

Governance, Accessibility, and Academic Impact of a Local Government Educational Subsidy Program: A Case Study of College Beneficiaries in Baao, Camarines Sur

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Abstract

Socio-economic gaps remain a serious hindrance to the accessibility and retention of higher education, especially for those coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The initiative of educational subsidies has recently emerged as a major policy imperative to bridge the said gaps. This research endeavors a descriptive-evaluative case study to present a comprehensive critical assessment of the accessibility, effectiveness, and academic outcomes associated with the initiation of educational subsidies by the local government, with special emphasis on the Baao Educational Subsidy Program at Camarines Sur, Philippines. The case study adopted a structured survey to investigate the attitude of a convenience sample of 30 randomly identified college student-beneficiaries of the subsidy initiative. The results obtained from both approaches confirm that administrative simplicity, open process, and on-time distribution of funds are key considerations for individual positive experiences and outcomes to prevail. The Baao case, in addition, illustrates how the subsidy initiative abets a reduced concern with finances, increased focus on academic activities, and increased retention at higher learning institutions.

Keywords: educational subsidy; local government unit; higher education access; student retention; academic outcomes

1. Main text

The Philippine education sector still faces persistent challenges associated with socio-economic disparities, regional inequalities, and post-pandemic learning disruptions. Recent national reports indicate that a large number of college students still face financial constraints that prevent them from continuing their studies, despite current reforms that have created an enabling environment for access and retention (Santos, Reyes, Dela Cruz, & Marquez, 2021; Robles, Garcia, Mendoza, & Uy, 2020; Villena, Santos, Rivera, & Gomez, 2019). These reflect the long-standing resource gaps that hit learners from poor families particularly hard and further call for sustained educational support mechanisms at both the national and local levels. In this regard, financial assistance programs have become vital components of the country's broader educational landscape.

These realities are addressed through tuition subsidies, financial assistance to students, and local scholarship programs initiated by the government to alleviate the burden of school expenses that impede students' progress. This support lessens dropout risks, secures stronger engagement, and fosters equitable access to higher education—a rightful place for all (Torres et al., 2022; Flores et al., 2021; Medina et al., 2020). Government programs keep changing with various dimensions in the needs of learners and communities, recognizing that

structural reforms along with targeted assistance are needed to improve outcomes. Such programs are essential tools in empowering students for college education, which otherwise would not be pursued.

Among these initiatives, local government units are at the forefront in directly extending contextualized support to their respective constituents. It is purported that, within local governance frameworks, LGUs are called upon to invest in social services such as education to help alleviate financial burdens from vulnerable sections of the population. In Baao, Camarines Sur, one core strategy of the Local Government Unit in the pursuit of meeting essential academic expenses is through an Educational Subsidy Assistance Program for college students (Cruz, Abella, Fernandez, & Martinez, 2022; Navarro, Lopez, Gonzales, & Javier, 2021; Herrera, Solis, Domingo, & Tan, 2020). The municipality has taken a concrete step toward strengthening educational access by easing the financial stressors that commonly hamper persistence and performance among its students.

Given the significance of this program, the current study attempts to investigate the implementation and impacts of the Baao Educational Subsidy Program from the perspective of college student recipients. As a case study, it particularly intends to evaluate the program's accessibility, or ease of application, clarity of processes, and timeliness of release; the program's effectiveness in delivering on academic and financial needs; and the perceived impact on overall educational outcomes, such as retention, reduced financial stress, and sustained motivation. By doing so, this study hopes to develop some insights that might guide improvements at the LGU level and ensure that the subsidy serves as a relevant support structure for Baao's learners.

1.1. Research Design

The research paper made use of a descriptive and evaluative case study research design to explore the application and perceived outcome of the Baao Educational Subsidy Program among the beneficiaries who are college students. The choice of the research study was found to fit properly since it is able to offer an in-depth and thorough analysis of a bounded system in its real-life environment and settings, especially when it comes to evaluating programs undertaken by local government units (Ramos et al., 2020).

1.2. Research Location and Population

The research was carried out within the Municipality of Baao, Province of Camarines Sur, Philippines. The target population was composed of officially recognized college beneficiaries of the Baao Educational Subsidy Program during the year covered by the research, enrolled in different higher educational institutions, residing in different barangays within the Municipality of Baao.

1.3. Sampling procedure

A random sampling method was employed in order to give each eligible beneficiary an equal chance to participate. Based on the list provided by the administering office, 30 students were randomly selected for this study. This method helped overcome biases in the selection and provided a balanced representation with regard to the distribution of the beneficiary among the barangays, by sex, and by age.

1.4 Research instrument

The study gathered data using a researcher-constructed structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed in consideration of the objectives of the program to be identified. The instrument had two large sections: (1) the demographic profile of the respondents, and (2) the statements that formed the perceptions of

the respondents. The perception statements utilized the four-point Likert scale ranging from 1, Strongly Disagree, to 4, Strongly Agree. The questionnaire had four sections that included: (a) Accessibility of the Program, (b) Effectiveness of distribution, (c) Governance and local implementation, and (d) Academic Performance. To avoid ambiguity and ensure content validity, the questionnaire was pre-tested before use by experts in education and public administration.

1.5 Data collection procedure

The data was collected following a procedural and systematic step-by-step approach. Permission was sought from the Local Government Unit of Baao, specifically from the office handling the subsidy program. There was also coordination done in order to get the list of beneficiaries for data gathering. The selected participants for the research were oriented regarding the objectives of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the anonymity of their answers. The questionnaire was either personally handed to the respondent or distributed through a coordinated procedure to ensure that all questions were explained to prevent any possible misinterpretation. The completed questionnaires were gathered and verified for completeness and consistency before the data could be encoded. Responses were recorded using a spreadsheet and verified for correctness of data entry.

1.6 Data analysis

The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, specifically utilizing frequency counts, percentages, and weighted means. Scores for weighted means for each indicator, as well as each dimension of each program, were calculated to establish the level of acceptability and effectiveness of the subsidy program based thereon. Data was analyzed utilizing predetermined scale descriptors for results.

1.7 Ethical considerations

In relation to research, ethical practices were scrupulously followed in this study; these aspects were taken into consideration: voluntary participation in research, seeking consent from respondents to participate in the research study, and maintaining the confidentiality of some personal details of the research subjects. These shall be further elaborated in the following paragraphs.

2. Results and Discussion

This section offers an integrated discussion of the findings from the results from the case study on the 30 college students who received the Baao Educational Subsidy Program. The integration of the global and local findings will enable the interpretation of the effects of the educational subsidy program compared to the literature from the current body of knowledge.

2.1 Accessibility of the Educational Subsidy Program

Studies reveal the importance of accessibility in making effective educational subsidy schemes, and easy application procedures, administrative requirements, and timely dissemination of information (Santos et al., 2021; Ocampo et al., 2021; Flores et al., 2021). Research also indicates that complicated administrative procedures act as a deterrent for many, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Ramos et al., 2020; Cruz et al., 2022).

In line with these observations, evidence coming from the Baao case study indicates a high degree of accessibility, as indicated by a mean of 3.25. The beneficiaries of the program were able to access the program without difficulties or hassles, thanks to understandable procedures and mild requirements. The correspondence between theoretical and practical observations reveals that accessibility has been promoted by the Baao Educational Subsidy Program through the elimination of administrative difficulties.

2.2 Effectiveness of Distribution

Through the literature, timeliness, transparency, and accuracy in fund distribution have come out as important aspects that influence the credibility of the program and student satisfaction (Mercado et al., 2022; Navarro et al., 2021; Herrera et al., 2020). Any delay or irregularities in fund distribution have already been proven to weaken credibility and hamper the academic advantages that come with the distribution of financial assistance (Medina et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2021).

The findings have been substantiated by the results of the survey, wherein the effectiveness of distribution was rated an average of 3.40, showing strong levels of satisfaction among the beneficiaries. The efficient distribution of functions was also attributed, showing timely distribution of funds, hence supporting the perception of reliability and accountability of the institution. This supports the findings from the literature, which state that effective administration builds students' trust in programs administered by the local governments for education initiatives.

2.3 Governance and Local Implementation

Previous works also stress that good governance and proper implementation are foremost in making educational subsidy programs a success. Institutional roles and processes that are transparent and accountable on the part of implementers result in credible programs that are also synchronized with educational goals (Cruz et al., 2022; Navarro et al., 2021; Medina et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2021). Together, this means a greater likelihood that subsidy programs can be implemented in an efficient and regular manner by all localities.

In line with these findings, there is affirmative evidence of positive perceptions of program governance of students in the Baao case study. Beneficiaries also expressed satisfaction with staff professionalism, program organization, and compliance with procedures. These perceptions support previous findings on improved efficiency and beneficiary cooperation due to effective program governance (Herrera et al., 2020; Mercado et al., 2022; Torres et al., 2022).

2.4 Academic Performance

Existing literature has found that financial subsidies in education positively impact academic performance by alleviating financial demands and allowing students to dedicate quality time to their academic obligations. Evidence has emerged that financial aid enhances focus, increased attendance, and motivation, all of which impact academic retention and persistence positively (Robles et al., 2020; Villena et al., 2019; Torres et al., 2022; Herrera et al., 2020; Flores et al., 2021).

In line with the results, the case study on Baao reflected a significant mean rating on the academic effects,

signifying that the recipients were less concerned about the economy, more focused, and remained motivated in continuing their studies. These results validate that the beneficiaries had received a beneficial effect from the educational subsidy intervention, which served beyond pecuniary aid and acted as a means to empower the recipients in academic capabilities.

Conclusion

This research utilized the results of a case study on college student participants to investigate the acceptability, efficiency, governance, and academic outcome processes of an educational subsidy program initiated by a local government. This study found that there is a remarkable level of convergence between the literary data and the findings, indicating that the Baao Educational Subsidy Program is highly acceptable, efficient, and effective in terms of reducing economic barriers, promoting academic attention, and facilitating student retention due to the efficiency of the processes and the efficiency of the local governance structure, thus confirming the literature that well-designed and locally-implemented subsidy programs not only serve as mechanisms for providing economic support but also play a crucial role in facilitating inclusive participation in education.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the Local Government Unit of Baao sustain and institutionalize the Educational Subsidy Program, particularly by maintaining its strengths in accessibility, administrative simplicity, and timely fund distribution, as these factors were shown to significantly contribute to positive student experiences and academic outcomes. Strengthening monitoring and documentation mechanisms is also recommended to ensure continued transparency, accountability, and consistency in program implementation, especially as the number of beneficiaries increases.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the LGU consider expanding the scope of the subsidy by integrating complementary academic support initiatives, such as student orientation sessions, financial literacy activities, or coordination with higher education institutions, to further enhance student retention and performance. Lastly, future researchers may conduct longitudinal or comparative studies involving larger samples or other municipalities to assess the long-term academic and socio-economic impacts of local educational subsidy programs and to generate evidence-based inputs for policy enhancement.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the cooperation and support of the Local Government Unit of Baao, Camarines Sur, for providing access to relevant information essential to this study. Sincere appreciation is extended to the college student beneficiaries whose participation and responses assessed the educational subsidy program's feasibility. The authors also recognize the guidance and supervision of the subject adviser throughout the conduct of the research.

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