapped market for higher education institutions during the transition period.

Simultaneously, this study was conducted in order to map out lifelong learner candidates in the municipal level, find out the possible number of this group, their profile, and needs as well as gauge the capacity of the higher education system to accommodate this special cohort. Results of the study will provide an up to date source of information on socioeconomic attributes of Lifelong Learners in the barangay and municipal level; serve as outline for policy recommendations for the consideration of CHED and higher education institutions; a source of comprehensive statistics for the use of the general public, government, business industry, and research and academic

institutions. More importantly, information that could be generated will serve as input to the academe like CapSU-Pilar on how to mitigate the impact of the unpredictable and potentially limited number of student enrolment in the last year of the K12 transition in college.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used the descriptive design of research through a survey questionnaire. The respondents of the study were the identified OSYs (Buenvenida, 2016) and residents of the Municipality of Pilar, whose age ranged from 15 to 50 years old, high school graduates who do not have a College degree and have graduated before March 2016. Also included are College dropouts before March 2016 and have some or completed post-secondary education (TVET). Gathering of data were done from October to December 2016. The content of the survey questionnaire were primarily based on the 2015 National Survey commissioned by CHED to assess the profile of the group of enrollees for the K to 12 transition Period. Modifications were made to reflect relevant issues in the university. The gathering of data was performed by enumerators by house-to-house visits and interview through purposive sampling. The questionnaire was translated and explained in Hiligaynon. Frequency, percentage, and ranking were used to interpret the data using SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

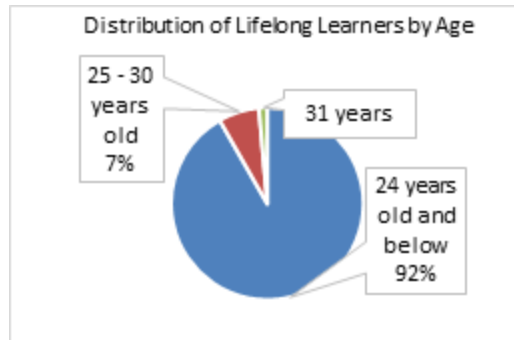
Profile of the Potential Lifelong Learners

A total of 72 respondents participated in the study. These were the identified OSYs based on the study of Buenvenida (2016) and residents of the municipality who were graduates from high school prior to 2016, under the basic education curriculum before K12, who failed to enroll or complete their undergraduate degrees and whose age is not more than 50 years old.

Age

Almost all (92%) lifelong learners in the Municipality of Pilar, Capiz belong to 24 years old and below age group. This signifies that the population of those who were not able to complete college education as well as those who were not able to enroll in college is dominated by young individuals. This echoes the 2015 survey of Commission on Higher Education (CHED) on lifelong learners in the Philippines

wherein it was found out that the respondents are mostly characterized as young (between 15 to 29 years of age).

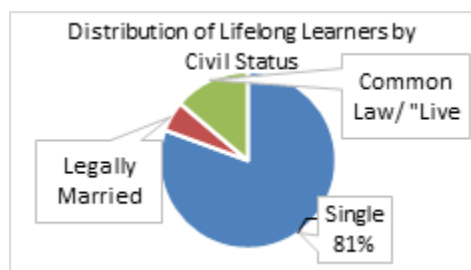


Sex

A huge portion of lifelong learners are females, accounting to 65% of the respondents. This means there are more females than males who either quit schooling or did not enroll in college at all. In the 2013 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) that covered around 36 million population aged 6 to 24 years revealed that in terms of gender, the proportion of out-of-school children and youth was higher among females than males in all regions.

Civil Status

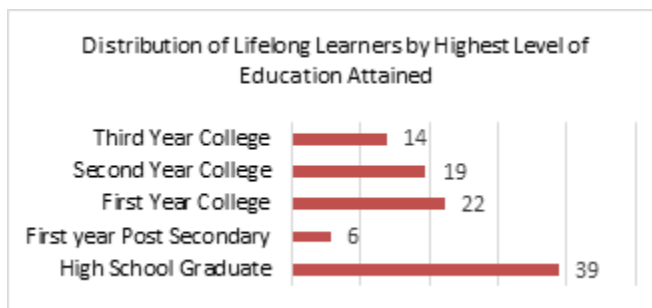
An overwhelming majority (81%) of lifelong learners are single. This somehow shows a relationship with the age profile of the respondents wherein, as previously stated, almost all are aged 24 years old and below; hence an enormous number of them are not yet involved in marital responsibilities. On the other hand, the 2015 survey by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) indicated that, among the unemployed lifelong learners in the country, more than half are single.



Highest Level of Education Attained

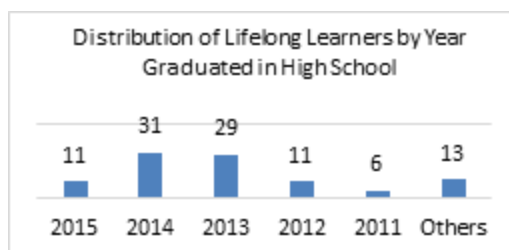
The majority (55%) of the respondents have taken some years in college, specifically from the first year up to third-year level. On the other hand, about 4 in ten respondents (39%) are high school graduates. This suggests that the majority of lifelong learners have already entered college before, but perhaps due to various compelling reasons they decided to quit schooling.

Meanwhile, the 2015 National Survey by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) indicated that among the lifelong learners in the country who expressed willingness to pursue their studies, around 40 percent have already taken some years in college. In the study of Buenvendida (2016) on the demographic profile of the residents of the municipality of Pilar in the province of Capiz which included some 1029 household members aged 6 to 24 years old, the highest population of out of school youth (OSY) are high school graduate level (45.2%) and 30.1% of OSYs are college undergraduates.



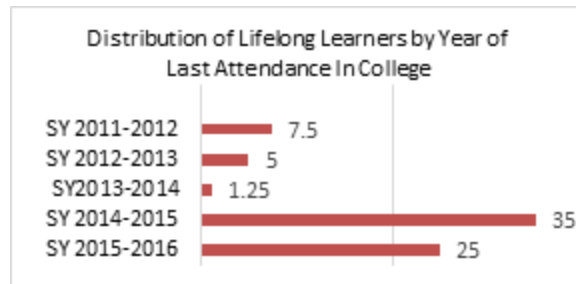
Year Graduated in High School

Majority of the respondents earned their secondary education diploma in the years 2013 (with 29%) and 2014 (with 31%), respectively. This can be linked to the age profile of the respondents wherein almost all of them are youth as they belong to 24 years old and below age bracket. Further, it implies that on the average most lifelong learners in the municipality of Pilar have stopped schooling for more than three years.



Year of Last Attendance in College

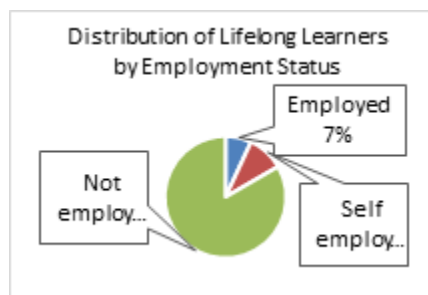
Many (35%) respondents last attended college in the school year 2014-2015. A substantial portion (25%) stopped after the school year 2015-2016. As suggested by these data, many respondents already spent some years in college had they not quit schooling, some of them could already have graduated by now.



Employment Status

An overwhelming majority (83%) or about 8 in 10 lifelong learners are unemployed. This implies that the respondents did not quit college to look for a job as evidenced by the extraordinarily high rate of unemployment among them.

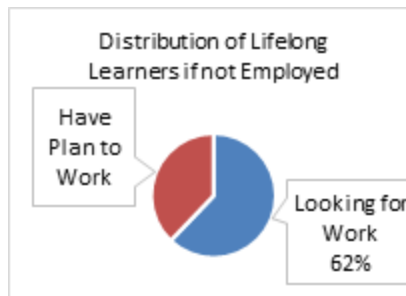
This concurs with the 2015 survey by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) which revealed, among other things, that most of the lifelong learners in the country are unemployed. These verify the findings of Buenvenida (2016) that for every ten out of school youths, seven are unemployed. Several studies have already established that those who are out of school are particularly disadvantaged and discriminated in the job market with respect to qualifications, skills, and experience.



Status of Unemployed

The majority (62%) of the unemployed respondents are presently looking for work. On the other hand, the remaining 38% are planning to work. This means that the respondents are not satisfied and happy with being jobless,

hence they think, plan and look for ways through which they can find a job.

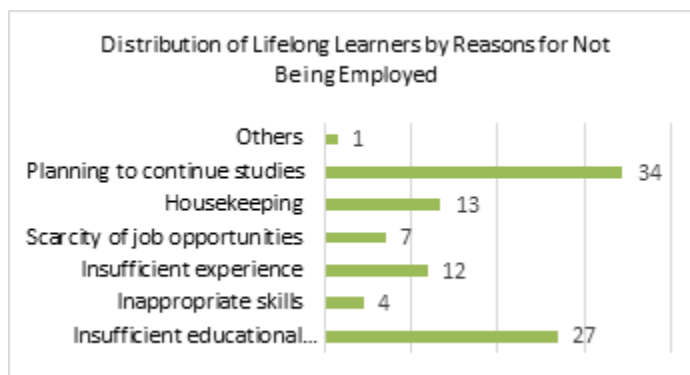


Reasons for Not Being Employed

Many lifelong learners (34%) are not employed because they are planning to continue their studies. Meanwhile, a substantial portion (27%) is unemployed learners due to insufficient educational qualification. Thus, non-working lifelong learners have not sought employment yet as they still hope to complete their studies.

The survey also indicated that, among the unemployed lifelong learners in the country, the other concerns are the difference in priorities, lack of budget, and even the need to support their families.

Meanwhile, Buenvenida (2016) found out that an overwhelming majority or nine in ten (92.8%) unemployed OSYs in the municipality of Pilar cited scarcity of job opportunities as the reason for their being unemployed.



Reasons for Not Pursuing/Completing College

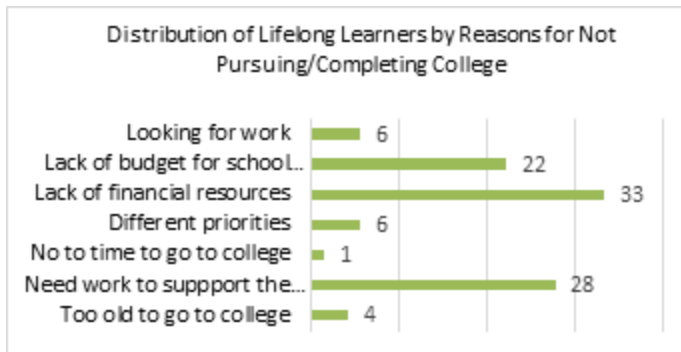
About 3 in 10 lifelong learners (33%) have not finished college due to lack of financial resources. Many (28%) quit college as they need to work to support their families. A significant fraction (22%) gave up their studies due to lack of budget for school expenses. Ultimately, poverty/scarcity is the principal factor that triggered the respondents to depart from school.

The Commission on Higher Education (2015) indicated that on the whole, the reasons for not continuing to college and the triggers are consistent across groups of the sampled Lifelong Learners, and the theme that cuts across is financial resources or the lack thereof.

In the study of Buenvenida (2016) on the demographic profile of the residents of the municipality of Pilar in the province of Capiz which included some 1029 household members aged 6 to 24 years old, the highest population of OSYs are high school graduate level and are college undergraduates where most of them gave financial problems as the primary reason for being out of school.

Meanwhile, the Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS) of 2004, revealed interesting pieces of information. Among those with some secondary education, high cost of education is the most cited reason (34%) for the bottom 20 percent while for the top 20 percent, employment/looking for work is again the most cited reason (45%), something that is certainly quite surprising given such income group.

It is important to articulate and emphasize the benefits of education, especially in the context of human capital development (Becker 1993), and as evidenced by returns to education in the Philippines (Gerochi 2002). Considering the opportunity costs of studying instead of working, these high school graduates should be enticed to forgo working now in exchange for more stable and decent jobs in the future. This would require tangible and high productive employment opportunities available to them after obtaining their respective degrees.



Issues and Concerns of Lifelong Learners

This part investigated the respondents' perceptions of the various issues surrounding the CHED's Lifelong Learner Track.

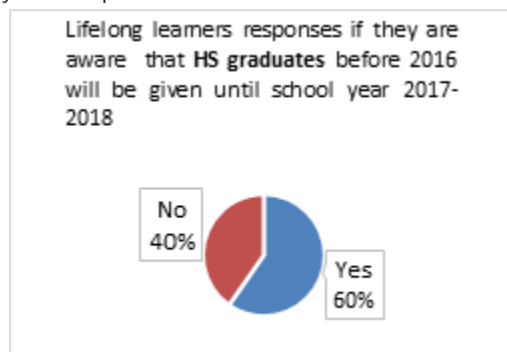
Awareness on the issue that HS graduates before 2016 will be given until the school year 2017-2018 to enroll in college

The majority (60%) of the respondents are aware that high school graduates before

2016 will be given only until the school year 2016-2017 to enrol in .

Despite of this, there exists undeniably large proportions (40%) who are unaware of CHED’s Lifelong Learner Track wherein those who graduated from high school prior to 2016, under the basic education curriculum before K12 are allowed to enroll and finish their baccalaureate degrees from SYs 2016-2017 to 2017-2018, as a “last chance to go to college”.

This implies a dire need on all concerned agencies and stakeholders to widely disseminate this essential information to all potential lifelong learners as well as to out-of- school youths and their parents to encourage them to make the best out of this rare opportunity to complete their studies.

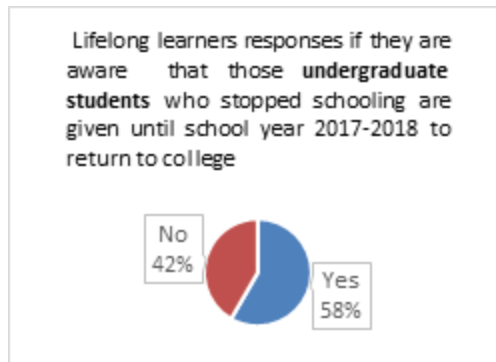


Awareness on the issue that those undergraduate students who stopped schooling are given until the school year 2017-2018 to return to college.

In general (58%), the respondents know that undergraduate students who stopped schooling are given only until the school year 2016-2017 to pursue the completion of their college education without having the need to go back to senior high school.

However, a glaringly large fraction (42%) appears to be unfamiliar with CHED’s Lifelong Learners Track as they do not know that those who have started but haven’t finished their baccalaureate degrees are now given their last chance to complete their studies without returning to senior high school.

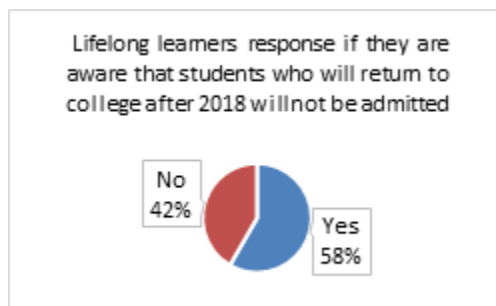
This implies an urgent need to boost the information dissemination campaign on CHED’s Lifelong Learner Track program to increase the level of people’s awareness and appreciation of such initiative.



Awareness on the issue that students who will return to college (higher education institutions) after 2018 will not be admitted.

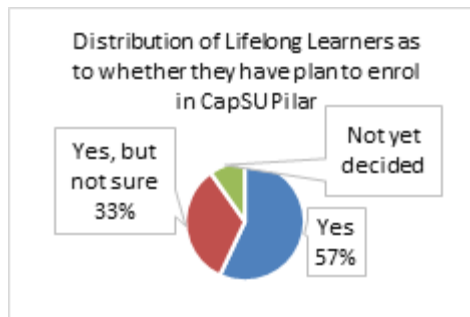
As to their awareness on CHED’s policy that students who will return to college (higher education institutions) after 2018 will have to go back to senior high school, majority of the respondents (58%) signified “yes”. On the other hand, a little less than half of them (42%) were unaware of such a program.

Hence, this observation indicates that a conscious effort must be exerted by proper authorities and concerned stakeholders to completely inform the target beneficiaries of such particular program, and as a consequence ensure the resounding success of its implementation.



Awareness on the issue aware that the school year 2017-2018 is their last chance to enroll in college

Six (6) in ten (10) respondents or 60% are aware that the school year 2017-2018 is their last chance to enroll in college without going back to senior high school. Meanwhile, 4 in 10 are unaware of such CHED policy. This means that although those who have knowledge on CHED’s Lifelong Learner Track outnumber those who are unaware of it, one cannot dispute the necessity of reaching out to more out-of-school youths so as to encourage them to finish their education.



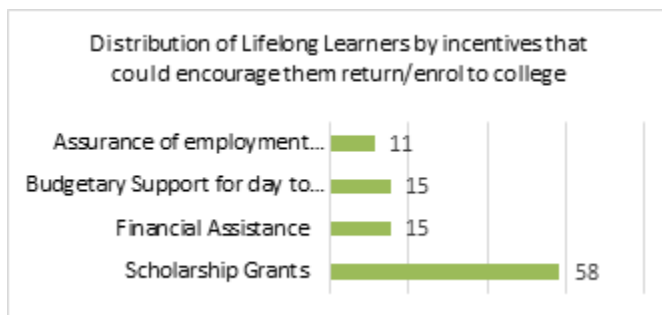
Incentives that could encourage them to return/enroll to college

About 6 in 10 respondents (58%) indicated their eagerness to return/enroll to college should they be provided with scholarship grants. On the other hand, 15% could be motivated by budgetary support for day to day school expenses. Another 15% expressed a desire to finish their education should they be afforded with financial assistance.

Hence, scholarship grants are the greatest, most vital motivation for lifelong learners to pursue their studies towards completion. This could be the case because as previously shown in the discussion of reasons why they stopped schooling, it was revealed that poverty/scarcity was the foremost factor.

The survey likewise revealed that monetary aids, guaranteed employment after college, and sufficient budget for education-related expenses were the top incentives that could encourage lifelong learners to return to college. On top of financial assistance, they can also benefit from programs that are flexible and can be taken part-time so they need to choose between studying and working.

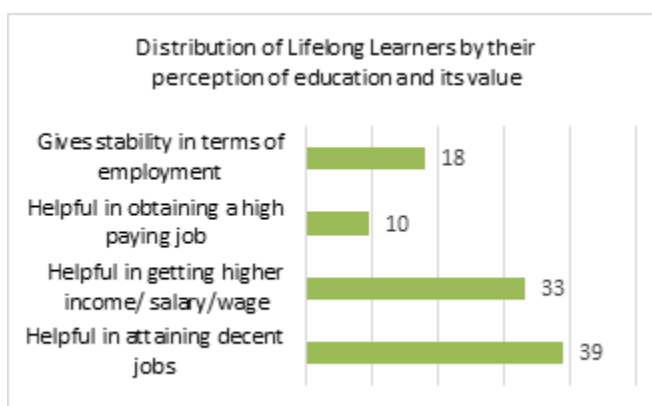
Meanwhile, Reyes and Galang (2009) on their study which documented students' motivations for studying and the factors that facilitate or inhibit learning found out that parents and family are the main source of motivation and that positive relationships with peers and teachers are major facilitators of learning show the primacy of personal relationships as students work towards their college degrees.



Perception of education and its value

About 4 in 10 lifelong learners (39%) perceive education as helpful in attaining decent jobs. Meanwhile, 3 in 10 believe that education is helpful in getting high income/salary/wage. Overall, the respondents have a positive regard on the value of education as they view it as a key towards attaining a decent, worthwhile employment.

This further revealed that looking into how the lifelong learners perceive education and its value, the oft-cited reasons are related to employment. They saw education as helpful in attaining decent jobs, higher income salary, and stability in terms of employment. Whereas, Kandiko and Mawer (2013) indicated that students have positive perceptions of higher education, but also clear expectations in mind of what institutions should provide to support and enable their learning and enhance their career prospects.



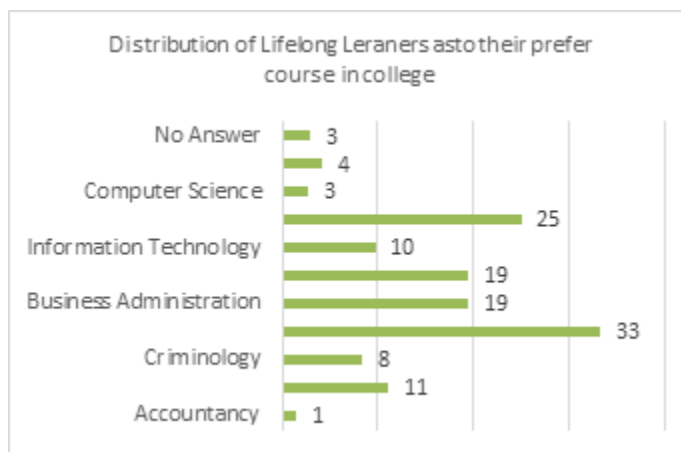
Preferred Course in College

If ever they will enroll in college, about 3 in 10 (33%) prefer to take up agriculture. Meanwhile 1 in 4 (25%) shall pursue a degree in Social Work. About 1 in 5 (19%) will enroll in an HRM program; a similar percentage goes with those who plan to pursue a degree in Business Administration. Hence, Agriculture and Social Work are

the top programs preferred by the respondents.

Meanwhile, Fizer (2013) in a study which determined the factors affecting agriculture students' choice of career path, it was found out that students believe that there are excellent career opportunities in agriculture.

In contrast, a CHED study on lifelong learners (2015) on the national level revealed that the top programs preferred by respondents planning to go to college are Information Technology Education, Teacher Education, Business Administration, Business Administration, Engineering and Technology and Service Trades (e.g. Tourism, Hotel, and Restaurant Management). The same demand for these programs is seen across regions, with the addition of Law and Jurisprudence as well as Medical and Allied Services in the Visayas region.



Do they have the plan to enroll/return to college?

As to whether or not the respondents have plans to enroll in college, the majority (57%) answered "yes,". There were 21% who signified a "yes but not sure" response. Some 18% were not yet decided during the time the survey was conducted. A small portion (4%) indicated a "no" reply.

Majority of the respondents signified definite and absolute willingness in returning to school. This indicates that the respondents are completely sure as to enroll in college upon knowing the fact that the school year 2017-2018 will be their last chance to go to college before the new general education (GE) curriculum and revised college curriculum is implemented by June 2018. This brings potential participants of the Lifelong Learning track to higher institutions like CapSU

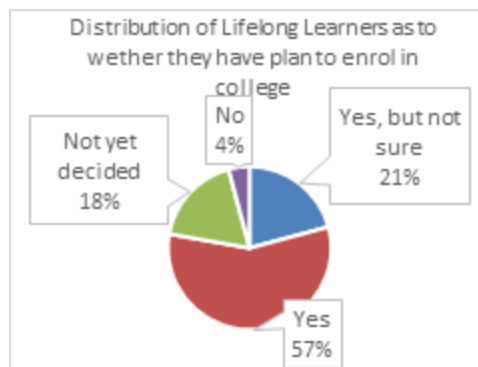
This result is very vital for planning and policy formulation to mitigate the impact of K12 transition in college. This means that there will be freshmen and returnees that

need to be catered in the first semester of the school year 2017-2018.

Do they have the plan to enroll in CapSU-Pilar?

When asked whether the respondents have plans to enroll in CapSU-Pilar, the majority (57%) said “yes”. There were 33% who answered an indefinite yes. The remaining 10% was, at the time of the survey, not yet decided. The respondents are strongly convinced of the quality of education offered by CapSU-Pilar, hence the majority of them desire to enroll in it.

This means that CapSU-Pilar shall still have enrollees either freshmen, returnees or transferees for SY 2017-2018. This information contradicts the common knowledge that there will be no more first year enrollees next semester and that teacher loads will be limited. Possibly, there will be more returnees and new enrollees than expected if only all agencies will do a more rigid information campaign on the last chance to enroll in college.



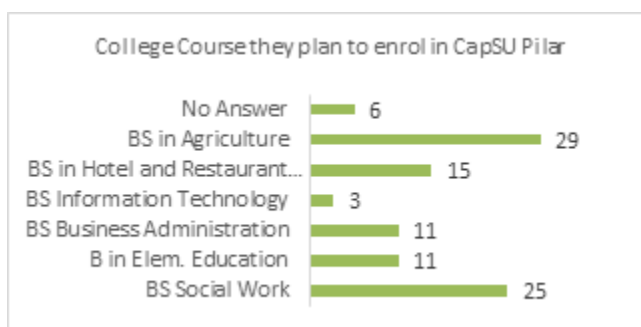
Course they plan to enroll in CapSU-Pilar

About 3 in 10 respondents (29%) prefer a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (BSA). This reveals that of the six (6) degree programs offered at CapSU-Pilar, the lifelong learners prefer to take a course that will not require them to pay tuition fee. Capiz State University initiated a Free Tuition Grant to all students who will take Agriculture. It verifies the previously stated results that financial assistance such scholarship grants is the best motivating factor that could encourage them to return or enroll in college.

Interestingly, this contradicts the findings of Pascual (2014) in her study on factors affecting high school students' career choice which showed that most of the students prefer to take scientific related field courses or the “popular courses” for Filipinos. The least preferred course is in the Agricultural field.

More importantly, results also confirmed that there will still be students who wish to

pursue all the courses offered on the campus. A significant percentage of the lifelong learners will enroll in Social Work Hence, Hotel and Restaurant Management, Business Administration, Teacher Education, and Information Technology. Hence, there will still be a need for more teachers, facilities and services.



CONCLUSIONS

1. Lifelong learners' single-young females, college undergraduates and unemployed.
2. Financial problem was the key reason for the non-pursuing or noncompletion of college.
3. A significant few are still unaware that SY 2017-2018 is the last chance to go to college under the Lifelong Learner Track Program of K12 transition.
4. Scholarships or financial assistance is top incentives that could encourage dropouts to return and enroll in college.
5. Lifelong learners signified definite willingness in returning to school and enroll in a free tuition-program of the university in the first semester of SY 2017-2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A concerted interagency (CHED, DILG, DSWD, DOLE, TESDA, DepEd, GO's, and NGO's) effort is urgently required to

1. ensure awareness of every potential lifelong learner of the barangay in the country through mass and social media;
2. enlist provisions for financial aids, grants, and scholarships to poor but deserving lifelong learners who opted to return/enroll to college;
3. formulate and implement systematic policy and institutional changes to ensure completion of the degree they want to pursue;
4. encourage participation and involvement of the lifelong learners in designing and implementing programs; and
5. develop more accessible support mechanisms to those who cannot return to colleges such as life skills training, livelihood, employment, and financial assistance;

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