

Utilization of the CHED-UniFAST's Tertiary Education Subsidy by the Students of a State University, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Republic Act No. 10931 intends to provide all Filipinos with an equal opportunity to quality tertiary education as to ensure the optimized utilization of government resources in education. This study investigated how the state university students utilized the 28,000 grant, and how it directly helped their education. Data was collected during the second semester of 2018-2019. In sample size 336 students, 77% have a family income of 10,000 and below. The items purchased by students in decreasing order were: 21% cellphone, 20% laptop, 20% boarding house fee, 19% food/groceries, and 13% clothes/shoes. Only 16% of the respondents had bank accounts, 88% sent money to parents, while 10% did not inform parents. The students gave priority to products they found helpful to their studies but were not affordable without subsidy. It is therefore concluded that the top five items are considered to be the basic needs

of a student to tackle college degrees in Philippine state universities; subsidy was used according to purpose; requirements of TES subsidy were mostly met; TES has initially addressed an expanded and equal access to quality tertiary education; and one of the means on how the Philippine Education System upholds the Equality Education for All (SDG4).

Keywords: SDG4, Western Philippines University, student's basic needs, CHED

INTRODUCTION

Financial constraint is one of the reasons why many high school graduates are not able to pursue tertiary education, and why a considerable percentage of college students drop out and are not able to finish their respective degrees. Financial reasons, apart from socioeconomic status, cultural and social capital, family structure and expectations, and the general organization of the high school offered some insight as to why students did not attend college (Temple, 2009).

Only 40 percent of Filipino high-school graduates have the financial capability to proceed to college, a problem that is hurting the country's chances of achieving sustainable growth (de la Cruz, 2015). This current plight of the affected students and the education sector have motivated legislators to seek measures to enhance the distribution of scholarship and other means of financial assistance. Hence, the Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education Act, or UniFAST — also known as Republic Act No. 10687, appropriated a billion pesos budget for tertiary education financial aid. Under this act is the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES). According to Lim et al. (2018), the Act aims principally to address dropout rates; there are only a quarter of students in higher education graduate at present. The Act is meant to help those dropping out because of a financial shortfall.

TES, which is under the rule of Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act of 2017, aims to support the tertiary education of a student, which includes all other expenses incurred related to the pursuit of the student's stay in a public or private university or college. Apart from the free tuition fee in state universities and colleges (SUC), a qualified TES recipient will be given an amount of 40,000 pesos for those enrolled in a SUC, and 60,000 pesos for those who are enrolled in a private university and colleges for the whole school year.

According to this act, TES may, among others, support the cost of tertiary education or any portion thereof to cover tuition and other school fees, allowance for books, supplies, transportation, and miscellaneous personal expenses, including a

reasonable allowance for the documented rental or purchase of personal computer or laptop, and other education-related expenses, and allowance for room and board costs incurred by the student. This Act's potential effects go beyond economic efficiency and targeting specific economic groups. It sends a powerful signal, particularly to poor and struggling students, that higher education is accessible to all. In principle, the Act allows all Filipinos to access quality tertiary education and commits to "provide adequate funding," potentially establishing universal access (Lim et al., 2018).

While this measure together with the tuition fee subsidy may help mitigate the dropping numbers of college graduates and high school graduates who no longer pursue tertiary education, factors such as supportive learning environments, quality of education they receive, student support and guidance, and personal goals and values among others, which will aid in the success of a student's tertiary education are to be monitored. These factors should be examined in order to fully maximize the resources invested and ensure a substantial increase in the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship. While many types of research are conducted exploring the various areas mentioned, there are yet no sufficient studies conducted to investigate subsidy utilization of TES scholarship or similar to it. This study was limited only to the recipients' utilization of the subsidy and did not seek to measure and assess the impact of the subsidy to the academic welfare of the student or the effectiveness of the government-initiated scholarship.

FRAMEWORK

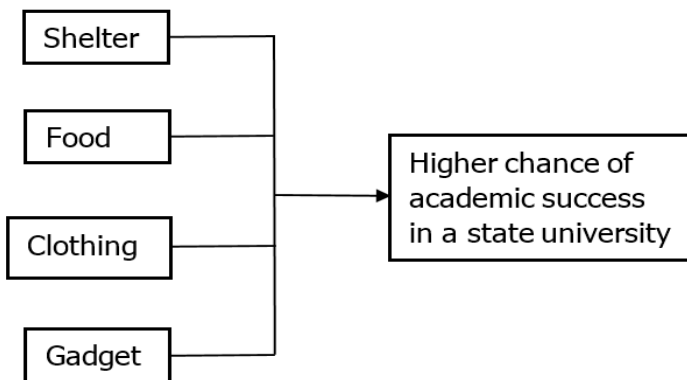


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of this study

This study aimed to know if the TES financial grant given to students helps

in their college education. The goal is to be able to identify what specific items do students buy given financial subsidies like TES. Although there are several studies on the basic needs of the college students, these studies were not focused on the specific items that students perceived to possess. Much of the works of literature have not focused on students' point of view and perspective on the things that they really need in order to pursue college education in a state university. The information derived from the experiences of the students will create a whole picture of students' perspectives on how to best use the TES grant in relation to academic success.

This study provided answers to the question "What are the priority items bought by students using TES grant?" Judging from various previous studies on student basic needs, use of laptop computers in higher education, quality tertiary education in the Philippines, rate of Filipinos finishing college, and factors that influence students to attend higher education, it can be determined that there are three main variables, namely: shelter, food, and laptop computer, which influences students' experiences in college.

Students are very much concerned with the basic needs of learning and living a college life. Clothing and shoes are also part of the basic needs. Lastly, cellphones that now have functions of a laptop computer also greatly influence student's academic experience. The study was also able to determine that the variables: food, shelter, laptop computer, mobile phones, and shoes/clothing (Fig. 1), are the priority needs of a college student in a state university.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore the utilization of the 610 qualified students on the initial P28,000 subsidy given to them during the second semester of SY 2018-2019. It aimed to identify the; (a) Profile of the recipients, and (b) Utilization of subsidy received from (TES) scholarship.

METHODS

This study used quantitative approach utilizing the survey questionnaire as the primary instrument supported by interviews in order to clarify or confirm answers and supplement reasons to chosen answers. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part was on the profiles of the student recipients and the second part aimed to determine how the students utilized the subsidy

they have received. A Free and Informed Prior Consent was secured from the respondents and explained that that they were are not forced to answer, and that they can refuse to answer the question if they wanted to.

The respondents of this study were the student recipients of TES subsidy who were from the different colleges of Western Philippines University, Puerto Princesa Campus. Of the 610 students who received subsidies, 336 students were respondents for the study.

Descriptive Statistics such as Frequency Count, Rank and Percentage Technique were used to evaluate the profile of the recipients and their TES subsidy utilization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) Recipients

The majority of the recipient-respondents of TES subsidy (82%) came from the northern and southern municipalities of the Palawan Province. The majority of the respondents' parents (77%) had combined the monthly family income of below 10,000, which is way low for a family of five. Only 3.6% of the respondents had combined monthly income ranging from P15,000 to P20,000; it is still way half the supposed household income for a family to have a decent-enough living. An average Filipino family would need an aggregate income of P42,000 to live above the poverty line (Sy et al., 2018).

Majority (76.2%) of the respondents did not expect the monetary amount subsidized by the government. Although this may seem to imply that the students pursued tertiary education even without being informed that the government will subsidize their other tertiary education expenses. The influx of 1st-year enrollees can be attributed in the zero tuition payment or non-collection of tuition and miscellaneous fees during the first and second semester of SY 2018-2019 as shown in Figure 2. Besides, the TES subsidy was distributed two months before the end of the 2nd semester of SY 2018-2019. In line with this, there had been a 22.7% increase in the number of enrollees from 1,552 first-year students in 2016 and 2,007 first-year students in 2018 and a 19% increase in 2019 in Western Philippines University Puerto Princesa Campus.

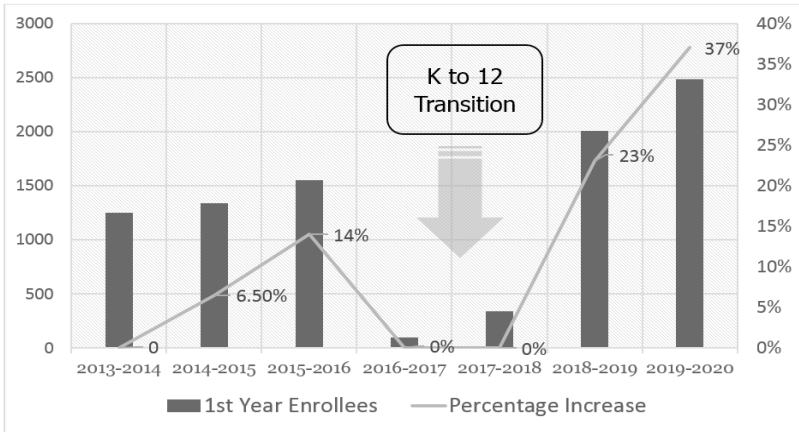


Figure 2. Rate of increase of 1st-Year enrollment in WPU (2013-2019)

This likely indicated a positive outcome as a result of additional financial aid opportunities such as the UniFAST. Moreover, it would seem to have initially resolved the prior issues on the dropping rate of tertiary enrollees. Three of five high-school graduates could not afford to go to college (de la Cruz, 2015). Furthermore, the Philippine News Agency (2017) quoted that only 23% of Filipinos were able to finish college due to financial constraints.

TES Subsidy Utilization

The distribution of subsidy for TES recipients was given on a staggered basis. 28,000 was given to the students in January 2019, and the remaining 12,000 was distributed to the students in April 2019. The data gathered in this study on the utilization of the students of Western Philippines University – Puerto Princesa campus on the TES subsidy were collected after the recipients received the first part of the subsidy amounting to 28,000.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Utilization of the TES subsidy 2019

Questions	YES		NO	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Did you inform your parents, brothers, sisters or other family members about the money you received?	303	90.2%	33	9.8%
Did you deposit your money or part of it in the Bank?	55	16.4%	281	83.6%
Did you send money or part of it to your family?	275	81.8%	38	11.3%

Table 1 shows that the majority (90%) of the respondents informed their parents about the subsidy, while a few (10%) decided not to notify their families. Moreover, a few (16%) of the recipients deposited a portion of their subsidy to the bank, and most of them (81.8%) also sent a part of their money to their parents or relatives. While a few decided to save an amount in the bank, while most were inclined to inform their parents about the subsidy and shared them a part of what they had received.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents who deposited a part of their subsidy in the bank

Percentage from the Amount received (Php 28,000) by the Respondents deposited to the bank	Frequency (N=55)	Percentage
10%	15	27%
11%-15%	9	16%
16%-20%	8	15%
21%-30%	6	11%
31%-40%	2	4%
41%-50%	2	4%
51% and above	9	16%
No response	4	7%

Table 2 shows that almost a third (27%) of the 55 respondents who deposited in the bank had saved about 10% or 2,800 of their subsidy, another third had saved about 11%-20% or 3,080 to 5,600 pesos, 15% saved about 21% to 40% or 5,800 to 11,200 pesos, and 20% saved a sizable amount of 41% or 11,480 pesos and above of their subsidy. The majority of the respondents opted not to deposit in the bank because apart from not having a bank account, they needed the amount to spend for their immediate needs, such as boarding house rental, among others. In the S&T Scholars handbook, Science Education Institute - DOST (2015) requires that DOST scholarship recipients should open an e-account with the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) and submit their account number to DOST-SEI or DOST Regional Office immediately, because all financial assistance, except for the tuition fees, are released to the recipients through their LBP bank e-account.

Unlike DOST scholarship recipients who are required to open an account in Land Bank of the Philippines before receiving their stipend and allowances, UniFAST did not require recipients to do so. While transferring scholarship subsidies to students through the bank may have more benefits and streamlines the distribution process, there could be a difference in how recipients utilize the subsidies when receiving it in check or cash or through bank ATMs. The study, however, is delimited to such extent.

Table 3

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents who sent a part of their received allowance to their parents or relatives

Percentage from the Amount received (Php 28,000) by the Respondents that they sent to their parents or relatives	Frequency (N=275)	Percentage
10%	86	31%
11%-15%	58	21%
16%-20%	31	11%
21%-30%	23	8%
31%-40%	16	6%
41%-50%	18	7%
51% and above	43	16%

Table 3 shows that a third of the 275 respondents sent to their parents or relatives about 10% or 2,800 pesos of their subsidy, another third sent about 11%-20% or 3,080 to 5,600 pesos, 14% sent about 21% to 40% or 5,800 to 11,200 pesos and 23% sent a substantial amount of about 41% or 11,480 pesos and above of their subsidy. Of those who sent money to their family, 89% sent to their parents, while the rest either sent to their siblings or relatives. According to the respondents, some sent the amount to their parents for saving (because they do not have bank accounts), while others sent it as day-to-day subsistence support to their parents and siblings. A few respondents sent money to their parents to pay their parents' debt or use as start-up capital for livelihood or business ventures.

Approximately 19% (17.08 million) of the total amount given to 610 WPU-PPC students was forwarded to their parents. This suggests that the subsidies of the state university students were not solely utilized for their educational needs, but also considers the close familial relationship along with the Filipino culture, that influences how students (children) utilize their financial grants.

Table 4

Top priority items that the students spent their money on

Items	Frequency (N=336)	Percentage
Cellphone	71	21.1%
Boarding House Rental	69	20.4%
Laptop	66	19.7%
Food/Groceries	65	19.4%
Clothes	31	9.3%
Shoes	12	3.6%
Medicine	7	2.2%
Capital for Business	7	2.2%
Bags	4	1.1%
Jewelries	1	0.4%
Treat Friends/Classmates	1	0.4%
Motorcycle (Down payment)	1	0.4%

CONCLUSIONS

The top five items, namely mobile phone, boarding house rental, laptop, food/groceries, and clothes are the main items that a student would provide himself if he has enough money to pursue his college education, hence may become the basic items needed by a student to tackle college degrees in state universities in the Philippines. Considering the stated coverage of the subsidy which included books, supplies, transportation, room and board costs and miscellaneous personal expenses, including a reasonable allowance for the documented rental or purchase of personal computer or laptop, and other education-related expenses incurred by the student – the respondents, having given discretion on how to utilize their financial aid, have mostly use the subsidy according to its purpose. The purpose of the TES subsidy, as stated in the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 10931, known as the “Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act of 2017, is mostly met. Under the Memorandum Circular No. 2018-0004 released on October 15, 2018, by the UniFAST governing board that discussed the guidelines on the implementation of the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES), it iterated section 7 of R.A. 10931 that the TES intends to support, among others, all education-related expenses, which includes the items prioritized by the students. Results have further proven that the TES can initially address an expanded and equal access to quality tertiary education, as seen in the increase of enrollees (Fig. 1) and increased capacity of the students for food security and housing.

The TES Subsidy is one of the means of how the Philippine Education System upholds the Equality Education for All goal of the United Nations (SDG4). However, the subsidy that the students received was not entirely utilized for their educational or academic needs as part of it was sent to their parents or relatives for non-academic purposes, and a few used the subsidy for buying non-academic related items.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following are recommended;

1. Student recipients must be required to open bank accounts. The use of a bank's ATMs in issuing subsidies should be considered;

2. If deemed necessary, a study on the advantages of issuing subsidies by ATM should be done. Transferring scholarship subsidies to students through the bank's ATM may benefit and streamline the distribution process, there could be a difference on how recipients utilize the subsidies when receiving it in check or cash, or through bank ATM, e.g., sending money to parents for saving rather than in the bank;

3. Generally, the bulk of state universities students come from distant municipalities and provinces, which in this case, the universities should provide decent and low-cost dormitories and safe food services for their students on the campuses;

4. Monitoring and Control schemes also can be firmly established in order to ensure that; TES recipients will finish their tertiary education and prevent circumstances that will delay or hinder them from graduating; and to maximize the use of subsidy; and

5. Consequently, it is still worth to conduct more detailed studies on the direct relevance of the items that the student has bought to the learning

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