

Implementation of the Expanded Students Grant-in-Aid for Poverty Alleviation (ESGP-PA) Program in the Philippines

¹Jennifer M. Montero,¹Maria Lady Sol A. Suazo, ¹Annie Y. Samarca and ²Minda B. Brigoli

Abstract

This study assessed the implementation of the Expanded Students Grants-in-Aid for Poverty Alleviation (ESGP-PA) Program as basis for policy enhancement. Quantitative descriptive design was employed in this study. Checklist was used in order to gather the data needed. To triangulate the responses of the respondents, random interview was done. The numerical data was subjected to descriptive statistic. The study found out that many of those belonging to the financially disadvantaged families were able to gain access to college. However, the grant does not necessarily propel the students towards increased academic achievements. On the part of the implementing SUC, administrative and academic schemes have been instigated in order to address the demands brought about by the swivel of enrolment and the needs of the respondent-grantees.

Keywords: academic outcomes, gains and impacts, grant-in-aid program

Corresponding Author: Jennifer M. Montero, medrano0822@gmail.com

1.0 Introduction

Academic preparation through college access is an imperative aspect for career mapping. Thus, the government has taken initiatives in order to institute a program that will give opportunities to deserving students with financial impediments. It is assumed that with a well-designed study grant program, educational attainments are deemed to escalate. Consequently, this study is designed in order to assess the implementation of the Expanded Students Grants-in-Aid for Poverty Alleviation (ESGP-PA) Program as basis for policy enhancement. Furthermore, this study sought to establish the profile of the grantees, extent of implementation, the level of the administrative capacity of the Academic Institution in the Implementation of the ESGP-PA Program, the problems encountered by the ESGP-PA Grantees and the implementing SUCs as well as the gains and/or impacts of the program both at the Grantees and Implementers level.

ESGP-PA came about in consonance with Article XIV, section 1 of the Philippine Constitution requiring the State to make education accessible to all. Many of the young Filipinos are unable to reach College because poverty significantly affects the resources available to them (Lacour and Tissington, 2011). The government on its end sought for means to help close the gap by providing these poverty stricken students the necessary assistance. To address the problem, the SGP-PA as an initiative was pursued by the government which was later called as ESGP-PA. This is intended to provide access to the poor but capable students to higher education. The objective of the program is to increase the number of higher education graduates among poor households by directly providing financing for their education in selected SUCs (Silfverberg and Orbeta, 2016). SGP-PA as a scholarship program has two important features: (a) it is well-targeted to identified poor households; and (b) it provides substantial grant

amount sufficient to cover all normal education expenses including living allowance.

As stated in the framework of CHED-DSWD Expanded Students' Grant-in-aid Program for Poverty Alleviation (ESGP-PA), the said grant essentially, measures the needs to be taken and sustained in order to reduce poverty and unemployment in the country. Community development practice, embedded in decades of welfare and social policy, frequently deals with programs aiming to remedy poverty. The key initiatives today are to push poor into work as a primary goal (Maskovsky, 2001). In line with this, the government is taking the lead in providing an opportunity specifically to the youth members of the indigent families to acquire better education systems that is more responsive and relevant. This, in turn, is anticipated to help address problems of unemployment and alleviate poverty. The baseline is investing with the youth and giving them a head start towards a brighter and well-founded future.

In putting the Program into the forefront, CHED has selected SUCs as implementing academic institutions one of which is Surigao del Sur State University (SDSSU). The tasks of the implementing SUC in the partnership include: entering into a MOA with CHED, enroll deserving students to the program and channeling them to the identified programs of CHED, orient the beneficiaries of the policies of the program monitor and report the academic performance of the grantees, receive the benefits from the granting agency and disburse it to the beneficiaries, provide appropriate accommodation to the grantees, institute career guidance programs for the grantees and their parents, inform the granting agency in the event that there will be drop outs so that replacements will be considered, organize remedial classes for the grantees when deemed necessary and submit pertinent reports to the partner agencies relevant to the program. As an

assessment of the existing operations and scenario of the program, results will serve as barometer of what has been done to deliver the same to its recipients, and if there is a need, improve prevailing mechanism for a more operative Program delivery.

2.0 Research Methodology

The study made use of quantitative descriptive research design in order to elicit responses from both grantees and administrators. However, in order to validate responses from the survey, the triangulation method through interviews with four groups: ESGP-PA grantees; teachers; ESGP-PA Coordinators; and administrators was employed. The interview served as an important tool in finding out the existing problems encountered by the grantees and implementing campuses relative to the program implementation as well as finding out the mechanism engaged by the administrators in addressing the problems met. Validation and pilot-testing of the research instruments was done in order to ensure validity of the tool utilized in this study. Universal sampling was employed in the identification of the respondents. Descriptive statistics was used in order to find out answers to the problems posted in this study.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Profile of ESGP-PA Grantees

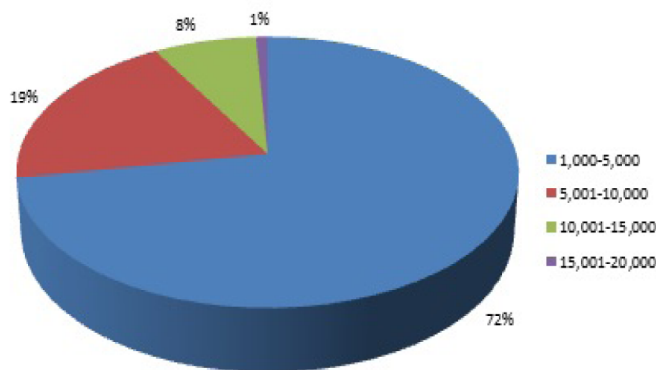


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of grantees' family income

Figure 1 shows that 72% or most of the 582 grantees of SDSSU system belong to a family with meager income amounting to P1,000 – P5,000 a month. Following are those who belong to family with P5,001 to P10,000. Only 1% of the grantees belong to a family with P15,001-P20,000 income. Family income is an important requisite for a student to be enrolled to the program. The Joint circular of CHED, DBM, PASUC, DSWD and DOLE stipulated a provision that the Program will address poverty by increasing the number of graduates in higher education among poor households. The program aims to reduce the financial stress of the student-grantees who belong to low income families in order

to induce confidence on their part and to increase chances of academic success, thereby enabling them to a land to high-valued employment thus contributing to national growth.

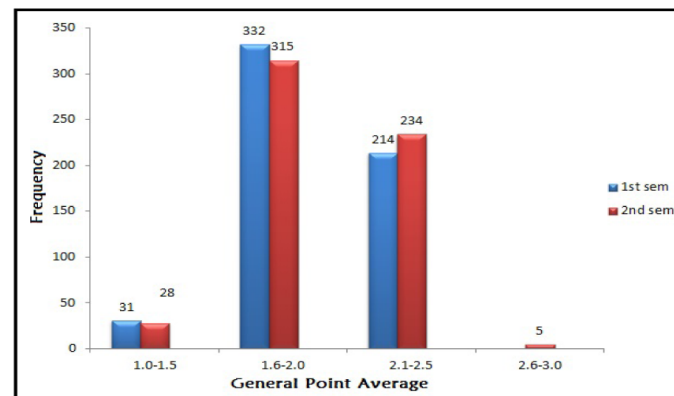


Figure 2. Academic performance (GPA for AY 2015-2016) of the respondents

In terms of academic performance, Figure 2 reveals that a substantial number of the 582 grantees earned a grade between the bracket of 1.6-2.0 (89-85) followed by the grade bracket of 2.1-2.5 (84-80). It can be gleaned from Figure 2 that a number of the grantees have average academic performance and only a flimsy number has shown above average performance where academics is concerned. However, it can also be noted that during the second semester 5 of the total grantees fell short from their academic performance having gained a grade between 2.6-3.0 (79-75). It can further be inferred from the results that financial contingencies do not warrant increased academic performance. By and large, academic performance does not rely so much on financial considerations for those students who belonged to disadvantaged families. This is conformed by Alon (2007) who stated that most if not all students with merit-based grants belonging to disadvantaged families are negatively related to persistence in terms of academic achievement. Based on this assertion, and in order to carve better results for the program, policies for program retention may incorporate cautionary academic provisions that will better promote an increased academic performance though the program is by essence not an academic-merit based program.

Figure 3 underscores the course most subscribed by the student-grantees. It can be noted from the chart that 19% of the grantees mostly prefer Bachelor of Secondary Education. The program has its own admission and retention requirements while the rest of the programs have not instituted stern policies on access and retention except for BSCE with only 2% subscription. The high level skill required by both degrees meant higher probability of landing a decent and high valued career. However, between the two, only BSED is typically pursued. One reason for BSED to be frequently subscribed is

that it is offered in all four campuses: SDSSU Tandag, Lianga, Cantilan and Tagbina; while BSCE is offered only in Tandag Campus. Because of the admission policy, grantees who wished to be enrolled in the said degrees were not allowed access; forcing them to enroll in other courses with flexible admission schemes.

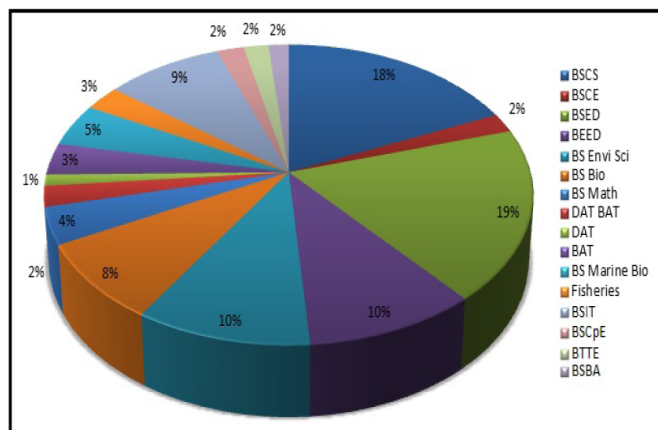


Figure 3. Subscribed Courses (AY 2015-2016)

Level of Implementation

Figure 4 underscores the level of implementation of the ESGP-PA Program as to policy orientation, accommodation and meals, guidance program, remedial instruction and monitoring and evaluation.

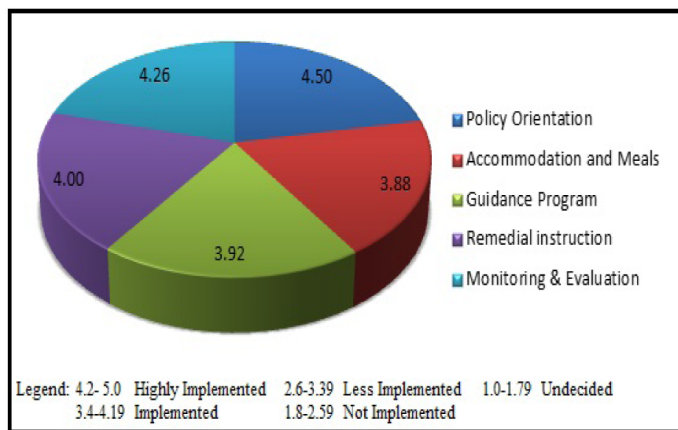


Figure 4. Level of Implementation of ESGP-PA Program

Results show that only policy orientation and monitoring and evaluation gained a highly implemented descriptive value with means of 4.50 and 4.26 respectively. These institutional strategies are instigated in order to contribute to students' success. Making the students at ease in the learning environment depends on the school's mechanisms on giving the students awareness on the environment. On policy orientation, results revealed that the Institution has conducted orientation about the ESGP-PA which include guidelines for program retention. On monitoring and evaluation, all four implementing campuses identified a key person to monitor and report academic performance of the

student-grantees. Such person oversees the problems met on grades and other concerns that could impede on the academic experience of the grantees.

On the other hand, remedial instruction, guidance program, and accommodation and meals all gained a descriptive rating of implemented with means 4.00, 3.92 and 3.88 correspondingly. Remedial instruction has been conducted for students with academic deficiencies and for those who have failing grades. This serves as a bridging program so that those who fall short with their grades can weed themselves out from their academic deficiencies. Progress of the student-grantees are constantly monitored and evaluated in order to know whether objectives of the program have been fully met. Meetings with parents and ESGP-PA Coordinator in each campus have been called in order to inform the parents of the performance of their children. These meetings also form part of the monitoring activity planned by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs to ensure that the grantees are given the attention so as to avoid being delisted from the program. Aside from the above-described meetings, there are also meetings with the grantees themselves for grade monitoring purposes. Grantees are asked to submit their permanent record to the ESGP-PA point person in their respective campuses showcasing their semestral grades which they request from the Office of the Registrar. The ESGP-PA staff in every campus reports the data to the VPAA who also forwards the same to CHED. On the other hand, the guidance program has also offered varying holistic and value-laden formations such as stress management, individual counseling, group counseling, referrals, personality enhancements, and seminars on pre-marital sex, smoking drug abuse and prohibited beverages. All these services are instigated in order to prevent academic downturns. Values formation activities have also been given attention as these are deemed necessary in the holistic formation of these grantees. Lianga Campus has conducted consultations in form of symposium wherein speakers are invited to talk about values enhancement and academic performance. Tagbina, Cantilan and the Main Campus on the other hand, have conducted the same practices, and they all sought the assistance of DSWD to help them carry out their activities intended for the ESGP-PA grantees.

Jacob and Ludwig (2009) argued that schools including the way they organize their services and resources to be offered to the students could improve students' achievement. Furthermore, recent literatures indicate that school-based factors, such as the teaching approach and the school environment are of primary importance to improving educational outcomes of students belonging to disadvantaged families (Ockenden, 2014).

Figure 5 shows how the institution has

instigated measures in order to better deliver the ESGP-PA financial aid to the grantees. The administrators in all of the aspects identified under administrative capacity are highly capable.

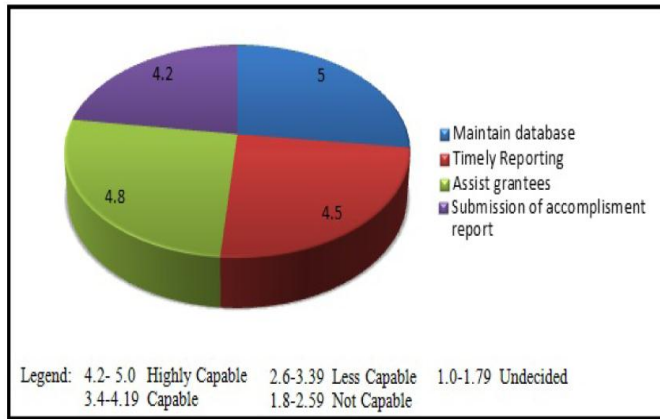


Figure 5. Level of Administrative Capacity of the Institution.

On the administrative capacity, the institution is assessed as to data with a mean result of 5.0 having a highly capable descriptive value. This is followed by assisting grantees with their concerns such as stipend and problems met gaining a 4.8 mean with the same adjectival rating. The starting point for quality learning among students belonging to disadvantaged families is school leadership. Administrators through their systematic support can provide a positive learning and teaching environment (OECD, 2012).

Problems Met

Academic related problems are highlighted in Figure 6.

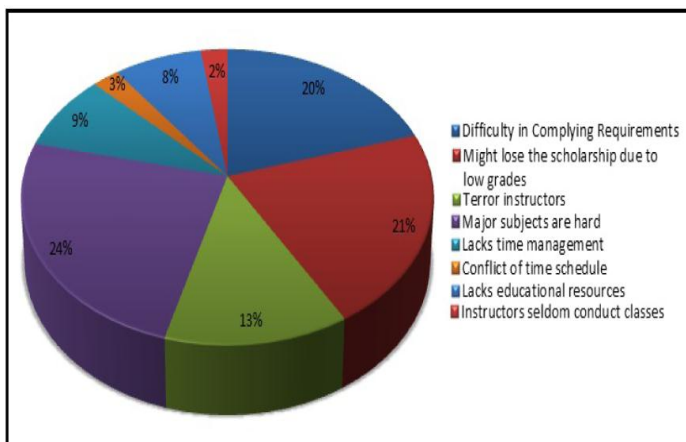


Figure 6. Academic-related problems of ESGP-PA Grantees

It is noted from the presentation that 24% of the grantees find difficulty with their major subjects. This is followed with 21% of the grantees feeling apprehensive of getting delisted due to low grades. From such results, it can be inferred that most if not

all grantees are disadvantaged in terms of academic performance despite the fact that they have been relieved from financial constraints. A trivial 2% quipped that there are those instructors who seldom conduct classes. Though inconsequential, there is still a need to look into the professionalism of the teachers for this will greatly affect educational outcomes. From the results, it can be established that financial aids, or government grants do not necessarily ensure positive academic performance. In essence, schools were able to admit a pool of average performing students; thus, in the long run, these students if not highly motivated may not be able to perform better forcing their performance to either stay on the average level or even decline if no academic interventions will be instituted.

Figure 7 shows the grant-related problems experienced by the students. Foremost in the list is the insufficiency of the allotment with 64% of the respondents identifying it as the main problem where the grant is concerned. Varying mechanisms are adopted in each campus in the distribution of allowances. For Lianga and Tagbina satellites, accommodation and meals are provided; hence, only a slight amount is left for their incidental expenses. As to their book allowance, the 2,500 allotment per semester was found to be insufficient for their books and projects expenses. However, administrators revealed during the interview that some of the grantees mismanage their money resulting to running out of stipend before the semester ends.

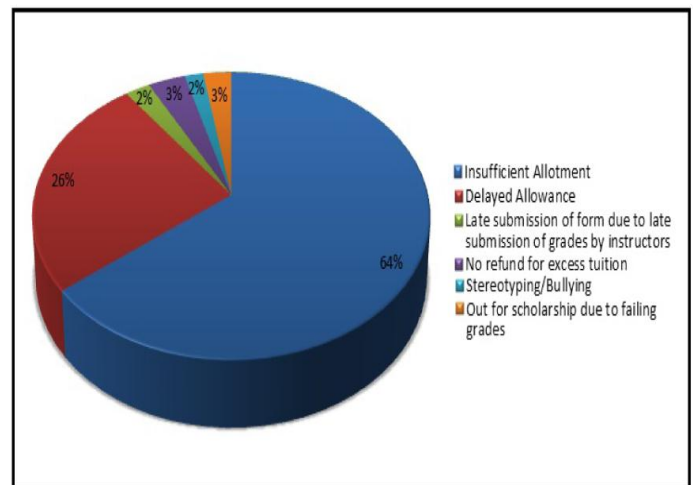


Figure 7. Grant-related problems of the ESGP-PA Grantees

Two percent is identified with bullying problems and late submission of forms due to instructors' late submission of grades. Bullying has become a problem because the non-grantees will hurl unsolicited words to them being recipients of a grant but not performing more in class. On another note, some teachers as revealed during the random interview lag behind in submitting grades; hence,

students have difficulty complying with their grant-related semestral requirements.

One issue faced by the University is on the provision of food and lodging for the grantees. The Main Campus and the Cantilan Campus for example have no dormitories; thus, the grantees were referred to the boardinghouses outside the campus. Because of this, monitoring as to their whereabouts, absenteeism and tardiness has become a challenge. Another issue is on their food allowance. Some of these grantees were observed to skip meals due to projects and other expenditures that they take from their meal allowance; however, because they are scattered in the different boardinghouses, the ESGP-PA coordinator has difficulty monitoring grantees, unlike Lianga and Tagbina Campuses which have their own dormitories. According to Higgins et al., (2005) schools have a role in the meals of the students linked as roles beyond the classroom with regard to information and initiatives that could lead to a better learning performance. Furthermore, they stressed that physical services such as accommodation are essentially part of the comfort that students are supposed to avail for improved well-being, attitude and perhaps achievement as well.

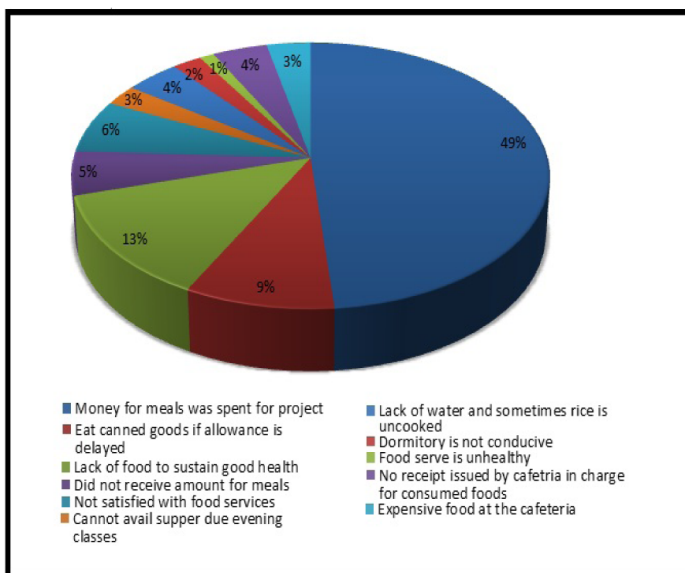


Figure 8. Accommodation and Meal-related Problems of ESGP-PA Grantees

In terms of the project staff-related problems, Tandag campus respondents quipped that project staff in the said campus is not focused with his assigned task as a coordinator. Triangulation revealed that the said coordinator is also assigned with other tasks that impede the effectiveness as ESGP-PA coordinator because of other concerns which are also of equal importance. Because of overlapping work, the assigned coordinator fails to meet the grantees regularly. Tagbina respondents have not come across project-staff issues while Lianga and Cantilan found their coordinators to be rather strict and ill

disposed. Zandvliet & Straker (2001) in the study of Higgins et al., (2005) noted that teacher-to-student communication lead to productive interaction and improved student performance. Thus, it can be inferred that the success of the students and school administrators in the implementation of the ESGP-PA program can be attributed to the kind of communication structure and social support made available to the grantees. If the coordinators manifest unbecoming attitude towards the grantees, the line of communication will most probably erode forcing the grantees to withdraw themselves from the authorities thereby creating a gap which will affect other engagements such as the monitoring and evaluation for the purpose of coming up with progress reports.

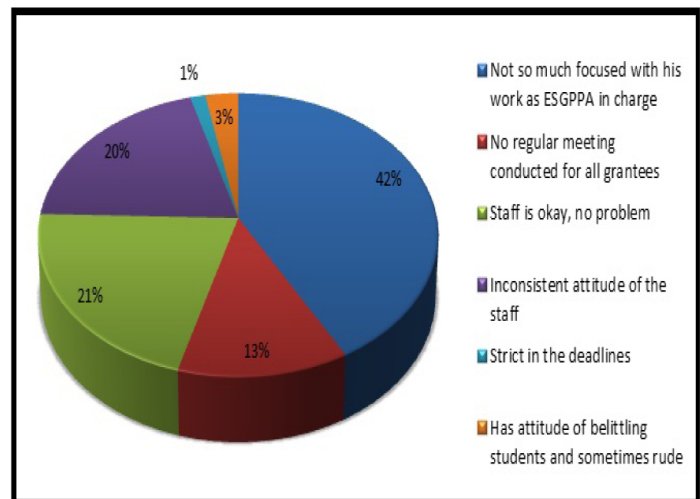


Figure 9. Project staffs related problems.

Gains/Impacts of the Program

Figure 10 shows the benefits gained by the grantees from the program.

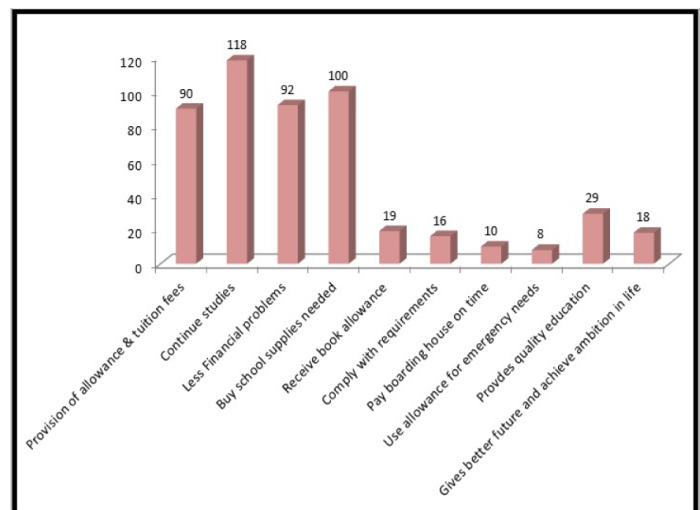


Figure 10. Benefits Gained from the Program

One hundred eighteen of the respondents quipped that they are able to pursue their studies

because of the subsidy provided by the Government the Grant. This is followed by 90 responses on the provisions for allowance and tuition fees. This meant that students coming from low income families are able to offset their educational costs and are able to obtain entry to CHED priority courses through the help of the said grant. On the other hand, eight out of the total grantees declared that they are able to make use of their allowance for emergency use. However, several studies have shown that pure grants (those with no achievement requirement and incentives) have found no conclusive evidence on positive effects and persistence to obtain increased academic achievements (Dyanrski & Clayton, 2013) as evidenced by the grade point average of the grantees which fall largely on the average level.

Figure 11 highlights the impact of the program to self and family.

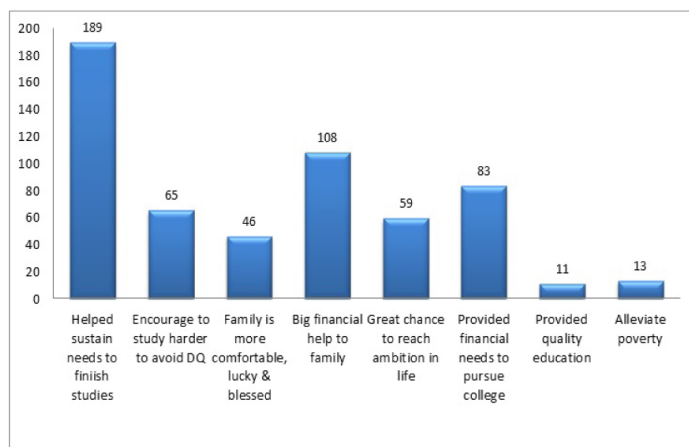
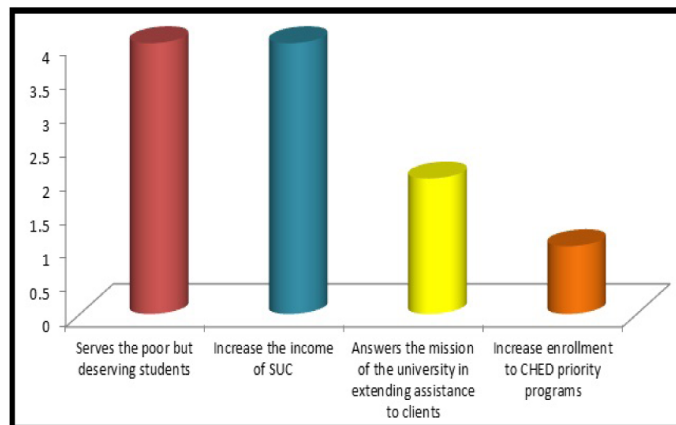


Figure 11. Impact of the Program to Self and Families of the ESGP-PA Grantees.

Of the total grantees, 189 stressed that the Expanded Students' Grant-in-Program for Poverty Alleviation has helped sustain the needs in order to finish one's studies. Subsidies from the Government have allowed economically-challenged students to gain access to tertiary education and for the respondents, this meant being able to pursue a baccalaureate degree. For them, this is tantamount to finding a career after the completion of the degree. This in turn satisfies the provision of the grant to educate these financially disadvantaged students so that they can help their family in the future and be able to contribute to the Government's thrust towards national development. Nonetheless, 11 of the total grantees who responded to the assessment remarked that they were provided with quality education from the implementing campuses. The role of the school and its overall ethos is deemed by many researchers to be critical in promoting academic success (Higgins et al., 2005). Deemer (2004) as cited by Higgins et al., (2005) argued that teachers and the school are important mediators to the overall learning experience of the students.

Figure 12 underscores the gains/impact of the program experienced by the implementers. From the four delivering satellites of SDSSU, serving the poor but deserving students as well as increasing the income of the SUC proved to be the two most prevailing outcomes experienced by the implementers. They revealed that the appropriation has played an important role in providing access to education. However, results also show that the program has not saliently increased the enrollment to some of CHED's priority courses. This can be attributed to the entry requirements sternly implemented for these identified degrees.



Accordingly, with the influx of student enrollment because of the Grant, the University is also spending for the increasing cost of instruction and the demands for amenities and other services to make college experience worthwhile and productive. With these demands, the University is able to hurdle with the assistance of the operational cost amounting to 3% of the total appropriation as stipulated in the grant which is spent for the operational cost of the Program.

4.0 Conclusions

One of the salient goals of this study is to identify fleapits of the Program. Family income is an important requirement for one to be listed in the program but while grants have shown effective avenues in influencing students to enroll in college but results also reveal that financial aid is not necessarily a determinant for increased academic outcomes. Foremost, it is inferred from the results of this study that other factors may have relatively influenced why the student-grantees are not showing increased academic progress despite being relieved from the financial cost that higher education demands. Thus, this study recommends that provisions on academic performance will be embedded as one of the Program requirements in order to be eligible as an ESGP-PA grantee.

With regards to the administrative capacity of the University to handle students from the ESGP-PA framework, the manpower mentioned above

was utilized in order to oversee the necessary tasks of assisting, monitoring and evaluating the SGP-PA grantees. Registration, enrollment and other document processing related to enrollment of the grantees are mainstreamed. On the other hand, for monitoring implementation, no monitoring tool was adopted; however, monthly meetings are conducted wherein issues and concerns of the grantees are discussed.

The faculty of the University, on the other hand, did not find any difficulty as to the accommodation of the grantees because they have been placed in regular sections; thus, no extra classes were conducted and no change in the pacing of lesson need to be instituted. Teachers have adopted a business-as-usual scheme in terms of managing the class where the ESGP-PA grantees are enrolled. For those student-grantees who encountered academic difficulties, remedial and tutorial classes were instituted. In Lianga Campus, Math and English Remedial Classes were conducted every Saturday for the grantees.

Meetings with parents and ESGP-PA Coordinator in each Campus have been called in order to inform the parents of the performance of their children. These meetings also form part of the monitoring activity planned by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs to ensure that the grantees are given the attention so as to avoid being delisted from the program.

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