

An Evaluation of the Tertiary Education Subsidy Program: Context, Input, Process, and Product

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Abstract

This study evaluates the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES), a key component of the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (Republic Act No. 10931), which aims to provide financial support to underprivileged Filipino students in higher education. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative and qualitative data through key informant interviews, an online survey of TES grantees, and secondary data from government agencies. The Context, Input, Process, Product evaluation framework guides the research, assessing the TES program across four dimensions: context, appropriateness of instruments, alignment of processes, and program outcomes. The study explores critical issues in the program's implementation, such as access, equity, quality, and labor market outcomes. It assesses the alignment of TES regulations and processes with the law's objectives, identifying challenges in grantee selection, fund disbursement, and monitoring. It also provides recommendations to improve the program's design, operation, student support services, and monitoring.

Keywords: tertiary education subsidy, UAQTEA, quality education, access

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1. Introduction

The Philippine government's pursuit of providing access to quality tertiary education underscores its commitment to empowering its citizens. This is the central tenet of the Republic Act No. 10931 or Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education (UAQTEA). The law responds to the rising education costs and the desire to make tertiary education more accessible, especially to financially disadvantaged but deserving students. Under the UAQTEA, all Filipino students enrolled in undergraduate-post-secondary programs of public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) and technical vocational institutions (TVIs) may, subject to the prioritization scheme, qualify for the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) programs, which has three components: TES-1 (tuition and other fees), TES-2 (allowance for books, transportation, room, etc.), and TES-3a (allowance for PWDs) and TES-3b (allowance for takers of professional license). Students enrolled in public HEIs and TVIs may apply for TES-2, TES-3a, and/or TES-3b. Students enrolled in private HEIs and TVIs may apply for TES-1, TES-2, TES-3a, and/or TES-3b.

This study reviews the TES program implementation and analyzes whether and how the program responds to the intended goals of the law. Specifically, the study aims to investigate the following research questions:

- What are the contexts, past and current?
- Are the instruments, in the form of existing guidelines and regulations, appropriate for achieving the intended goals of the law?
- Are the processes/activities aligned with the program design? What are the issues and challenges in the implementation?
- Has the program achieved its goals?

The investigation of the preceding questions is guided by the Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) model (Figure 1), an evaluation framework that provides a systematic approach to assessing and improving a program or policy. Developed by Stufflebeam (2003), the CIPP framework provides a holistic and comprehensive view as it investigates four key elements:

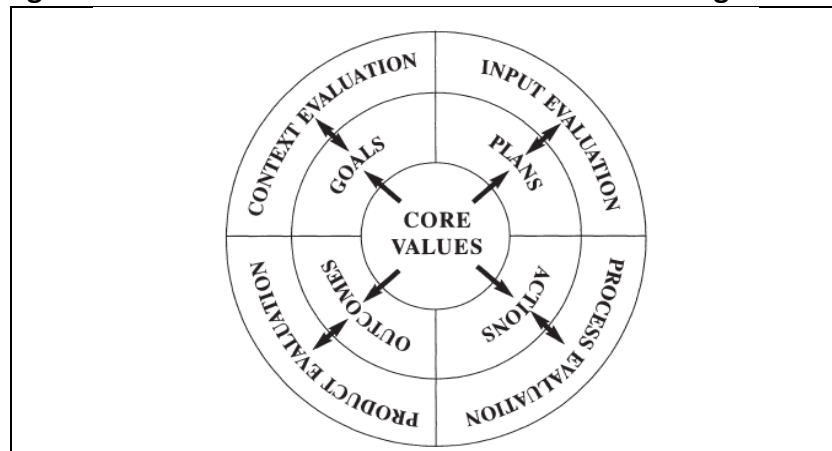
- Context evaluation: This aims to understand the past and current contexts and looks into key aspects of access, equity, quality, and labor market-related outcomes.
- Input evaluation: This examines policies and guidelines, policy shifts on prioritization and benefits, and whether and how the harmonization of grants-in-aid programs has progressed.
- Process evaluation: This investigates the actual implementation of the policy. It examines how the program is carried out, including the activities, procedures, and strategies to

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achieve the goals. It identifies challenges and issues arising from and assesses if the program is implemented as intended by the law/policy.

- **Product evaluation:** This analyzes whether and how the program achieved its goals, analyzing the grantees' household profile and school choice, highlighting the grantees' perceptions and experiences of the program, and synthesizing potential program improvements.

Figure 1. CIPP model for the evaluation of the TES Program



Source: Stufflebeam (2003)

Table 1 summarizes how the CIPP model is used to attain the objectives of this study. Guided by Stufflebeam's checklists, overarching questions in the CIPP elements are mapped into the research objectives, activities/strategies, and relevant data for analysis. The context evaluation examines past and current contexts using CHED and Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST) administrative data and Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) microdatasets. The research also examines the processes, assesses if these align with the program design, and investigates issues and challenges in the implementation through interviews with implementers in the HEIs and CHED regional offices (CHEDROs). Using an online survey of student grantees, the research investigates the product by assessing whether and how the program achieved its goals.

Table 1. Framework for the TES program review

Stufflebeam (2003) CIPP framework Checklist	Overarching question/s	Objectives	Activities Checklist	Relevant data
Context: What needs to be done?	What are the contexts, past and current?	Clarify the intended beneficiaries, review the program's goals	Review background information	UniFAST and CHED Administrative data, PSA microdata
Input: How should it be done?	Is the instrument, in the form of the TES' existing guidelines and regulations, appropriate for achieving the intended goals of the law?	Clarify if the program's strategy is feasible for meeting the assessed needs of the targeted beneficiaries.	Check alternative approaches, shifts in guidelines	Review of related literature, the UAQTEA and its IRR, memorandum circulars, and other guidelines

Stufflebeam (2003) CIPP framework Checklist	Overarching question/s	Objectives	Activities Checklist	Relevant data
Process: Is it being done?	Are the processes/activities aligned with program design? What are the issues and challenges in the implementation?	Strengthen the program design	Assess program implementation, analyze documents	Interviews with implementers and HEI grantees
Product: Did it succeed?	Has the program achieved its goals?	Strengthen the program design	Assess outcomes and identify areas for improvement	Online survey of TES grantees

2. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, an approach common to evaluating government programs or policies. Mixed-methods evaluation serves different purposes, which include 1) convergence or triangulation, wherein one type of data is used to validate the conclusions/findings derived from another form of data; 2) complementarity, with the quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously informing the narrative; 3) expansion, with the qualitative method explaining the quantitative research; 4) development, with some methods used to develop tools, frameworks, or interventions to answer other questions; and 5) sampling, with some methods sequentially used to select a sample of respondents for the use of the other method (Palinkas, Mendon, and Hamilton 2019).

The mixed-methods approach is crucial to the use of the CIPP framework, which requires quantitative and qualitative methods to understand underlying issues and challenges. Thus, the paper synthesizes insights from primary data such as key informant interviews (KII) and an online survey of student grantees. The paper also uses secondary data such as desk reviews, administrative data, and microdata. The administrative data come from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), UniFAST, Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU). The microdatasets include those released by the PSA, such as the Annual Poverty Indicator Survey (APIS) and the Census of Population and Housing.

2.1. Selection of KII respondents

The study conducted KIIs with stakeholders, representatives from UniFAST and CHEDROs, previous co-implementer Private Education Assistance Committee (PEAC), and administrators of HEIs and TVIs to gain insights into the TES program. The sample selection process varied according to stakeholder type. For CHEDROs, the first batch of invitation letters was sent to five regional offices with the highest number of TES grantees in AY 2021-2022. After these interviews were completed, another batch of letters was sent to the remaining CHEDROs to gather varied perspectives across regions. In the case of co-implementers, PEAC was selected because of its role in the TES implementation in AY 2019-2020.

For HEIs, two sampling methods were used to select potential KII respondents: 1) a stratified random sampling method, which grouped HEIs by type, and 2) a quota sampling of the top ten

HEIs by type, based on the number of TES grantees. The target population included HEIs that were recipients of the TES program in AY 2022-2023, resulting in a total sample size of 214 schools. To manage time effectively, invitation letters were sent to 72 HEIs in two batches (see Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of sampled HEIs with TES Grantees for AY 2022-2023 by HEI Type

Type of HEIs	Total HEIs ¹	Sample	
		Sample (stratified and quota)	Invited for KII
State Universities and Colleges (SUC)	486	62	14
Local Universities and Colleges (LUC)	82	19	14
Private HEIs in areas with SUCs and LUCs (non-PNSL)	743	89	26
Private HEIs in areas without SUCs and LUCs (PNSL)	342	44	18
Total	1,653	214	72

Source: CHED (2023b)

Note: 1/ Sampling of HEIs did not include 21 schools that were either closed during the pandemic or were not included in CHED's directory (as of July 2023)

The first batch of invitations was sent to 29 randomly selected HEIs from the stratified sample, along with the top five schools per HEI type from the quota sampling of SUCs, LUCs, and private HEIs without SUCs and LUCs (PNSL). Additionally, the top ten schools for PNSL were included in the initial batch of invitees. After conducting KIIs with the available institutions from the first batch, a second batch of invitations was sent to replace the non-responding HEIs. This second batch included 18 randomly selected HEIs from the stratified sample and five additional from PNSL. The KIIs were conducted from July 21 to October 24, 2023. Coordination efforts resulted in 11 HEIs/TVIs interviews (23 participants). Additionally, 10 government stakeholders (23 participants) were successfully interviewed, including UniFAST, seven CHEDROs, and two PEAC offices (see Table 3).

Table 3. Respondents of the key informant interviews

Type of respondent	Number of interviews	Number of participants
Technical Vocational Institution	1	1
Higher Education Institutions (HEI)	10	22
State Universities and Colleges (SUC)	2	2
Local Universities and Colleges (LUC)	2	5
Private HEIs in areas with SUCs and LUCs (non-PNSL)	1	2
Private HEIs in areas without SUCs and LUCs (PNSL)	5	13
Government Stakeholders	10	23
UniFAST/CHEDRO	8	20
PEAC/PEAC regional offices	2	3
Total	21	46

Note: Interviews were conducted from July 21 to October 24, 2023

2.2. Selection for the online survey of TES grantees

The online survey used convenience sampling, relying on the assistance of school administrators. Data collection began in August and continued until November 30, 2023. HEIs that participated in the KIIs were asked to share the online survey with their students, making it easier to reach participants. Additionally, the survey was distributed to other HEIs in the KII sample to expand the respondent pool. Convenience sampling was chosen for its ease of reaching students and efficiency, and it is important to note that this method will not fully capture a representative range of experiences. As such, the insights cannot be generalized to the broader TES beneficiary population without further validation. Despite limitations, the survey data was crucial for understanding the TES program's effectiveness. It provided a foundation for further investigation and highlighted areas where additional support or adjustments may be needed to enhance the program's impact on future beneficiaries.

The survey included questions about students' backgrounds, their schools, and their recommendations for the program. Additional screening questions were introduced at the beginning of the survey to target TES beneficiaries specifically. Respondents needed to meet several criteria: They had to be 18 or older, have been enrolled in a HEI/TVI within the past five years, be a TES recipient for at least one semester, and be enrolled during AY 2022-2023.

Out of the 214 HEIs, the survey received responses from 42 schools, representing approximately 20 percent of the combined stratified and quota sample. A total of 4604 students participated, but only 26.5 percent (1,224 students) completed the survey. More than half of the respondents were from Mindanao, followed by Luzon at 38 percent and Visayas at nine percent. Regarding HEI type, most respondents (54%) were enrolled in SUCs, while only about six percent (approximately 70 respondents) were from private HEIs with SUC/LUC (See Table 4). The average age of respondents at the time of the survey is approximately 22 years, with ages ranging from 19 to 30. The survey saw a higher participation rate from females (64.46%) than males (34.97%). Most respondents were single or never married (97.30%), with only a small percentage having been married or divorced/separated/annulled (2.69%).

Table 4. Distribution of online survey respondents by HEI type enrolled in

Type of higher education	Luzon		Visayas		Mindanao		Total	
	No. of school	No. of student	No. of school	No. of student	No. of school	No. of student	No. of school	No. of student
State Universities and Colleges (SUC)	9	94	7	71	7	465	23	630
Local Universities and Colleges (LUC)	2	6	1	18	3	146	6	170
Private HEIs in areas with SUCs and LUCs (non-PNSL)	4	17	3	23	4	33	11	73
Private HEIs in areas without SUCs and LUCs (PNSL)	1	349	0	0	1	2	2	351
Total	16	466	11	112	15	646	42	1,224

Source: PIDS (2023)

3. Context evaluation: What are the contexts, pre- and post-TES?

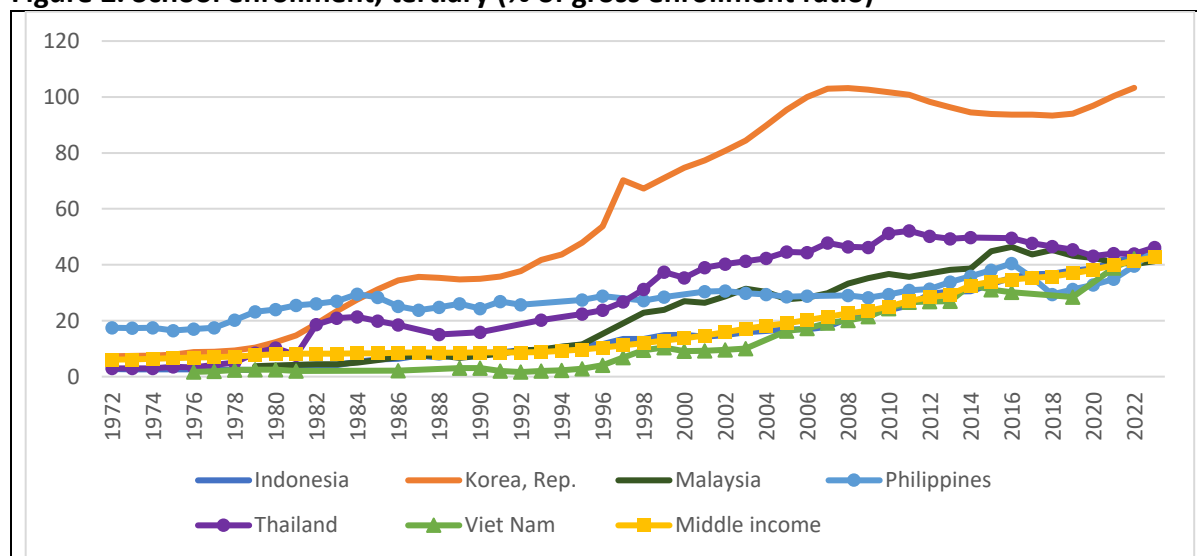
Using administrative data and microdata, this section explores the context of the pre- and post-implementation of the TES program, analyzing key aspects of access, equity, quality, and labor market-related outcomes.

3.1. Access

Tertiary enrollment rates were increasing although sluggish relative to Asian neighbors (Figure 2).

- Historical data show that the country had the highest tertiary enrollment rate (17%) in the region in the 1970s. The enrollment rate increased to 35 percent in the early 2020s and was higher than that of the average of the middle-income countries.
- Relative to its Asian neighbors, however, the country's performance was sluggish, with some regional comparators initially registering low enrollment rates. In 1971, South Korea's and Thailand's enrollment rates were 10 and 15 percentage points lower than the Philippines' 17%, respectively. By the mid-1980s, South Korea had overtaken the Philippines. Thailand and Malaysia had overtaken the Philippines' enrollment rate in the late 1990s, while Indonesia surpassed the same in 2017. All three regional ASEAN peers have remained leading since then.

Figure 2. School enrollment, tertiary (% of gross enrollment ratio)



Source: World Bank (n.d.)

Note: Gross enrollment ratio is the ratio of total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown.

Government spending on tertiary education was increasing, although it was lower than the government expenditures in other Asian countries. The combined spending in SUC and CHED accounted for 0.31 percent and 0.51 percent of the real GDP² in 2009 and 2019, respectively.

² Data source: DBM-Budget of Expenditures and Sources of Financing for expenditure program and PSA for 2018 implicit price index and nominal GDP.

However, these were lower than some regional comparators, including Singapore (0.76% in 2021) and Thailand (0.63% in 2021)³.

Historical data also indicated that educational providers were mostly private HEIs, although the growth of public and private HEIs was comparable (Table 5).

- In AY 1990, private HEIs accounted for around 79 percent (83%) of the total HEIs excluding (including) satellite campuses. In AY 2019, the private HEIs' share to total HEIs (including satellite campuses) decreased by three percentage points.
- Although educational providers were largely from the private sector, the growth of public and private HEIs was comparable. Based on the 30-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR), private HEIs grew by 3.38 percent (mainly driven by the growth in non-sectarian HEIs), and public HEIs grew by 3.60 percent (mainly driven by the increase in SUC satellites and LUCs).

Table 5. 30-year compound annual growth rate of the number of HEIs by HEI type

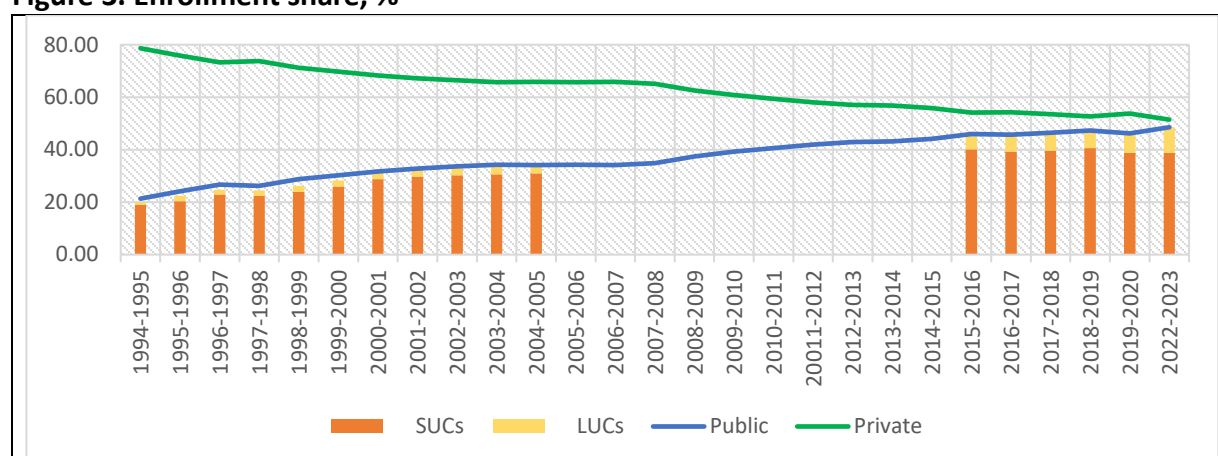
Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)	AY 1990	AY 2019	30-year CAGR (%)
TOTAL HEIS (INCLUDING SUCS SATELLITE CAMPUSES)	868	2,396	3.44
<i>Public (including SUCs satellite campuses)</i>	<i>231</i>	<i>667</i>	<i>3.60</i>
State Universities and Colleges (SUCs)	81	112	1.09
SUCs Satellite Campuses	57	421	6.89
Local Colleges and Universities (LCUs)	34	121	4.32
Others (include OGS, CSI, and Special HEIs)	59	13	-4.92
<i>Private</i>	<i>637</i>	<i>1,729</i>	<i>3.38</i>
Sectarian	225	356	1.54
Non-Sectarian	412	1,373	4.09

Source: Authors' computation using CHED data downloaded from its website (CHED 2020a; CHED 2003)

While the number of public and private HEIs had grown at relatively comparable rates, enrollments in public and private HEIs had converged even before the UAQTEA. Enrollments in private HEIs accounted for around 80 percent of the total enrollment in the mid-1990s (Figure 3). The share continuously declined, and by AY 2016 (before UAQTEA), enrollments in private HEIs were 54%. The converging public-private enrollment shares before the UAQTEA years were likely the result of dynamic complementarities of government policies to improve access before 2017. For example, policies in the 1990s provided more access to secondary education, resulting in many high school graduates eligible for college enrollment (De Jesus, 2011). In addition, government financial support (i.e., grants-in-aid, scholarships, student loans) was made available to all deserving Filipino students through the Expanded Students Grants-in-Aid Program for Poverty Alleviation (ESGP-PA) in 2012 and the UniFAST (Republic Act 10687) in 2015. Based on the CHED data, aid and scholarship beneficiaries grew by six percent or a 13-year CAGR from AY 2003 to AY 2015.

³ Data source: UNESCO. n.d. UNESCO Institute for Statistics [dataset]. <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on March 1, 2023).

Figure 3. Enrollment share, %



Source: Authors' computation based on data downloaded from the CHED website (CHED 2020a; CHED 2003; CHED 2023c) and CHED data shared by the EDCOM2 Secretariat (CHED 2023a)

Note: There were no disaggregated public HEI data from AY 2005 to AY 2014.

The CAGR of the public HEIs' enrollment was substantially higher than enrollment in private HEIs. This is consistently observed across several end periods (Table 6). Considering pre-UAQTEA and pre-K12 periods (from AY 1994 to AY 2016), public HEIs' enrollment grew by six percent, around five percentage points higher than private HEIs. Likely due to the K-12 implementation, the pre-pandemic period (from AY 1994 to AY 2019) saw the enrollment growth rates decline, although the difference between public and private growth rates was maintained. A similar trend can be observed using the latest data as the end period.

Table 6. Enrollment's compound annual growth rate in various periods by HEI type

	Pre-UAQTEA ¹	Pre-pandemic ²	Latest ³
	23-year CAGR, %	26-year CAGR, %	29-year CAGR, %
Public	6.3	5.4	6.3
State Universities and Colleges (SUCs)	6.18	5.2	5.9
Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs)	11.55	10.6	11.9
Private	1.2	0.8	1.8

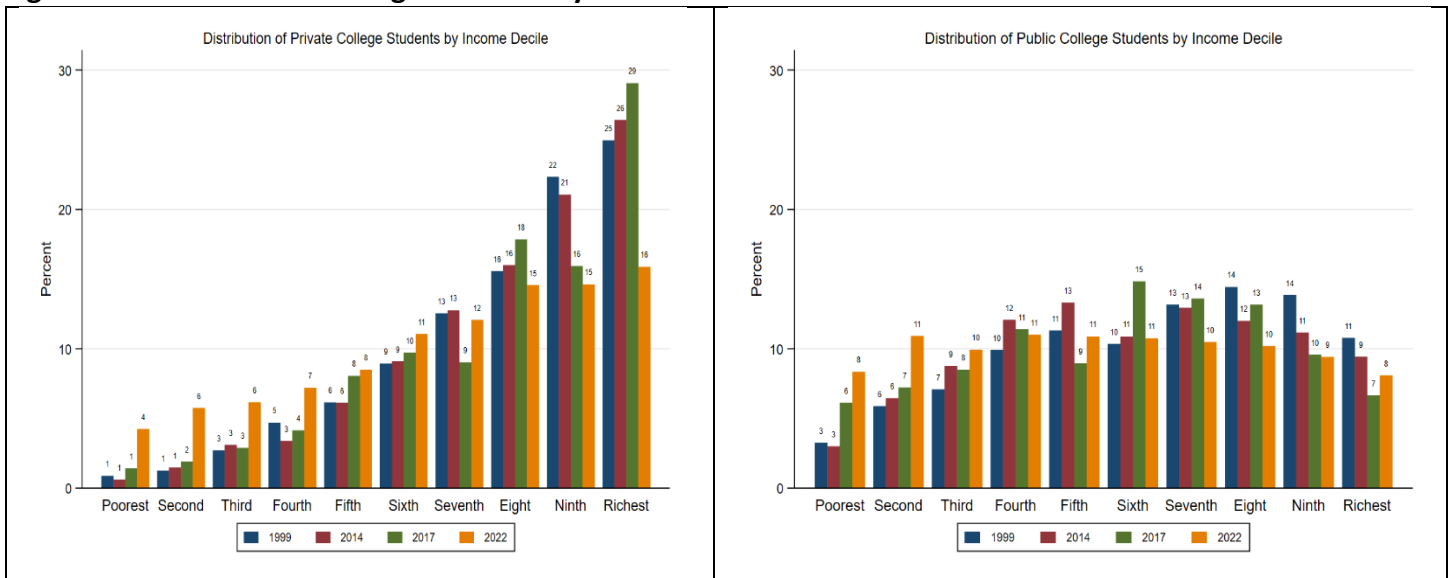
Source: Authors' computation based on CHED data shared by the EDCOM2 Secretariat (CHED 2023a)

Notes: 1/From AY 1994 to AY 2016; 2/From AY 1994 to AY 2019; 3/From AY 1994 to AY 2022

3.2. Equity

There was a narrowing dispersion in private and public HEIs' enrollment shares before and during the UAQTEA implementation (Figure 4). Prior to UAQTEA (1999-2017), the mean of enrollment shares in private HEIs was around 8 percent (standard deviation of 8) and during the UAQTEA implementation (2022), around 10 percent (standard deviation of 4). Meanwhile, the mean of enrollment shares in public HEIs was around 8 percent (standard deviation of 3) and around 10 percent (standard deviation of 1) before and during the UAQTEA implementation, respectively.

Figure 4. Distribution of College Students by Income Decile



Source: Authors' computation using PSA (1999, 2014, 2017, 2022)

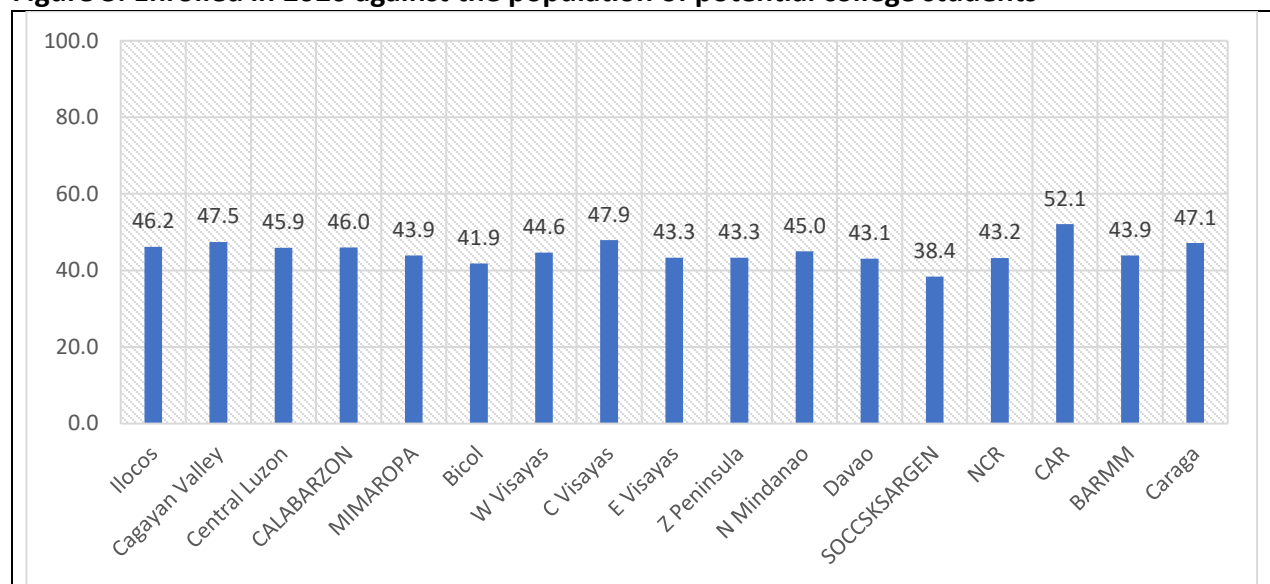
There were improvements in the tertiary enrollment shares of the poorest groups (three lowest-income deciles) between the years before and during the UAQTEA implementation. Improvements were more pronounced in the poorest groups' enrollment in public HEIs (Figure 4).

- The richest group (three highest-income deciles) dominated private HEI enrolments before the UAQTEA (1999, 2014, and 2017) at around 11 percent (versus the poorest groups at around six percent. Four years after the UAQTEA implementation, the mean of the richest and poorest groups' enrollment shares was around nine percent and ten percent, respectively.
- The richest group also dominated private HEI enrolments before the UAQTEA at around 21%. That of the poorest group was around two percent. Four years after the UAQTEA implementation, the mean of the richest and poorest group's enrollment shares was around 15 percent and five percent, respectively.

There was geographical inequality in college progression rate despite converging enrollments in public and private HEIs and increasing enrollment shares of the poorest group in private and public HEIs (Figure 5).

- A large portion of potential college students in 2015 (defined as 11-19 years old, attending school, and at least elementary graduate, high school undergraduate, and first-year college in the 2015 Census of Population and Housing) did not pursue tertiary education in 2020. The progression rate at the national level was around 45 percent.
- CAR had the highest progression rate at 52 percent. SOCCSKSARGEN had the lowest at 38 percent.

Figure 5. Enrolled in 2020 against the population of potential college students



Source: Authors' computation using PSA (2015, 2020b)

Notes:

Figures are computed as 2020 enrolled students/potential college students.

2020 enrolled students data are the sum of the following enrolled students: in the same province-city/municipality, same province-different city/municipality, different province-different city/municipality, Foreign Country, and Not Reported.

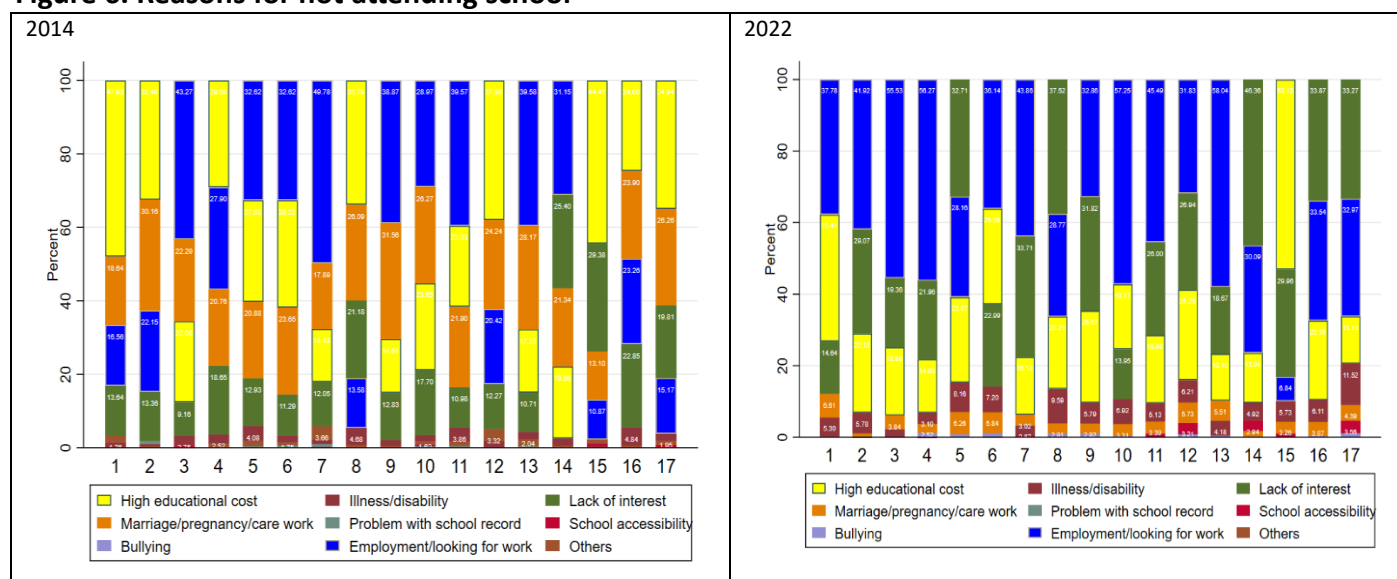
Potential college students are defined as 11-19 years old, attending school, and with the following highest grade completed in the 2015 Census of Population and Housing: at least elementary graduate, high school undergraduate, and first-year college. The estimated total is net of cohort mortality from 2016-2020 (PSA various years).

CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon), MIMAROPA (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan), SOCCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, General Santos), NCR (National Capital Region), CAR (Cordillera Administrative Region), and BARMM (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao)

The reason for not attending school had shifted from high education costs in 2014 to employment/looking for one in 2022. However, high educational costs remained in some regions (Figure 6).

- In 2014, high educational costs, employment, and family matters/care work were the key reasons for not attending school, especially in Ilocos Region (1), SOCCSKSARGEN (12), and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (15). Central Luzon (3), Central Visayas (7), Zamboanga Peninsula (9), Davao (11), SOCCSKSARGEN (12), and the National Capital Region (13) registered higher shares of employment/looking for work. Cagayan Valley (2) and Zamboanga Peninsula (9), while showing high shares of educational costs or employment-related reasons, also registered high shares of family matters/care work.
- In 2022, employment or looking for one was the prominent reason in most regions, although the share of high educational costs remained substantial, especially in BARMM (15). The lack of interest had bigger shares, especially in Bicol (5), Central Visayas (7), Eastern Visayas (8), and Cordillera Administrative Region (14).

Figure 6. Reasons for not attending school



Source: Authors' computation using PSA (2014, 2022)

Notes: The following reasons were not included in the computation: Being too young to go to school, quarantine due to COVID-19, and finishing schooling/post-secondary level.

1-Ilocos, 2-Cagayan, Valley, 3-Central, Luzon, 4-CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon), 5-Bicol, 6-Western, Visayas, 7-Central Visayas, 8-Eastern Visayas, 9-Zamboanga Peninsula, 10-Northern Mindanao, 11-Davao, 12-SOCCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Saranggani, General Santos), 13-National Capital Region, 14-Cordillera Administrative Region, 15-Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), 16-Caraga, 17-MIMAROPA (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan)

3.3. Quality in HEIs

The higher education ecosystem was faced with quality issues (Table 7).

- The proportion of faculty members with advanced degrees increased from AY 1997 to AY 2018. However, the share of faculty members with masters' degrees remained low (38% in current AY with data), and those with Ph.D., even lower (17% in current AY with data).
- With efficiency in supervision as the goal, CHED issued Memorandum Order No. 52 in 2006, providing guidelines for granting autonomous and deregulated status in private HEIs. Only around four percent of the total private HEIs are autonomous/deregulated.
- CHED uses commitment to excellence and the sustainability and viability of operations to evaluate the regulatory status of private HEIs. Commitment to excellence has two components: accreditation level and the presence of a center of excellence (COE) and center of development (COD). While the share of HEIs with accredited programs increased, it remained low at 29 percent in AY 2018. Broken down by levels, a very small percentage of HEIs has level IV accreditation (around 5%), which is the highest level⁴ given by accrediting agencies like PAASCU. Around two in five HEIs had programs accredited at level II.

⁴ Level IV Accredited Status: Accredited programs that demonstrate very high-quality academic programs and with prestige and authority comparable to similar programs in excellent foreign universities (PAASCU n.d.).

- Board passing rates of overall takers were low and barely breached 40%. The passing rates of first-time takers were higher at around 56%.

Table 7. Key quality indicators for AY 1997-2019

Indicator	Academic Year						
	1997-98	2000-01	2004-05	2008-09	2009-10	2014-15	2018-19
Faculty Qualification							
% with MA/MS	25.3	26.1	30.6	34.8	35.0	40.8	37.6
% with PhD	7.5	8.3	9.1	9.8	9.7	12.5	16.6
Autonomous/Deregulated Private HEIs, % of total private HEIs				3.3	3.8	3.7	4.3
Accreditation							
No. of HEIs with Accredited Programs			297	407	428	606	701
% of HEIs with Accredited Programs			18.0	19.6	19.6	25.4	29.3
No. of HEIs with Accredited Programs, % of total excluding candidate status							
Level I			20.3	26.0	26.9	33.8	25.0
Level II			67.8	51.4	47.0	37.8	43.6
Level III			11.9	22.7	26.1	24.7	26.8
Level IV						3.7	4.6
Performance (% Passing) in licensure examination							
Across all disciplines (Overall takers)	32.6	37.2	32.9	38.8	36.2	40	38
Across all disciplines (First-time takers)					50	60	56

Source of basic data: For AY 2010-10 to AY 2018-19 (CHED 2020b); for AY 2004-05 (CHED 2015); AY 1997-98 to AY 2000-01 (CHED 2005)

There were regional disparities in the components of commitment to excellence (one of the criteria in evaluating private HEIs' regulatory status).

- Accreditation:

PAASCU data (as of September 2022) indicated that only 12 HEIs had institutional accreditation, 40 percent of which were in NCR (

- Table 8).
 - Most programs were accredited at levels 2 and 3. Around 55 percent and 30 percent of levels 3 and 4 accredited programs were found in NCR.
 - The presence of COEs and CODs:
 - Table 9).
 - Relative to the total HEIs in each region, Cagayan Valley, CAR, and Northern Mindanao had the highest percentage of HEIs with COEs/CODs.
 - Regarding the country's total HEIs, NCR had the highest percentage at 21%, followed by CALABARZON, Northern Mindanao, and Central Visayas at 10%, nine percent, and eight percent, respectively. MIMAROPA, Caraga, and SOCCSKSARGEN had the lowest proportion at one percent, two percent, and two percent, respectively.
- Only eight percent of the 2,393 HEIs in AY 2018 had COEs/CODs (**

Table 8. Number of HEIs with PAASCU accreditation, Program and institutional levels (as of September 2022)

Region	Program level				Institutional level
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	
Ilocos Region	5	21	8	0	0
Cagayan Valley	11	23	27	8	0
Central Luzon	7	38	20	6	1
CALABARZON	19	28	30	14	1
MIMAROPA	3	7	0	0	0
Bicol Region	6	20	28	0	1
CAR	1	24	0	0	0
NCR	50	70	278	33	5
Western Visayas	9	53	11	14	0
Central Visayas	14	44	31	14	0
Eastern Visayas	2	0	0	0	0
Zamboanga Peninsula	0	1	22	0	1
Northern Mindanao	7	23	8	7	1
Davao Region	24	28	30	8	2
SOCCSKSARGEN	6	38	9	5	0
Caraga	2	14	5	0	0
BARMM	0	3	0	0	0
Total	166	435	507	109	12

Source: Obtained via communication with PAASCU on November 22, 2022

Notes: CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon), MIMAROPA (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan), CAR (Cordillera Administrative Region), NCR (National Capital Region), SOCCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, General Santos), Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao)

Table 9. Number of HEIs with COE/COD, Academic Year 2018-2019

Region	Total HEIs	Public (SUCs)			Private			Total COE COD	% of total HEIs in the region	% of total HEIs with COE/COD
	(A)	COE	COD	Total	COE	COD	Total	(B)	(B)/(A)	(B)/182
Ilocos Region	113	3	5	8	2	3	5	13	11.5	7.14
Cagayan Valley	73	2	4	6	2	3	5	11	15.07	6.04
Central Luzon	239	2	4	6	1	4	5	11	4.6	6.04
CALABARZON	338	3	4	7	5	7	12	19	5.62	10.44
MIMAROPA	91	2	-	2	-	-	-	2	2.2	1.1
Bicol Region	170	1	4	5	1	3	4	9	5.29	4.95
CAR	54	1	2	3	3	2	5	8	14.81	4.4
NCR	347	3	-	3	18	17	35	38	10.95	20.88
Western Visayas	155	2	4	6	1	4	5	11	7.1	6.04
Central Visayas	165	2	3	5	4	6	10	15	9.09	8.24
Eastern Visayas	89	1	4	5	-	1	1	6	6.74	3.3
Zamboanga Peninsula	85	1	3	4	1	2	3	7	8.24	3.85
Northern Mindanao	114	4	6	10	2	4	6	16	14.04	8.79
Davao Region	98	1	2	3	2	5	7	10	10.2	5.49
SOCCSKSARGEN	114	1	1	2	-	1	1	3	2.63	1.65
Caraga	55	1	1	2	-	1	1	3	5.45	1.65
BARMM	93	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Total	2,393	30	47	77	42	63	105	182	7.61	100

Sources: CHED (2019)

Notes: CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon), MIMAROPA (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan), CAR (Cordillera Administrative Region), NCR (National Capital Region), SOCCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, General Santos), Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao)

The use of the Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF) can be improved.

- The HEDF was established in 1994 under CHED to provide funds for higher education policy, development, and regulation services. Of these, the share of funds allocated for development services declined while that for regulation services increased from 2016 to 2022 (Table 10).
- The share of support to COEs and CODs to the total development services was less than one percent in 2016-2017 and none afterward. In 2022, a large percentage of the total development services went to the development of strategies for international linkages (56%) and programs for research and development (27%).
- CPBRD (2021) noted the Commission on Audit (COA) findings on the HEDF seed capital remaining unutilized since the calendar year 2005 due to the sufficiency of funds collected in other CHED's other sources (e.g., travel tax, professional regulation fees, and lotto operations). These collections were sufficient to cover the funding requirements of the agency's priority programs and projects. The unutilized seed capital can be earmarked for programs to achieve HEI quality, including accreditation and the development of COEs and CODs.

Table 10. Higher education development fund services, % of total

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Higher education policy services	2.04	1.43	0.80	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.00
Higher education development services	86.63	94.22	64.84	35.53	51.08	34.54	11.43
Higher education regulation services	11.32	4.35	34.36	64.47	48.92	65.32	88.57

Source: Authors' computation based on CHED data

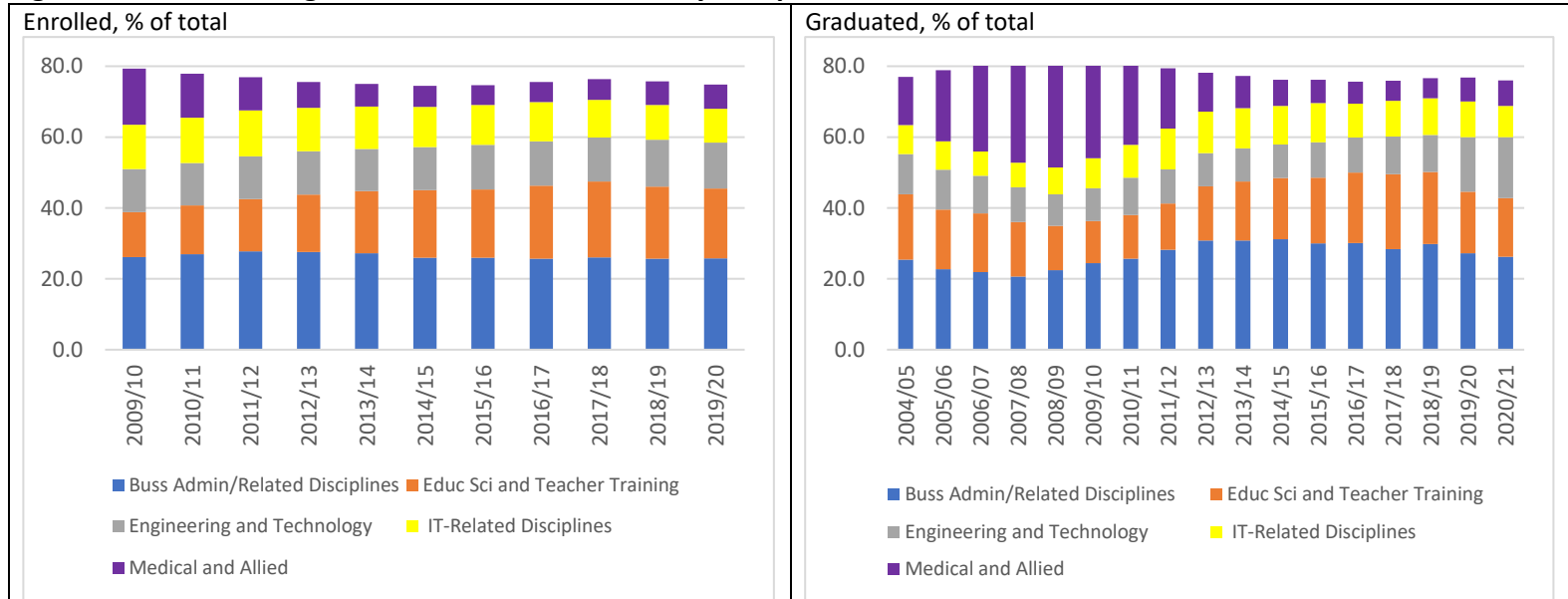
3.4. Outcomes related to the labor market

Skills mismatch, an issue as early as the 1970s, remained a challenge.

- Training and skills obtained from tertiary education were inadequate. Graduates report their lack of communication and problem-solving skills, competence, and trainability (Tutor et al. 2021).
- Studies highlighted mismatch issues. Around 65 percent of graduates were not getting jobs in the sector of their choice due to a lack of skills (Aspiring Minds 2017). Around one in five workers with college degrees had jobs using basic skills only (Bayudan-Dacuyucuy and Dacuyucuy 2021). S&T graduates did not have R&D jobs and/or did not persist in jobs requiring S&T skills (Albert et al. 2020).
- Data also highlighted mismatch issues. Enrollments were historically concentrated in business administration and related disciplines, as well as education and teacher training (Figure 7). These two disciplines accounted for around 39 percent of total enrollments in AY 2009 and around 46 percent in AY 2019. Graduate data also indicated these two disciplines had stable shares, with around 44 percent in AY 2004 and 43 percent in AY

2020. Meanwhile, DOLE (2022) indicated that hard-to-fill occupations⁵ were mainly manufacturing, information technology-business process management, health and wellness, agribusiness, mining, and power and utilities.

Figure 7. Enrolled and graduated in baccalaureate, by discipline



Sources: CHED (2020b) for enrollment data; CHED (2023a) for graduation data

4. Input evaluation: Are the instruments, in the form of existing guidelines and regulations, appropriate in achieving the intended goals of the law?

Reviewing policies and guidelines, this section explores the status of the TES program, analyzing policy shifts, prioritization schemes, and the range of benefits provided. The discussion also considers how the program's alignment with other grants-in-aid programs has progressed.

Subsidies and financial assistance in tertiary education are known to be effective tools in encouraging college participation (Leslie and Brinkman, 1987; Nielsen et al., 2008) and improving retention and completion rates (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2012; Dynarski S., 2008). This kind of government assistance may be in the form of need-based grants, merit-based scholarships, reduced public tuition costs, subsidized loans, and tax incentives (Dynarski, 2007) and can be broad-based or categorical (Stiglitz and Rosengard, 2015). The main difference between the two is the scope of target beneficiaries and activities. Broad-based aid is targeted toward a larger set of potential beneficiaries. In contrast, categorical aid has a narrower focus and is intended for certain types of beneficiaries (i.e., low-income households, depending on eligibility requirements). This type of aid is often justified when the government is said to be under strict budgetary constraints, targeting those with the greatest need of assistance. Under certain conditions, this proves to be a more effective tool in attaining redistributive objectives, with less distortionary effects, than broad-based aid programs (Stiglitz and Rosengard, 2015). However, it has limitations, including higher administrative costs to minimize leakages.

⁵ Job vacancies the employer/company is having difficulty or taking longer time to be filled because job applicants are not qualified and/or there is no supply of job applicants for the particular job vacancy (DOLE 2022).

Need-based and merit-based grants are examples of categorical programs that may be provided in the tertiary education system. Both do not require beneficiaries to repay in the future, but in terms of eligibility, the former focuses on the financial need of the student, while the latter focuses on academic credentials. Merit-based often benefits students from middle- and high-income families (Dynarsky, 2000; Cornwell et al., 2006). Need-based student aid is more effective than low or reduced tuition costs when improving the college participation rate of students from low-income households (Leslie and Brinkman (1987); Long (2008)). Experiences of other countries suggest the importance of information systems to enhance the access of low-income youth to postsecondary education (Tierney and Venegas, 2009), simplified processes and guidelines (Long, 2008), and alignment of periods of the college and financial aid application (Dynarski and Scott-Clayton, 2006).

In the Philippines, the Students Grants-in-Aid Program, created in 2012, was a direct response to the issue of access to tertiary education, aiming to provide financial support for students. It later became the Expanded SGP for Poverty Alleviation (ESGP-PA) to accommodate more beneficiaries, aiming to provide financial aid to poor but capable students in selected SUCs. Other than enforcing admission policies to ensure efficient resource allocation (Silfverberg 2016), maintaining data for program evaluation purposes, designing the selection process and interventions for the program to avoid dropouts or noncompletion, providing bridging programs, and continued monitoring of performance and tracer study were identified as critical elements to the program design and implementation (Silfverberg and Orbeta 2017).

In 2015, the national government passed RA 10687 (UniFAST Act) to streamline and coordinate various student financial assistance programs (StuFAP) and initiatives in the Philippines. This initiative aimed to improve resource allocation and management while simplifying coordination with other responsible agencies. In particular, the primary modalities considered under StuFAP are scholarships, grants-in-aid, and student loans. The law mandated the UniFAST Board to create an official registry of quality-assured academic and research programs and HEIs (Section 15p) that will serve as partners in implementing the law. In addition, Rule 1.4 of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) required student applicants to obtain at least the score required by the Board for the Qualifying Examination System for Scoring Students, a form of standardized examination to help ensure the students' readiness for college education.

While the UniFAST law intended to strengthen the provision of financial support, it did not include any mandated funding. Later, policymakers pushed for free higher education in the country. The first program was "Free Tuition 2017," which covered the tuition expenses of all students enrolled in SUCs in AY 2017. The funding was provided by the 2017 General Appropriations Act, subject to the conditional implementation ordered by the President. The conditional implementation underscored the need to prioritize the financially disadvantaged but academically able students and the right to choose a course subject to a fair and equitable admission process. Section 5 of the Implementing Guidelines (Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) No. 2017-1) detailed the prioritization scheme in the following order: 1) StuFAP beneficiaries, 2) continuing students that are ranked according to household income, and 3) the remaining slots for new enrollees and returning students that are also ranked according to household income. The program received a PHP8 billion budget allotment.

In August 2017, the UAQTEA was approved. It has three programs: Free higher education (FHE), TES, and student loan program. The TES was included given the following goals:

- Provide financial assistance for indigent students who cannot afford the additional costs associated with tertiary education, such as transportation, books, supplies, and living expenses.
- Address the disparities in access to quality education by assisting students from marginalized and low-income families, leveling the playing field, and ensuring all qualified students can pursue higher education.
- Encourage enrolment in priority courses identified as in-demand or critical to national development, aligning with the country's economic and developmental needs.
- Provide a more comprehensive financial support system for students by complementing the FHE.
- Reduce dropout rates by offering financial assistance to the beneficiaries throughout college, subject to the HEIs' retention policy.

Thus, the TES program aims to create a more inclusive and equitable higher education system in the Philippines, enabling more students to access quality education and contribute to the nation's progress. The UAQTEA and its IRR were crafted to achieve the TES objectives (Table 11). To encourage access, the law and its IRR provided for three TES types: tuition and other school fees (TOSF, TES-1), education-related expenses (TES-2), and additional assistance for students with disabilities (TES-3A) and those required to take professional licensure or certification exams (TES-3B).

Table 11. Input Evaluation Mapping

Context and Issues	Target Beneficiaries	TES Objective	Inputs: Relevant strategies (e.g., laws, IRRs, policy)	Inputs: Resources needed
Low college participation rate of poor students; Economic barriers (e.g., high tuition fees, cost of living, limited financial aid options and scholarships) Lack of readiness for college	Low-income students	Encourage access by supporting qualified disadvantaged students, especially those living and studying in areas without public HEI, through a prioritization scheme.	TES-1 and TES-2 for students enrolled in private institutions The standardized exam (i.e., Qualifying Exam), included in the UniFAST law to gauge the students' readiness for college, was not adopted in the UAQTEA. Under the UAQTEA, students are only required to pass the admission and retention policy of the desired HEI.	Budget allocation to 1) accommodate incoming and existing students; 2) enhance the quality of the public HEIs Clear and effective targeting mechanism
Uneven quality of HEIs that are often correlated with the stringency of admission policy	Low-income students	Provide quality tertiary education among public HEIs and TVIs through a set of quality indicators to be defined by the UniFAST Board.	<i>Section 10 of UAQTEA. Quality Standard for SUC and LUC Budgets, TES, and Student Loan Programs:</i> The CHED and the TESDA shall ensure quality standards in the review and consequent endorsement of the SUCs, LUCs, and state-run TVIs budget.	Comprehensive information about schools/programs
Concentration of enrollments in a few courses Need to strengthen industry coordination to reduce job mismatch and poor job placement of graduates.	Low-income students	Encourage industry priority programs to help them land in-demand jobs and contribute to national development.	CHED and TESDA identify priority courses to provide guidance to grantees	Budget for activities that aim to strengthen education and industry coordination

Context and Issues	Target Beneficiaries	TES Objective	Inputs: Relevant strategies (e.g., laws, IRRs, policy)	Inputs: Resources needed
Existence of multiple grants-in-aid programs	All students	Serve as the National Grants-in-Aid (GIA) program	<i>Section 59 of RA No. 10931. Harmonization of nationally-funded GIA Programs:</i> Within two years from the effectivity of the Act, the UniFAST Board shall exercise its mandate to harmonize all publicly-funded StuFAP according to three main modalities of StuFAP: scholarships, GIA, and student loans. The TES shall serve as the national GIA program, and redundant and/or ineffective programs shall be subsumed into the TES mechanism.	Clear strategy and plan of action to harmonize existing StuFAP and the TES

Source: Authors' compilation using Republic Act 10931 (UAQTEA)

Based on the compiled prioritization scheme for the TES (see

Table 12), the *Listahanan*, a database including poor and non-poor households used by the DSWD's 4Ps to identify poor households initially, was the primary prioritization instrument following the provision of the UAQTEA. TES applicants not included in the database must submit proof of income to assist in ranking eligible beneficiaries. However, this scheme did not apply to students in private schools in areas without public HEIs (PNSL). By exempting students in PNSL from the income-based prioritization scheme, the program enabled students to attend school without leaving their residences. This approach aligned with the UAQTEA's broader goal of acknowledging the complementary roles of public and private HEIs within the education system. However, this also meant that students from non-poor households could qualify for the subsidy if they had a residency certificate. In 2020, there was a shift in the guidelines, prioritizing continuing ESGP-PA and TES grantees first, followed by students in PNSLs, then the *Listahanan* database, with the last priority given to lower-income households not included in the *Listahanan*. Due to the pandemic and the resulting limited fiscal space, no new TES grantees were added for AY 2021-2022.

With the UniFAST memorandum circular (MC) 5, series of 2023, *Listahanan* 3.0 became the sole selection instrument to determine fresh intake in AY 2023-2024. For AY 2024-2025, the allocation of new TES slots is prioritized in the following order: 1) Students under the most updated *Listahanan* for HEI types state universities and colleges (SUCs), local universities and colleges (LUCs), PNSL, and non-PNSL, 2) Students included in the 4Ps, ranked according to household per capita income for the above HEI types; and 3) The remaining slots will be allocated to students in PNSLs not included in the 1st and 2nd prioritization categories⁶.

⁶ Per communication letter sent to PIDS by the UniFAST Secretariat, dated August 27, 2024.

Table 12. Prioritization scheme of the TES program

Prioritization	RA 10687 (2017)		UniFAST MC 2018-4		JMC No. 4, series of 2020		UniFAST MC 5, series of 2023		AY 2024-2025	
	Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act		Guidelines on the implementation of the TES for Filipino students		Enhanced guidelines on the TES program		New TES slots for fiscal year 2023			
	No	Guidelines	No	Guidelines	No	Guidelines	No	Guidelines	No	Guidelines
Based on the <i>Listahanan</i>	1	Ranked according to the estimated per capita household income	1	Ranked according to their estimate per capita income or the equivalent proxy income variable (Proxy Means Test scores)	4	Ranked according to the estimated per capita household income	1	Slots divided equally between PNSL and public HEIs	1	Updated <i>Listahanan</i> , all HEI types: public HEIs, PNSL, and non-PNSL
Based on Income (not included in the <i>Listahanan</i>)	2	Ranked according to estimated per capita household income	2	Ranked according to their per capita income	5	Ranked according to the estimated per capita household income				
ESGP-PA					1	On-going ESGP-PA beneficiaries enrolled in SUCs				
Continuing TES					2	Continuing TES student-grantees				
4Ps									2	Ranked according to household per capita income for the above HEI types
For PNSL only	-	Students in cities and municipalities with no existing SUC or LUC campus.	-	Students residing and studying in cities and municipalities with no existing SUC and LUC campus	3	Students in cities and municipalities with no existing SUC or LUC campus.			3	Remaining slots, those not included in the 1st and 2nd prioritization categories.

Sources: Author's compilation from RA 10687; UniFAST (2018a); CHED-UniFAST-DBM (2020); UniFAST (2023); Last column is based on the communication letter sent to PIDS by the UniFAST Secretariat, dated August 27, 2024

To address quality issues in HEIs/TVIs, quality standards will be used in the review and consequent endorsement of the budget of the SUCs, LUCs, and state-run TVIs. In addition, CHED Memorandum Order 14 series of 2019 provided guidelines on issuing Certificate of Program Compliance to SUCs/LUCs to ensure that public HEIs comply with the CHED's policies, standards, and guidelines (PSG). In addition, CHEDROs have a quality assurance team to ensure the private HEIs' compliance with the PSGs.

In addition, the CHED registry of participating HEIs is publicly available⁷. However, the registry of programs needs to become more accessible. Based on Table A1 in the annex⁸, only four regions—CHEDRO CALABARZON, CHEDRO Northern Mindanao, CHEDRO Davao Region, and CHEDRO CAR—have online/publicly available data on the registered programs of their HEIs.

⁷ UniFAST. N.d. List of Participating Higher Education Institutions in the CHED Registry. <https://unifast.gov.ph/hei-list.html>

⁸ Summarizes the findings from a desk review aimed at identifying publicly available lists of HEIs and their registered programs by region. The review sourced information from the respective websites of CHED, CHEDRO, and UniFAST as of September 18, 2024.

UniFAST also offers an online database of compiled registered programs across regions, although access to the database⁹ requires login details, making it less accessible to the public. Meanwhile, the CHED website provides information on the master's and doctoral programs offered by HEIs.

To address the multiple grants-in-aid programs, the TES program was tapped as the national grants-in-aid (GIA) program (UniFAST 2018b, pg. 40). In line with this, the UniFAST Board was tasked to harmonize all similar government-funded programs within two years of the UAQTEA's enactment. To harmonize GIA programs, the continuing ESGP-PA grantees were absorbed by the TES program. Before the ESGP-PA's integration into the TES program, ESGP-PA grantees received a total of PHP60,000, which included subsidies for tuition fees and other school expenses (.).

Table 13). During the transition period, ESGP-PA grantees receive the same subsidy amount as beneficiaries from SUCs/LUCs under the main TES program. The subsidy for textbooks/other learning materials and the stipend provided has remained unchanged after eight years (from 2014-2022).

Table 13. Subsidy for ESGP-PA grantees before and after inclusion in the TES program

	Prior to the TES ¹		TES (transition period) ²	
	Unit Cost	Total Cost/Year	Unit Cost	Total Cost/Year
1. Tuition, other school fees (based on national average tuition fees of SUCs), and academic and extracurricular expenses	10,000/Semester	20,000		
2. Textbook/other learning materials	2,500/Semester	5,000	2,500/Semester	5,000
3. Stipend (to include food, lodging, clothing, transportation, health/medical needs, basic school supplies and other related costs)	3,500/month (for 10 months)	35,000	3,500/month (for 10 months)	35,000
Total		60,000		40,000

Sources: Authors' compilation from: 1/ CHED-DBM-DSWD-DOLE (2014). 2/ UniFAST (2018c)

Note: ESGP-PA grantees are enrolled in State Universities and Colleges.

Other than the ESGP-PA, the *Tabang* OFW program, which provided financial support to students who are dependents of displaced, repatriated, or deceased Overseas Filipino Workers during the pandemic, and the new and ongoing grantees of the *Tulong Dunong* Program (TDP) were also included in the TES (Table 14). These programs target different beneficiaries and offer varying subsidy amounts. The TDP program, formerly under CHED, was designed to provide financial support to eligible tertiary education students based on household income requirements outlined in the guidelines. In 2017, the annual gross family income threshold was set at PHP300,000, but this was increased to PHP400,000 in 2019 to broaden the program's reach in response to economic changes. Furthermore, new applicants were required to submit a certificate of indigency as proof of their household's economic status for AY 2020-2021 and onwards. The *Tabang* OFW was a one-time grant of PHP30,000 for a single college-level dependent.

⁹ UniFAST website address: <https://registry.unifast.gov.ph/>

Table 14. Programs included under the TES program

Provision	ESGP-PA ¹	<i>Tulong Dunong Program (TDP)</i> ²	<i>Tabang OFW</i> ³
Implementing agencies	CHED, DSWD, DBM, DOLE	UniFAST and CHED	UniFAST, CHED, and DOLE
Start period under the TES	AY 2018-2019	AY 2019-2020	AY 2020-2021 (one time)
Target beneficiaries	Poor but deserving students giving priority to 4Ps beneficiaries qualified to enroll in selected SUCs	Filipino students from a household with a combined household gross income not exceeding PHP40,000	One dependent of an OFW repatriated, displaced, or deceased because of the COVID-19 pandemic
Amount of Subsidy	PHP40,000 grant for one AY	PHP15,000 grant for one AY	A one-time grant of PHP30,000 covering AY 2020-2021

Sources: Authors' compilation from: 1/ UniFAST (2018c) and CHED-DBM-PASUC-DSWD-DOLE (2014); 2/ UniFAST (2021); 3/ CHED-DOLE (2020)

The UniFAST Board also determines the amount of the subsidy. Private HEI grantees originally received PHP60,000 per AY (Table 15, allocated as PHP20,000 for tuition and other school fees (TES-1) and PHP40,000 for education-related expenses (TES-2). However, to ensure that HEIs were paid the TOSF, HEIs were advised to draw up a sharing agreement with grantees, such that grantees received the TES-2 net of the TOSF. Meanwhile, public HEI grantees received PHP40,000 for TES-2. While the UAQTEA was seen as a significant step towards a more inclusive and equitable higher education system in the Philippines, its implementation presented huge budgetary concerns, with the TES program alone getting a budget of around PHP15.9 billion in FY2018 and PHP19.6 billion in FY2023¹⁰. Due to the limited funding and the desire to cover more beneficiaries, new guidelines outlined in the UniFAST MC No. 5, series of 2023, indicated that starting AY 2023-2024, continuing grantees will receive PHP60,000 per AY. New grantees, both in public and private HEIs, will receive PHP10,000.

Table 15. Changes in the amount (in PHP) of subsidy per academic year

TES	UniFAST MC 2018-4	UniFAST MC No. 5, series of 2023	
	Guidelines on the implementation of the TES	TES for fiscal year 2023	
Period covered	2018 to 2022	2023 to present	
		new grantees (AY 2023-2024)	Continuing (2 nd sem, AY 2022-2023)
For private HEIs			
TES-1 Tuition and other school fees (TOSF)	60,000	20,000	60,000
TES-2 Education-related allowances	Whatever remains in TES-1 after deducting TOSF	Whatever remains in TES-1 after deducting TOSF	Whatever remains in TES-1 after deducting TOSF
For state universities and colleges/local universities and colleges (SUCs/LUCs)			
TES-1 Tuition and other school fees	Not applicable. Students are covered under the free higher education program.		
TES-2 Education-related allowances	40,000	20,000	40,000
For both public and private HEIs			
TES-3a for students with disability	30,000	10,000	30,000
TES-3b for board exam takers	10,000	8,000 (starting AY 2022-2023 onwards)	

Sources: Authors' compilation from UniFAST (2018a; 2023)

¹⁰ Data obtained from UniFAST through the EDCOM2 secretariat (as of September 28, 2023).

There are other documents related to disbursement/awarding. A 2020 JMC was issued to enhance the TES guidelines involving CHED, DBM, SUCs, LUCs, Private HEIs, and the PEAC. This circular, implemented two years after the initial TES guidelines and during the first year of the pandemic, aimed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of specific agencies and ensure compliance with existing legislation, guidelines, and regulations (CHED-DBM-PASUC-LUC-PHEI-PEAC 2020). A special provision in the 2020 General Appropriations provided for the PEAC's participation as a TES co-implementer. Later, CHED (2020c) issued a press release highlighting delays in AY 2019-2020 that affected approximately 6,000 TES beneficiaries. The special provision for PEAC participation was removed in the succeeding general appropriations. In addition, an alternative disbursement method was introduced through the Landbank Mastercard Prepaid Card. Additionally, interim guidelines were established for TES implementation during the pandemic, including various disbursement mechanisms (such as direct cash payout, electronic or digital means, cash cards, money remittance, etc.) and electronic documents, among others.

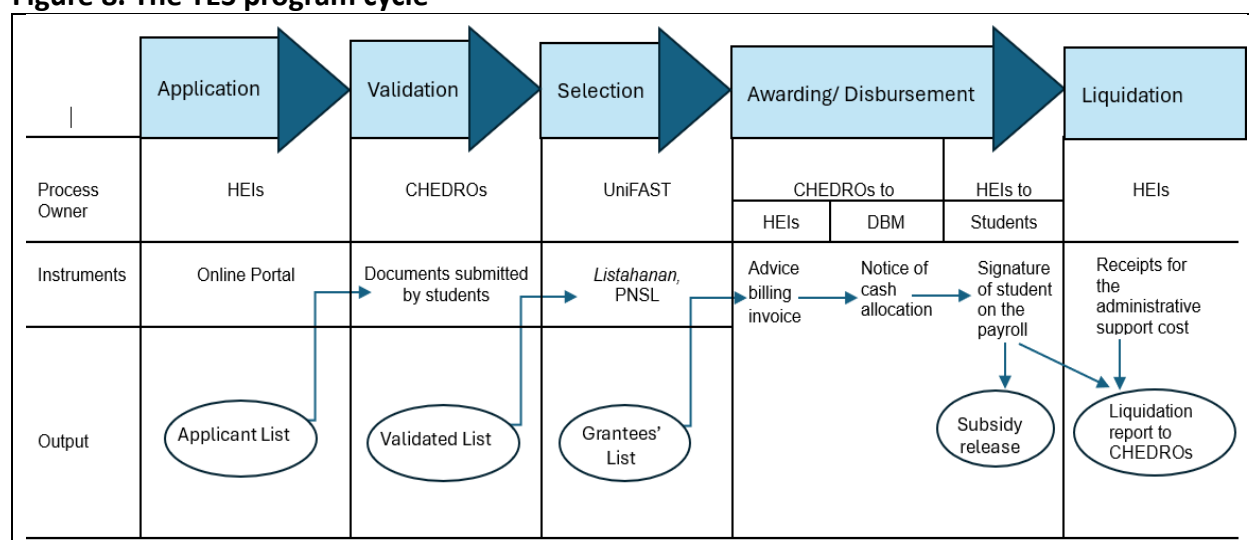
5. Process evaluation: Are the processes/activities aligned with the program design? What are the issues and challenges in the implementation?

Synthesizing the insights from the interviews and using quantitative data to support some insights, this section analyzes the program implementation and whether and how it aligned with the program design. The discussion highlights developments in policies and guidelines and emphasizes issues and challenges in key stages of the process flow.

5.1. Are the processes/activities aligned with the program design?

There are five steps in the TES program process flow: Application, validation, selection, disbursement, and liquidation (Figure 8).

Figure 8. The TES program cycle



Source: Authors' interpretation of the process flow based on interviews with key respondents.

- Application: CHEDROs inform HEIs that the portal for partner institutions is open for applications. HEIs, through their UniFAST coordinators, cascade the information to students. Students submit the documents required, including the certificate of registration/enrollment. HEIs upload the applicants' names in the portal, compile the required documents, and submit them to CHEDROs.
- Validation: CHEDROs check the documents (e.g., certificate of residency, certificate of registration) and the applicants' eligibility for the program (i.e., whether a recipient of other nationally funded scholarships, whether enrolled in courses included in the CHED's registry of programs).
- Selection: CHEDROs submit the applicants' list to UniFAST. UniFAST will select based on the prioritization instruments.
- Disbursement: CHEDROs advise HEIs of the list of grantees. HEIs prepare the billing based on the CHEDROs' advice. CHEDROs request funds from DBM through the Special Allotment Release Order (SARO) given to them by the central office. DBM will issue a notice of cash allocation. CHEDROs release the TES-1 and TES-2 funds to HEIs. HEIs release the subsidy to students net of tuition and other student fees.
- Liquidation: HEIs are given by CHEDROs 90 days to liquidate the student payroll and administrative support costs.

5.1.1.Application/Submission

CHEDROs' TES dissemination to HEIs is adequate. HEIs' TES dissemination to potential and existing grantees uses various channels.

Respondents generally shared that CHEDROs' information dissemination to HEIs is adequate and effective. Each school has focal persons working closely with CHEDROs. These focal persons maintain group chats where updates about memorandum circulars and other pertinent information are announced.

"CHEDROs, HEI focal persons, and regional coordinators have group chats. CHED is very efficient in information dissemination is concerned. There is no problem in this area."

SUC

HEIs' information dissemination to students is effective. For existing grantees, some HEI respondents shared that the UniFAST focal persons are available to answer questions. HEIs said they generally use social media and group chats to update students on the requirements, cheque availability, and important dates.

"We put up group chats for our grantees. Each batch has its own, so we know what information to post. The chat remains open, so we get news even when the grantees graduate."

LUC

For potential grantees, HEI respondents shared their various channels to make communities and potential grantees aware of the TES program. These include personal campaigning, handing out flyers, conducting orientation, and, in the quote from the PNSL respondent below, disseminating information through the efforts of the school community.

“Our staff is working on disseminating the information and the availability of this scholarship. Actually, the whole university got involved with the campaigning about the program. And so, many students came, and that’s how we increased by more than a thousand.”

PNSL

Intensifying the promotion of the program by other government agencies can help bring more awareness about the program. One LUC respondent shared that better information dissemination may contribute to higher senior high school students’ enrolment in tertiary education.

“I think as early as senior high school, students should be informed about the TES. After finishing senior high, many would not attend college because they had no money. So, I think we need to strengthen promotion, especially because this is a very good program. The challenge is how we can sustain it.”

LUC

UniFAST has streamlined documentary requirements.

CHEDROs have decreased the number of documents to be submitted, and they streamlined the processes. This insight is noted by most respondents, with some sharing that other than the certificate of registration/enrollment, they are no longer required to submit documents for continuing grantees. Some documents, like the certificate of registration/enrollment, are uploaded to the portal, but others, like the hard copy of the certificate of residency, must be submitted to CHEDROs.

“HEIs must submit separate documents for validation and billing. But after 2021-2022, they were required only one set, which made it easier. They submit billing documents together with the certificate of residency and certificate of enrollment.”

CHEDRO

The portal for partner institutions is useful.

The information of all enrolled students is encoded in the portal. Respondents shared that they implement this strategy despite being aware of the qualifying criteria since they do not know who will be accepted by UniFAST. This is illustrated in the quote from one PNSL respondent below, highlighting the principle of universal access as getting equal chances.

“There are prescribed criteria. So, we collect the application and input the information in the portal. CHEDROs validate based on the qualifications. We don’t choose the students who will be included in the portal because the real essence is universal access, so everybody should be able to apply. It is UniFAST who decides. We will get feedback on whether students are qualified or not.”

PNSL

“CHEDRO will inform us if the portal is open for applicants. There is a deadline to encode in the portal, so we also impose a deadline on students’ submission of documents. We then submit all documents to CHEDRO, which will be the basis of the validation. Later, they will inform us of the grantees. Upon their advice, we will file the billing invoice and wait for the funds to be released. We are given around two weeks to one month to disburse to students.

PNSL

The online portal is useful and user-friendly. CHEDRO respondents generally shared this insight, noting the usefulness of the portal in billing references. HEI respondents also agreed with this

view, sharing that the portal is informative and has a feature that facilitates identifying the students as 4Ps, *Listahanan*, or PWDs.

“The online portal system is ok. We can see the student’s name (validated or not) and their status (qualified or not).”

non-PNSL

However, key areas for improvements in the portal can still be implemented, including a queuing system to mitigate congestion.

HEI Respondents experienced outages, and they shared that adding a feature that prompts encoders of successful uploads is important to prevent leaving some students out of the qualifying stage. They also shared that a queueing system in the portal use is important given the number of HEIs encoding simultaneously. This is also noted by CHEDRO respondents, sharing that the portal server can be slow due to congestion. This insight is illustrated in the quote from one LUC respondent below, sharing his initiatives to ensure the information is uploaded.

“My experience was that perhaps the portal could not handle the amount of information being encoded. All HEIs in the country were encoding in the same period. We needed to manually encode the name, address, contact, and supporting documents. Sometimes, I had to encode five times, but the information did not go through. So, my strategy in the AY 2021 2nd semester was to encode at midnight for almost one week to ensure that all students’ information was included.”

LUC

One good practice in portal use is noted, however. Another LUC respondent shared that they recognized the amount of work needed to encode, given their freshmen intake. Thus, the school required all students to register online and provide the information needed by the portal, minimizing errors and enhancing efficiency in data encoding.

“Considering our enrollment, for example, in the first year alone, we have about a thousand students, so it would be impossible for our focal person to encode their information in the portal. So, during enrollment, students register online. This facilitates the process since they know all the details. They are the ones encoding their data. We extract this information and form an Excel file. This is the same profile required by UniFAST, which we upload in the portal by batch. But we still review based on the documents submitted by the students.”

LUC

5.1.2. Selection

Perceptions about the goals of the TES program are mixed, with some respondents emphasizing access and others highlighting quality.

The TES program is a subsidy for poor students pursuing higher education. HEI administrators and CHEDRO respondents generally shared this, noting the provisions of RA 10931 as their main reference. They noted that the TES is a subsidy to enhance access to tertiary education and shared that the *Listahanan* is the key instrument to prioritize beneficiaries. They also noted that the program provides subsidies to students in PNSL.

“To my knowledge, the TES is a subsidy to students in higher education, especially to those studying in municipalities or cities without SUCs and LUCs. However, there are also those students who were able to benefit under the *Listahanan*. This program is trying to address students’ access, especially those in need.”

PNSL

Meanwhile, representatives of private HEIs with accreditation emphasized the importance of the TES program for access to quality HEIs. In the insight below, the respondent highlighted the school’s credentials and how the program can help deserving students in their locality gain better access to quality instructions.

“I know that the program really gives access to tertiary education students, especially the needy. The government can help students who want to study in our school and access quality education. Our school is PAASCU accredited level III, and we have existed for over 50 years. So, we have a good track record in terms of our graduates. The TES is a good program. It should be continued because this is an equalizer, especially for the poor.”

PNSL

However, another PNSL respondent highlighted that “deserving” can have different definitions based on poverty and ability indicators. The same respondent noted that clarifying the definition of “deserving” will help solidify the target program outcomes.

“Most deserving can be defined in many ways, right? How do you define most deserving? Who is more likely to graduate, to have a job, and to contribute to national development? Which population is more likely to finish to get employed? Who will achieve our desired outcomes? Deserving does not mean just being poor. What if you are poor but unable to graduate? That is not right. We must choose those who will achieve the likely outcome for the country, their families, and the community.”

PNSL

Recent changes in the prioritization scheme address earlier issues about the untargeted 4Ps students.

Prioritization schemes and instruments are updated, although the *Listahanan* remains the primary instrument. Unlike the earlier prioritization schemes, the determination of AY 2024-2025 grantees will follow the following order¹¹: 1) the *Listahanan* 3.0 for all HEI types (public HEIs, PNSL, and non-PNSL), 2) the 4Ps database for all HEI types, ranked according to household per capita income, and 3) allocation of remaining slots, to be allocated in PNSLs excluded in 1 and 2.

Prior to modifying the prioritization scheme, students in PNSL were automatically qualified TES grantees. A CHEDRO respondent shared that PNSL has a different prioritization scheme to mitigate students’ migration to other cities. Moreover, the same respondent shared that there was an assumption that well-off households would send their children to Manila or other prestigious schools (i.e., students who remain are students who need financial aid).

“The assumption was that students enrolling in PNSLs were from households that could not afford to send their children out of the area. These students needed help and would not leave the province to pursue a college education. That was the assumption. So, regardless of economic status, they qualify if they enrolled in private HEIs in areas without public schools.”

CHEDRO

¹¹ Per communication letter sent to PIDS by the UniFAST Secretariat, dated August 27, 2024.

“Students are qualified if they comply with the documentary requirements. We did not encounter an instance where students were disapproved or not validated. So, there’s no limit to the application. If they are residents, they are included, except if they are not enrolled and unable to produce the documentary requirements. They will be removed. The CHED portal can automatically segregate students based on the information provided. If they are not residents, there is a remark that they are not qualified. The students marked as not qualified will wait for the next prioritization, which is the *Listahanan*.”

PNSL

Income documents are no longer required in PNSL. Applicants only need to submit proof of enrollment/registration and a certificate of residency. Respondents shared that residency is not strictly limited to registered voters. Certificates are issued if students have lived in the area, either as renters or living with relatives, for a certain period.

“It’s the barangay captain who issues the certificate of residency. So, they will be issued the certificate when they rent in the area. But the rules differ, I think. Some barangay require at least six months. We do not regulate that on the part of the school. They will be included in the application if they submit the document.

PNSL

Granting of subsidies anchored in HEI types (i.e., PNSL, non-PNSL, public HEIs) can result in several issues, including the limited participation of private HEIs in non-PNSL areas, non-poor grantees, and potential loss of the subsidy when students transfer to another HEI type.

Some CHEDRO respondents shared that the relatively well-off students who were observed to be included in the program were an offshoot of the PNSL category. One respondent shared that PNSL prioritization is problematic if the grant intends to target marginalized and underprivileged students, noting the exponential growth of grantees under the PNSL, raising concerns on the lack of control mechanisms to ensure that target beneficiaries receive the grant, and highlighting other students, like single parents, working students, and Indigenous Peoples need financial assistance.

“The subsidy is intended for marginalized or underprivileged students. But we prioritize PNSL. Thus, grantees in PNSL have grown exponentially. Some private HEIs’ enrollment increased disproportionately. Single parents, working students, and IPs are perhaps more in need of the subsidy.”

CHEDRO

Looking into the potential leakage arising from the PNSL category, the study estimated the number of financially disadvantaged students in private HEIs. Using the 2021 PSA’s Poverty Incidence Among Youth Population and private HEIs’ enrollment generated from the 2020 APIS (Table 16, columns A-D), PNSL grantees in 11 out of 17 regions exceeded the estimated population of poor students in private HEIs. A larger number of non-poor students receiving financial subsidies were observed in regions SOCCSKSARGEN, Central Luzon, Northern Mindanao, Ilocos Region, and Cagayan Valley. Using the CHED administrative data in AY 2019 as alternative data to estimate the poor students in private HEIs, Zamboanga Peninsula and BARRM were no longer included in the list with potential leakages, but the other nine regions remained.

The broader inclusion of private HEIs in the TES program and exempting PNSLs from the prioritization schemes (i.e., *Listahanan*, income-based ranking, etc.) aims to improve accessibility by offering students the option to attend institutions closer to their homes, potentially reducing their overall educational expenses. This approach, however, inadvertently disperses the limited

resources over a wider group of beneficiaries. Consequently, this dilution of funds means that the support available for poorer students may be significantly diminished. While the intention is to support private HEIs and provide a more inclusive educational support system, this strategy risks compromising the program's effectiveness in targeting beneficiaries needing financial support.

Table 16. Distribution of PNSL grantees and number of poor enrolled in private HEIs by region

Region	2021 Poverty Incidence Among Youth (15 to 30 years old)	Population of 15-30 years old enrolled in private HEIs	Version 1: Computation of poor enrolled in private HEIs	4Ps and Listahanan Grantees in private HEIs (2020)	Version 1: Poor enrolled in private HEIs less 4Ps/ Listahanan grantees	2020 PNSL grantees	Leakage	Estimated leakages	Number of students enrolled in Private HEIs (AY 2019-2020)	Version 2: Computation of poor enrolled in private HEIs	Version 2: Poor enrolled in private HEIs less 4Ps/ Listahanan grantees	Leakage	Estimated leakages
	A	B	C=B*A	D	E=C-D	F	E<F	E-F	G	H=G*A	I=H-D	I<F	I-F
Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR)	9.2	37,078	3,411	1,432	1,979	-			62,756	5,774	4,342		
Region I (Ilocos Region)	12.5	75,576	9,447	1,650	7,797	17,986	Leakage	(10,189)	84,511	10,564	8,914	Leakage	(9,072)
Region II (Cagayan Valley)	14.5	35,309	5,120	1,364	3,756	12,968	Leakage	(9,212)	54,129	7,849	6,485	Leakage	(6,483)
Region III (Central Luzon)	9.4	124,497	11,703	1,956	9,747	25,517	Leakage	(15,770)	134,159	12,611	10,655	Leakage	(14,862)
Region IV-A (CALABARZON)	8.7	246,187	21,418	3,339	18,079	13,396			213,662	18,589	15,250		
National Capital Region (NCR)	3.1	222,025	6,883	1,431	5,452	12,813	Leakage	(7,361)	440,708	13,662	12,231	Leakage	(582)
MIMAROPA REGION	18.8	30,162	5,670	1,276	4,394	9,391	Leakage	(4,997)	21,358	4,015	2,739	Leakage	(6,652)
Region V (Bicol Region)	26.2	58,067	15,214	4,223	10,991	18,538	Leakage	(7,547)	83,452	21,864	17,641	Leakage	(897)
Region VI (Western Visayas)	17.5	80,696	14,122	3,944	10,178	6,204			102,659	17,965	14,021		
Region VII (Central Visayas)	25.2	94,538	23,824	3,114	20,710	15,297			167,246	42,146	39,032		
Region VIII (Eastern Visayas)	27.3	24,599	6,716	2,603	4,113	3,445			39,849	10,879	8,276		
Region IX (Zamboanga Peninsula)	28.9	28,751	8,309	3,182	5,127	8,118	Leakage	(2,991)	49,013	14,165	10,983		
Region X (Northern Mindanao)	24.3	72,426	17,600	6,558	11,042	22,921	Leakage	(11,879)	85,547	20,788	14,230	Leakage	(8,691)
Region XI (Davao Region)	15.1	108,740	16,420	4,320	12,100	8,536			128,871	19,460	15,140		
Region XII (SOCCSKSARGEN)	25.5	103,229	26,323	5,947	20,376	45,284	Leakage	(24,908)	85,676	21,847	15,900	Leakage	(29,384)
Region XIII (Caraga)	31.1	37,603	11,694	5,133	6,561	10,801	Leakage	(4,240)	38,826	12,075	6,942	Leakage	(3,859)
Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)	35.2	24,965	8,788	1,756	7,032	14,470	Leakage	(7,438)	40,358	14,206	12,450		(2,020)

Source: Authors' computation using the following data sources: A) PSA (2023); B) PSA (2020a); D & F) CHED-UniFAST (2023); G) CHED (2020d)

Notes: SOCCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Saranggani, General Santos), MIMAROPA (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan)

Meanwhile, one PNSL respondent noted that private HEIs' participation in the program is limited when public HEIs are present in the area, even if the public HEIs offer limited courses.

“So, it’s all about implementation. How do we select students? How do we help them in terms of their choice? There are areas without state schools, and they should be given that access. But there are other areas with state schools, but they offer limited programs. So private HEIs cannot participate in the program even if we offer more diverse courses.”

PNSL

On the part of the students, being a PNSL grantee has disadvantages. One CHEDRO respondent shared this, noting that they lose the grant if they transfer to public HEIs.

“If students are enrolled as PNSL grantees, they will be removed from the *Listahanan*. If they transferred to public HEIs, they would lose the grant. If they are *Listahanan* grantees, they can use the subsidy anywhere.”

CHEDRO

While the new prioritization for AY 2024-2025 attempts to include poor students (i.e., those in 4Ps), using the Listahanan can include non-poor grantees.

Using the *Listahanan* does not guarantee that grantees belong to poor households and 4Ps beneficiaries since the *Listahanan* is just a survey of poor and non-poor households¹². This explains the observations of several HEI respondents that some students under 4Ps are not TES grantees. In contrast, others noted that some students whose families can afford to pay for college education are included in the program. One SUC respondent, who appeared to understand why 4Ps may not be TES grantees, shared doubts about the reliability of the *Listahanan* in identifying poor and deserving students.

“During the orientation, we asked why some 4Ps beneficiaries were not TES grantees. We have feedback that some students do not deserve the subsidy because they belong to families that can afford to pay. Other grantees have parents with stable jobs. That was our observation.”

SUC

The Listahanan precedes the PWD criterion.

One SUC and CHEDRO respondents confirmed that the *Listahanan* precedes the PWD criterion in selection.

“PWDs are not automatic TES grantees. The first requirement is that they be part of the *Listahanan*. We have a lot of PWDs here, but they did not qualify for the TES because they are not part of the *Listahanan*.”

SUC

Once grantees, students will continue to receive the subsidy unless disqualified.

Once TES grantees, students are considered continuing grantees unless they become disqualified (i.e., stopped attending school or shifted to courses not included in the CHED’s registry of programs). Respondents generally agreed with this insight, sharing that documentary requirements

¹² 4Ps is just one of the programs using the *Listahanan* database to initially identify 4Ps beneficiaries. The final list of 4Ps beneficiaries depends on the program’s eligibility requirements (<https://listahanan.dswd.gov.ph/2019/11/dswds-listahanan-does-not-identify-delist-4ps-beneficiaries/#:~:text=The%20Department%20of%20Social%20Welfare,under%20the%20Pantawid%20Pamilyang%20Pilipino>)

for succeeding semesters are fewer (i.e., certification of enrollment/registration). One PNSL respondent noted the approach as sensible, as shown in the quote below.

“Grantees in their first year are grantees throughout unless they drop out or are kicked out. That’s supposed to be the TES mandate because how can it be that a student is a grantee in the first year and not a grantee in succeeding school years? They need support until they graduate.”

PNSL

5.1.3. Disbursement

The decentralization of fund release to regional offices has improved the time it takes to release the subsidy.

Fund disbursements have been decentralized. Respondents shared funds are now downloaded to CHEDROs, facilitating a much earlier release of money to the HEIs. One LUC respondent shared that there was no substantial delay when the regional office took charge. The same respondent noted that students can pay for their boarding house on time and have funds for school projects. The insight of shorter waiting time when CHEDROs downloaded funds is illustrated in the quote below from a PNSL respondent.

“That’s another change in the system. Money used to come from the central office, and that took a little longer. But when they disbursed the funds to the regional offices, it got facilitated somehow.”

PNSL

Student-HEI sharing agreements ensure schools are paid their dues.

The sharing agreement between HEIs and students was also implemented to ensure that the subsidy given to students is net of tuition and other fees. Respondents supported this, noting the dangers of giving the full TES amount to students.

“We are sure the students will use the grant to pay the tuition and other fees. If the full amount is given to students, they might spend this on other things. If the money is given to schools, it is assured that it is used for its intended purpose.”

PNSL

However, respondents shared that signing the agreement is time-consuming because of the volume of paper to be signed, and using e-signature is not allowed. Respondents generally agreed with this insight, with one PNSL respondent noting the CHEDRO’s solution to streamline the process.

“In the beginning, there was a lot of paperwork and deadlines. The deadlines were moved because it takes time to gather these documents. CHEDRO advised us to sign a sharing agreement with the students. CHEDRO pays for the university. Then, we deduct the tuition and miscellaneous fees. Whatever remains is refunded to the student. This is a 3-page agreement and needs to be notarized. Can you imagine the work if you have 2,800 students? It was a detrimental task. Finally, they realized it and said, ‘Okay. Just give us a list of those who signed the agreement, and you can keep these instead of sending them to CHED.’”

PNSL

HEIs are given 90 days to facilitate liquidation.

HEIs release the money to students once the fund becomes available. CHEDRO respondents shared that per guidelines, HEIs are given 90 days to liquidate, 30 days to distribute, and 60 days to prepare all documents and prepare the cheque and the paperwork to facilitate the release of the subsidy to students. Some respondents release the money net of tuition and other fees, while others release it as a refund.

“When it was given to the school, we also immediately gave that to the students. The students were paying before the release of the fund, so we refunded the total amount they had spent. We give them the full amount. We get what is for the school and give what is for the students. Every time the government provides us the budget, we conduct orientations for students so they will know the sharing breakdown.”

PNSL

There was an initial move to release the subsidy through ATM. There are mixed sentiments on the benefits of such a strategy.

Some respondents shared that releasing through the ATM will expedite the process, with one LUC respondent sharing that the strategy removes politics from the equation.

“ATM cards are good because they don’t have to queue in the school, and politicians will not use the program. We can ask them to sign the payroll, which is just clerical.”

LUC

However, one CHEDRO respondent shared some considerations when releasing the subsidy through ATM cards, including the availability of machines near the schools to prevent incurring additional costs to get the money. Other HEI respondents are also cautious about the strategy, with one sharing their negative experience of using ATM cards in the ESGP-PA implementation.

“I hope this is still relevant to our discussion. In the ESGP-PA, grantees receive their money through their ATM card. They pawned their ATM. So, what we did was we ask them to present their ATM cards during the release day.”

SUC

5.1.4. Monitoring

Reportorial mechanisms are adequate.

Monitoring mechanisms are well-placed. This is an insight generally shared by HEI respondents, who articulate that they submit reports to update CHEDROs on the status of grantees. They also shared that the reports required by CHEDROs are manageable.

“We submit forms to CHEDRO before they validate. There is a remarks column on that form that reflects the grantees’ status.”

PNSL

HEIs require LOA notice from students.

Students must file a leave of absence when they decide not to enroll or stop in the middle of the semester. Respondents from public HEIs shared that this facilitates better monitoring, with one SUC respondent emphasizing that such an approach is important to ensure access and quality. One LUC respondent also highlights this, as shown in the quote below.

“There was no LOA. Grantees out of school for a semester are still on the list the following semester. But now, LOA is required. After two semesters, they are off the list. They are delisted. This helps because there are students who enrolled because there was a subsidy. But there is a retention policy, so I observed that most of them tried hard to comply with the retention policy or they will submit an LOA.”

LUC

Tracer surveys have yet to be mainstreamed.

HEI and CHEDRO respondents articulated the importance of conducting tracer surveys, emphasizing that data are key to determining how grantees are faring in the labor market. Another PNSL respondent shared that some HEIs have initiatives to conduct tracer surveys while others do not have.

“There are HEIs that have tracer surveys for their use. However, CHED does not mandate its conduct. Although it would be good, especially in getting data relevant to grantees.”

PNSL

5.1.5. Ensuring quality

UniFAST ensures HEI grantees follow CHED’s regulatory standards.

When asked how quality is ensured in the TES program, some CHEDRO respondents shared that public HEIs have certificates of program compliance (COPC)¹³ and have government recognition. Private HEIs are given authority to offer programs based on the CHED’s PSG, and the CHEDROs’ quality assurance team monitors compliance. They also perform random checks on HEI facilities.

“CHED only requires minimum compliance with the minimum requirements under the PSGs, and all schools participating in the program have government permits. Their programs, especially in public schools, have certificates of program compliance, which is a testament to their compliance with the Commission’s minimum requirements. They have met the minimum requirements to assure quality. It is just that some schools did more than the minimum.”

UniFAST

A UniFAST respondent shared that they delisted 19 LUCs for non-compliance in AY 2023, but five were able to comply and are now included in the list. This is validated by LUC respondents, sharing that some LUCs were delisted or about to be delisted since they do not have CHED’s institutional recognition.

¹³ Issued as a recognition that a degree program in SUCs/LUCs is fully compliant with the CHED’s PSGs, per CHED Memorandum Order 14 series of 2019 “Policies and Guidelines in the Issuance of Certificate of Program Compliance to SUCs/LUCs”

“We are about to be delisted because the head should have a Ph.D. I have a Juris Doctor, which does not count. So, I stepped down. We had to search for a leader, but the pandemic came. The BOT decided to appoint the mayor instead. CHED also wants to be included in the BOT. If we can’t comply, we will be delisted.”

LUC

HEIs enforce their retention policies, which may be challenging for some grantees to comply with.

HEIs emphasize the importance of quality and access. Respondents generally highlighted that the opportunity be given to deserving students, with one SUC respondent emphasizing academic performance as the key to ensuring the wise use of the government’s money. The same respondent shared that they gave the allowance to all grantees during the first semester of implementation, but they enforced the school’s retention policy in succeeding semesters.

“We started the program in the first semester of AY 2018-2019 and gave allowances to all grantees. However, during the first semester of implementation, we called a general assembly to all student grantees, including their parents, and we said that in the second semester, we would now consider the academic performance of the first semester as the basis of the second-semester release. Still, some grantees could not cope with and meet the requirements. We warned them they would no longer receive the subsidy if they failed to comply with the grade requirement. But we will give them the allowance if they recover in the succeeding semester. They are not delisted for their entire academic life. We communicated that approach with CHEDRO.”

SUC

Despite institutional variations in retention policies, HEIs’ efforts to uphold their commitment to quality are evident. This is reflected in the required GPA, which, as explained by one SUC respondent, may be difficult for some students to comply with.

“Our retention policy is not per subject. It’s the average grade, a GPA of 2.5 or 80%. In the case of the school, 80 % is low. But some students could not comply. We called their attention, warned and reminded them. Perhaps they were not really meant to get the subsidy. Academic performance is also one factor. Students get the subsidy, but they must work hard for it.”

SUC

When asked why there is a decline in TES grantees in their school (setting aside the pandemic years when there was a moratorium on new intake), one respondent articulated that the selection itself was a contributory factor, noting the importance of the academic performance as a selection parameter.

“The university doesn’t have any say about the selection of grantees. Unlike in the previous CHED program, which is the ESGP-PA. The university has a say in who deserves the grant in that program. However, the university doesn’t have one for the TES. That’s why, in our database, if the basis of the selection is academic performance, at most 50 percent do not deserve the slot. The students’ performance in senior high school does not matter. If we have the grade requirement as a basis for the selection, I think we could select deserving students.”

SUC

Thus, the same SUC respondent shared they advised grantees and even parents that academic performance in succeeding semesters is considered for the release of succeeding subsidies. The respondent shared that enforcing such a rule is covered in the program’s IRR¹⁴.

¹⁴ Section 6 (*Exceptions to Free Tertiary Education*) of RA10931 states that “The following students are ineligible to avail of the free tertiary education: Students who fail to comply with the admission and retention policies of the SUC or LUC.”

“Grantees can have problems because of the school’s retention policy. The IRR states that the retention policy is one of the bases of the TES award. In the IRR, it’s generically stated that students must comply with the retention policy. So, each HEI will have a different policy, but that should prevail to maintain receipt of the subsidy.”

SUC

Some HEI respondents view the quality of instruction in secondary education as a key input to the academic journey of college students.

SUC respondents expressed hope for improvements in the quality of instruction in junior and senior high schools, recognizing the SUCs’ limited absorptive capacity and emphasizing their admission policies.

“Many students are not admitted to our school because they flunk the admission test. So, we tell our DepEd partners to improve their instructions. We don’t have a choice. We must enforce our admission policies.”

SUC

5.2. What are the issues and challenges in the implementation?

5.2.1. Selection of grantees

Advanced information on students’ TES eligibility is needed.

Early information on whether students are eligible for the TES is material to students’ decisions to pursue tertiary education. Some CHEDRO and HEI respondents generally shared this insight, noting that knowing whether students qualify early on encourages better-informed choices on schools and courses. One non-PNSL respondent, as shown in the quote below, shared some advantages of getting advanced information.

“Decisions about the grants come out after the student has enrolled. However, the student must know they are eligible for the grant before selecting the school. If they don’t know they’re eligible for the grant, there’s still bias regarding their affordability. They’ll take lower-cost schools. Some will drop out.”

Non-PNSL

One PNSL respondent emphasized the importance of creating a culture of certainty at the onset, noting a similar observation as above and sharing how uncertainty is also a burden to HEIs.

“For example, June-July, when it’s summer, we can do the application there. In August, students know already if they are grantees. This gives them time to decide. The tendency is to drop out if they are not accepted. This program is the work of 2-3 people. The president is involved in the process. In addition, when students cannot pay the exact amount, we allow them to continue. But there’s a lot of uncertainties.”

PNSL

A sharpened prioritization instrument is desired.

Determining the number of grantees for each HEI in each region is unclear. HEI respondents generally shared this insight, with some highlighting that they just received the list of the accepted applicants and others recognizing that they do not have control over the selection process.

“UniFAST set the selection criteria. We don’t have that kind of selection to compare two students; one gets in, and the other doesn’t. It’s whoever submits their documents, and then we submit these to CHEDRO. UniFAST does all the vetting. They tell us who gets in and who doesn’t. They tell us, ‘These are definitely qualified, and then the others, we can think about if we have the funds, we could qualify them.’”

PNSL

Noting the inadequacy of the *Listahanan* in identifying poor and deserving students, some HEIs expressed a desire to participate in the selection process. One respondent shared that HEIs typically have community engagement, which is part of accreditation requirements. Thus, they can provide recommendations based on their prior knowledge.

“HEIs have community engagements. We can have a system to prompt the community engagement programs of universities to look for these kinds of students. The *Listahanan* is one way, but perhaps schools can recommend to UniFAST based on HEIs’ community engagement. We see these kinds of students in the puroks or barangays. They want to go to school. They don’t have any means of going to school. Nobody identified them. Now, if the community engagement of every university can do this, perhaps that will be one of the ways to identify our scholars.”

non-PNSL

LUC respondents shared similar sentiments, advocating for a deeper assessment of the financial circumstances of potential grantees.

“An in-depth look at the economic situation of the beneficiaries is important. Perhaps give HEIs a voice in the selection process. We can give recommendations to improve access since some poor students are not being part of the program.”

LUC

One CHEDRO respondent also supported the idea of HEIs being able to recommend based on their database and community engagement. When asked if HEIs can have a role in the selection, the respondent was receptive to the idea, as shown in the quote below.

“That could also be a good entry point. HEIs can recommend or provide referrals, but relevant agencies will assess. HEIs have profiles, and they know students who could not pay.”

CHEDRO

Grantees in private HEIs sometimes choose affordability over quality.

Some grantees tend to choose private HEIs charging lower tuition fees. Several respondents shared this insight, noting the potential quality issues associated with low tuition fees. One PNSL respondent shared that parents have roles in this exercise, noting that some of them deliberately look for low-cost schools and suggesting that parents be educated as well to maximize the benefits of the subsidy.

“Sometimes, it’s the mindset of the parents, especially if they are poor. They look for ways to increase their income. Sometimes, education is not their priority, but putting food on the table is. So, we need to educate the parents. We need to ensure that quality education is given to the grantees.”

PNSL

Along this line, the same PNSL respondent shared that they charge relatively higher fees because they have competitive salaries, and some of their school's grantees transferred to other schools with lower costs so they can receive more in terms of allowance.

"They stopped. They transferred to other schools with lower tuition fees. But I don't want to comment on the other school. We charge higher fees because our teachers' salaries are competitive, so we can hire more qualified people to teach."

PNSL

Thus, some private HEI respondents appeal for a stronger emphasis on quality tertiary education through accreditation.

Ensuring the quality of private schools participating in the TES program is important. Private HEI respondents shared that CHDEROs have quality assurance teams to check on programs and curricula. However, several respondents emphasized the importance of accreditation.

"We focus on the process, not the content or substance, to give quality education to the students and young people. Access to quality education is very important. So how do you do that? Through accreditation. Some would say that is unfair. Administrators must aspire for their schools to be accredited. It's as simple as that, so they can also qualify. I don't want to disadvantage other schools that give quality education, but accreditation is needed to ensure quality programs, and we do not waste money."

PNSL

When prodded about the potential conflict of achieving access when considering the private HEIs regulatory status (i.e., only very few private HEIs are autonomous), one PNSL respondent shared that deregulated HEIs can also be included. The same respondent also emphasized program accreditation. Other respondents from the same HEI also highlighted the best practices in implementing the DOST scholarship.

"Like in DOST, they cater to students from schools with PAASCU Level 3 programs. Prioritize. We have top-performing programs recognized nationwide, not only in the region. However, when you check the statistics, we have few enrollees. Where do they go? Don't grantees consider quality? They choose affordability. We hope that the quality assurance team of CHED will provide the list of schools undergoing the quality assurance process. This will ensure quality."

PNSL

However, one respondent from a non-PNSL emphasized cost efficiency in the quality metrics. When asked to elaborate, the respondent noted that only big schools might be able to participate if the typical metrics are used. The respondent highlighted that affordability and producing employable graduates should also be considered.

"One school at PHP 45,000.00 and another at PHP 22,000.00. These are Metro Manila rates. The latter has chosen not to chase accreditation, but they have very good PRC rates. The former has accreditation. Two schools that have positioned themselves very differently. Accreditation generally will raise costs, and many schools, including ours, have chosen that path. If you look at levels of accreditation, the quality of the graduates, the amount of research being done, you'll start hitting schools with higher tuition levels."

non-PNSL

5.2.2. Disbursement

Delays in the release of the subsidy are pressing concerns.

HEI respondents shared that they receive the TES fund months after enrollment (e.g., five months after the enrollment, released one semester after). Some respondents with enough cash flows shared they were ok to wait, although others expressed hope, as shown in the quote below, for a timelier release of the money.

“This is money from the government. We heard that they cannot just release the funds. However, we hope that, if possible, CHEDRO can release the money before the semester ends. Receiving the subsidy every end of the semester the students enrolled in or two weeks after the end of the semester is ok. It might be that the fund will be used for the second semester. To facilitate small waiting time for students and schools, it is not advisable to release one year after the first-semester enrollment.”

PNSL

The delay was pronounced during the pandemic. This is shared by one non-PNSL respondent, as shown in the quote below, expressing similar sentiments of timelier fund release.

“It’s really delayed. This is HEIs’ common concern. For example, the fund for AY 2021-2022 was disbursed in AY 2022-2023. We hope that the subsidy will be downloaded during the semester for which it was applied. Basically, we wait for CHEDRO’s signal to send the invoice.”

Non-PNSL

Compliance with paperwork causes delays.

Despite identifying CHEDROs, CHED central office, and DBM as avenues where bottlenecks occur, some respondents acknowledged the HEIs’ contributions to the delay. One non-PNSL respondent shared that they have good relationships with CHEDRO, facilitating timely information needed to implement the program efficiently. However, HEI respondents recognized the importance of observing the processes to ensure compliance with policies and procedures in the program implementation and using government money. Compliance means paperwork, which is a frequent source of bottleneck, as shown in the quote from one PNSL respondent below.

“You know when the money comes to us, we must prepare a lot of paperwork like the payroll that needs to be signed by the grantees. And that’s different from cheque preparation. So, if you have 1000 grantees, four papers to be prepared for and signed by each grantee, and we need to prepare 1000 cheques. A specific signatory should sign the cheques, so it’s a long process.”

PNSL

Meanwhile, LGUs manage the LUCs’ financial accounts. Thus, LGUs prepare the paperwork, which can contribute to the delay, as noted by one LUC respondent below.

“We do not have an account, and the TES fund goes to the LGU. Sometimes, the mayor is not available, which causes delays. Sometimes, the distribution of the TES is politicized because the mayor distributes the cheque.”

LUC

Manpower issues in regional offices slow down the processes.

From the perspective of some HEIs, many delays are coming from the CHEDRO. Personnel-related issues, like resignation and reshuffling without proper turnover of documents, slow the processes. A lack of personnel is identified as a source of delay, and with one PNSL respondent sharing, they will be informed that CHEDRO is still validating. In the quote below, one SUC respondent noted the few personnel in the regional office against the number of students being validated.

“Delay occurs mostly in CHEDRO, UniFAST, and perhaps DBM. CHEDRO mainly because they need to validate many students and have a few personnel. Then, after their validation, they will request funds from DBM, which also takes time.”

SUC

Respondents from various CHEDROs agreed with the manpower issue, sharing the regional office’s lack of personnel given the time it takes to validate applicants and monitor HEIs.

“CHEDRO staff has increased, although most of us are contract of Service (CoS) workers. We have one accountant. So even if we are fast in processing, the accounting department has few people. CHEDROs are designed to accommodate the functions of CHED, not UniFAST.”

CHEDRO

“The biggest challenge on our part is we have one of the biggest grantees, but we’re only around 12 in the team to ensure that processes are going well. Per HEI, we don’t have just one transaction. We deal with different liquidation reports. Delayed initial disbursements, delayed liquidation, or difficulty in liquidating since grantees have already graduated/left the area. We cannot release succeeding funds.”

CHEDRO

Bureaucratic processes at the national level are contributing factors as well.

Some HEI respondents attribute the delay to national agencies, noting the helpfulness of CHEDROs from the application to billing. These respondents shared that CHEDROs inform them once the money is available. As shown in the quotes below, they identified DBM and CHED central office as key agencies to address delays.

“Our first bottleneck is the time it gets from DBM to CHED. I don’t know how long after it is appropriated in the GAA, then it goes to DBM. From the approval by the congress to DBM, DBM then gives it to CHED, who gives it to the regional directors. The regions cascade to the HEIs. Another bottleneck is when we distribute the money to students. There are many requirements because COA is strict about disbursement requirements. This is understandable, but we hope they can address the first bottleneck. Release the money earlier.”

PNSL

“The bottleneck is at the national level. We uploaded the names and submitted the requirements. CHEDRO will validate the documents, and we will be advised to send the invoice for the validated names. CHEDRO will send the request for fund release to the central office. That’s where the waiting happens. When we ask CHEDRO, they will tell us to wait. So, we wait.”

PNSL

Another source of bottleneck, as shared by one CHEDRO respondent, is the lack of funds in the SARO issued by the CHED central office, which may occur if there are many approved grantees in the region. In this case, CHEDRO needs to request additional funds, which already depends on the processes at the national level.

“If we have the approved list of grantees and the SARO, we will request funds from DBM. It does not take one month to get the money. But it depends on the availability of funds. For example, our current SARO is insufficient, so we must request additional funds from the central office. How soon we can receive the money depends on them.”

CHEDRO

To explain the process, UniFAST respondents shared that CHEDROs need to file a notice of cash allocation (NCA) to request the funds for the SARO. But, they can only do so if they already have the master list of grantees to ensure they can release the money within the allowed timeframe¹⁵.

“There is a long process, from application to validation. We cannot request the NCA unless the documents are complete. The NCA lapses every quarter.”

UniFAST

Liquidation (of payroll and administrative support costs) is a source of bottlenecks.

CHEDRO respondents generally recognized that HEIs also contributed to the delays, with respondents highlighting the sources, including delays in the HEIs’ billing invoice and liquidation report and inaccurately/incompletely filled out forms.

“If we have the funds, we disburse the money. The problem is that HEIs are sometimes slow to submit billing documents. We cannot process the release without the billing invoice. Another challenge is the delay in liquidation reports. We need to comply with COA. We cannot process succeeding disbursements without these documents because we are accountable. In addition, documents submitted are sometimes incomplete or inaccurate. That’s why there’s back and forth.”

CHEDRO

Other CHEDRO respondents, when asked why some HEIs take some time to file liquidation reports, shared that HEIs have to liquidate the student payroll and administrative support costs. The latter can be a bottleneck since HEIs need to compile receipts for expenses specified by COA.

“There is an administrative cost, around one percent of the total processed amount. This is for the school to defray their expenses when processing the documents like photocopying expenses and supplies. This also needs liquidation and follows accounting and auditing rules. There must be a receipt, which should bear a specific name. That’s also part of the bottleneck. Sometimes, they use the wrong expenses/receipts, and the expenses are disallowed. It takes time for them to comply with the latter, especially public HEIs, because they have BAC. They also have a COA where the original documents are submitted. We just request for the COA’s certification.”

CHEDRO

¹⁵ Failure to use the NCA means lower disbursement rate and underspending, which can adversely affect the agency’s next year. Unused obligated NCA will negatively affect the agency’s performance-based bonus.

One respondent from another CHEDRO articulated the same issue and suggested separating the liquidation of the grant and the administrative support.

“We recommended to separate the liquidation of the grant and liquidation of operational funds. Grants are easier to liquidate. But the operational funds are less so. We give HEIs a 90-day liquidation period. But liquidating is challenging, especially if they have not yet spent the money.”

CHEDRO

CHEDRO respondents also recognized that liquidation rules are more stringent for private HEIs than public HEIs, with one interviewee sharing that the regional office accepts documents submitted by public HEIs as long as these are certified by COA. In contrast, the private HEIs must submit original documents.

“Liquidation approach is different. Public HEIs have auditors. Their liquidation reports are received and checked by COA. Private HEIs do not have that. So, they must present the original official receipts and provide supporting documents in their report.”

CHEDRO

Delays affect the release of future tranches due to COA rules.

Liquidation delays have a ripple effect on the timing of future fund releases. This is shared by CHEDRO respondents and highlighted by some HEI respondents, as illustrated in the quote from one SUC respondent below.

“We submit the documents on time. When CHEDRO advises us on the billing deadline, we submit within the deadline. So. It’s not us. There is a new circular that we need to release the money to students within 30 days of receiving the funds. We really try our best to release the funds. Only around 20 percent of the delay can be attributed to us. For example, we will release their allowance for the AY 2022-2023 second semester. Some of them graduated and migrated already. We needed to contact each of them. For some, we needed to wait for the special power of attorney. We could not liquidate, and CHEDRO will not release the next tranche.”

SUC

Delays negatively affect schools’ operations, especially those of LUCs.

One LUC respondent shared that there are cases when the LGU subsidized the LUC operations, including the payment of salaries due to delays. The same respondent expressed hope for a timelier release.

“Actually, the money downloaded from UniFAST is supposed to be used for the operation of the school, construction of buildings, purchase of laboratory equipment, and everything else, including about 70 to 80 percent of the salary of the instructors and staff. But right now, because there is no money downloaded yet, the LGU subsidizes and pays for our salaries. But they only have a limited budget. So, the LGU has problems appropriating our budget because we have not received the money from UniFAST.”

LUC

Delays may have unintended effects on students’ schooling decisions and subsidy use.

On the part of students, some respondents shared their students borrow money to finance their tuition fees, with one noting the value families put in college education. Others shared that schools

adapt to the situation by offering installment plans, knowing students can pay once the funds are released. Thus, financing the tuition fee is not an issue.

“The release of the subsidy was late. Students receive it at the end of the semester or the end of the academic year. We have downpayment schemes for every exam. Then, they pay in full once the subsidy is available.”
PNSL

“Students will come to us and tell us, ‘I don’t have money. But I’m a TES grantee. Can I just write a promissory note?’ So, we allow them. But really, students depend on the subsidy. We hope the subsidy will be released in the same semester as the application.”
Non-PNSL

Financing the monthly expenses is the bigger issue, with one PNSL respondent sharing its adverse effect on schooling outcomes, as shown in the quote below.

“We’ve spoken with students who did not push through because they relied on the subsidy. There were uncertainties about when the support will come. Tuition fees are easy because we know they are grantees, so we allow them to take the exams. But the big problem is how they could sustain going to school, given the daily expenses like food, fare, etc. They don’t have a choice because they have no financial sources at all. They just drop out and work.”
PNSL

Some students treat the one-time release of the subsidy as a windfall income. This insight is noted by CHEDRO and HEI respondents. One CHEDRO interviewee shared that the subsidy is being treated by some grantees like a bonus upon receipt and hoped for a timely subsidy distribution. One LUC respondent shares this sentiment, noting that some use the money to buy food for friends and teachers and purposes other than educational-related expenses. Another LUC respondent, as shown in the quote below, shared that the subsidy will be more meaningful if received monthly.

“I hope students will receive the subsidy monthly instead of every semester. They feel like they are being gifted and not receiving a subsidy. If we want the subsidy to be meaningful, that they’re being helped, it should be given monthly. If you give them one time, they tend to use the money to pay debts or something.”
LUC

Table 17. Summary of issues in the TES process flow

Stages in the process flow	Positive features	Issues	Results	Outcomes
Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Adequate dissemination of CHEDROs and HEIs ✓ Streamlined documentary requirements, new and continuing grantees, User-friendly portal for partner institutions 			
Validation		Congestion, outages during the encoding period Mismatch in the volume of work and the number of personnel	CHEDRO personnel working overtime Delay in subsidy release	
Selection		<i>New prioritization scheme</i> 1. Students under the most updated <i>Listahan</i> for HEI types SUCs, LUCs, PNSL, and non-PNSL; 2. Students included in the 4Ps, ranked according to household per capita income for the above HEI types; and, 3. The remaining slots will be allocated to students in PNSLs not included in the first 2 prioritization categories. Prioritization associated with HEI types (i.e., PNSL, non-PNSL, public HEIs)	Misaligned prioritization and program goals (i.e., Selection of non-poor grantees) Limited participation of private HEIs in non-PNSL areas Potential loss of the subsidy when students transfer to another HEI type	Leakages Lack of public-private HEIs complementarity HEIs' operational challenges Adverse effects on students' schooling decisions and subsidy use
Awarding, Disbursement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Student-HEI sharing agreements ✓ Decentralization of fund release ✓ Release through ATM card 	Did not fully materialize* Compliance with paperwork Manpower issues in regional offices Bureaucratic processes	Delays in the release of the subsidy	
Liquidation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 90-day liquidation period 	Difficulty in liquidating the administrative support cost	Delays in future tranches due to COA rules	

5.3. *What are the issues and challenges in the other aspects of design and implementation?*

5.3.1. Student support services

Tutorial and bridging programs are missing.

Some HEI respondents agreed with targeting access and quality, noting the importance of efficient use of taxes. However, they also suggested the importance of mechanisms to ensure grantees can keep pace with retention policies.

“Perhaps there is a mechanism to help students keep pace with the retention policy, like tutorial sessions after class hours. This way, students who are failing can catch up. That’s how I understand access and quality.”

SUC

Another respondent from the same SUC noted that ESGP-PA had allowed HEIs to use the administrative support cost to fund bridging programs and shared that such a mechanism is not present in the program.

“In ESGP-PA, we can use the administrative support cost to fund activities like tutorial sessions. In the TES, we can only use that money for advocacy and promotions, technical assistance, monitoring and evaluations, and day-to-day operations. It is indicated in the MC 2018-0004.”

SUC

Information about programs and HEIs is available, but this does not necessarily filter down to parents’ and students’ schooling decisions.

Grantees should be able to make informed choices about their college education. Some HEI respondents agreed with this. One non-PNSL respondent shared that the usual approach is to make the data public, but as shown in the quote below, it may not be enough to have a material effect on students’ school choices.

“Because usually, when we discuss with policymakers, there’s agreement that the information set must be made public. Then, the technique is usually just to make it public. PRC releases publications on some websites. It must be given more thought because it doesn’t stick with the parents. The information set doesn’t find its way to a parent, and it doesn’t influence the parent or a student’s decision.

Non-PNSL

Prioritizing programs aligned with the country’s national development goals should also be a key implementation consideration. Some HEI and CHEDRO respondents have shared this, with the latter highlighting the country’s vision and how policies can achieve this.

“What are our priority programs? What manpower do we need in the next 25 years? How can we achieve the *matatag, maginhawang buhay*? Which programs are accredited? Which ones are autonomous schools? We need to guide students towards these HEIs?”

CHEDRO

5.3.2.Amount of the subsidy

The subsidy amount has decreased per UniFAST MC 5 (series of 2023).

The original subsidy of PHP30,000 per semester was enough. Respondents from outside the NCR generally noted this. When asked what happened when the tuition and other fees were higher than the total subsidy, one PNSL respondent articulated that the subsidy was already enough to have access to quality educational products offered by their school. Another respondent from the same HEI highlighted the importance of families having equity in education.

“In our school, tuition and other fees range from PHP22,000 to PHP30,000. Students will receive the excess, which is more than enough. If they get a more expensive course, then they have no allowance anymore. It is important that they also contribute to their education. They will value the subsidy more.”

PNSL

The PHP10,000 TES for incoming students in AY 2023-2024 is no longer adequate. Respondents articulated this, sharing that continuing grantees will receive PHP30,000 for TES-1 and TES-2, but the new intake will only receive a third of that. PNSL respondents expressed concerns that the subsidy is insufficient to cover even the tuition and other school fees and another articulated issues on financing daily expenses.

“The subsidy went down to PHP10,000 each semester. Hopefully, that does not discourage the students. It is better than nothing, but it will definitely not help them finish their courses.”

PNSL

The decrease in the subsidy is due to a limited budget and the desire for higher coverage.

One PNSL respondent attributes the decrease to the government’s desire to cover more, although one SUC and PNSL respondents associate the decrease in the subsidy with the limited budget.

“I’m not privy. But if there are problems like this, the source of the problem is money. Perhaps they did not study who should receive the subsidy. Students in public HEIs enjoy the program. They have free tuition and the TES. Perhaps the budget was overstretched. That’s just my contention because CHED does not disclose anything to us.

PNSL

UniFAST respondents confirmed that the program coverage depends on the available budget. One respondent confirmed that continuing grantees will receive PHP30,000 per semester, but the new intake will only be given PHP10,000.

“For now, our interim action is to lessen the benefit so we can cover more beneficiaries for this fiscal year. But the continuing will receive the PHP60,000 per year.”

UniFAST

Given sustainability issues, ensuring equity in the program design is desired.

Noting sustainability issues, some PNSL respondents noted that public HEIs should no longer be included in the program since the latter is already a beneficiary of the free tuition law. This is supported by one CHEDRO respondent noting the need to fix the program design to ensure students can choose their schools, as illustrated in the quote below.

“Students in public HEIs have free tuition already. Why should they be included in the TES? They are very lucky, in a way. We must fix the prioritization because not all students in private HEIs are rich. That’s one way of leveling the playing field between public and private HEIs because both perform public functions of educating Filipinos. We need to help students in the private HEIs as well.”

CHEDRO

When asked if a national assessment to determine the recipients is necessary, another CHEDRO respondent shared that it needs careful assessment but articulated the need to investigate SUC students still receiving the TES.

“It cannot be that SUC students have free tuition, and they still enjoy the TES. Perhaps we can have a socialized subsidy.”

CHEDRO

The subsidy provided to public and private HEI students is not equitable, given the free tuition fee in public HEIs.

The PHP10,000 subsidy applies to all students and favors public HEI students. This insight is shared by private and public HEI respondents, with one SUC respondent noting that their students already enjoy the free tuition law.

“The policy is okay for SUCs and LUCs because they qualify for free tuition. However, private HEI students will have challenges since the subsidy might not even be enough to pay their tuition fee.”

JRMSU

One CHEDRO respondent shared this insight, noting that the PHP30,000 subsidy was adequate even for private HEI students. The respondent highlighted the limited absorptive capacity of public schools and articulated that financing can be a challenge for grantees in private schools given the decrease in the subsidy to PHP10,000,

“It was ok before. However, the decrease in the subsidy does not bode well for private HEI students. It’s not enough, given the new tuition fee rates. There’s no school with a PHP10,000 tuition fee in the region. Perhaps PHP13,000 per semester, but that’s just tuition. They must pay PHP3,000, a large amount for a low-earner family. Public HEIs cannot accept everybody, so students go to private HEIs. The decrease is really a challenge.”

CHEDRO

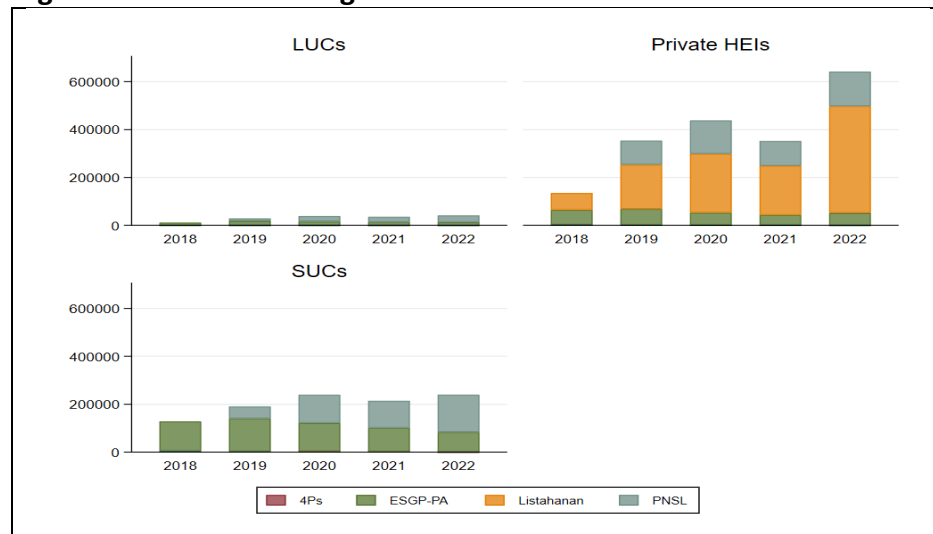
5.3.3. UniFAST

Other grants-in-aid programs were subsumed into the TES, although the Tulong Dunong Program (TDP) remains standalone.

Consistent with the mandate for the TES program to be the overall GIA program, CHEDRO respondents confirmed that the ESGP-PA was transferred to the TES. However, the program was only for continuing grantees and will cease to exist once grantees graduate. When asked why the UniFAST data include 4Ps and SWDI in the categories alongside Listahanan and PNSL, one CHEDRO respondent shared that there were times when there were extra funds (i.e., selected grantees did not enroll), and UniFAST obtained additional grantees using the 4Ps and SWDI. Thus,

grantees under ESGP-PA, SWDI, and 4Ps are very few relative to those selected under the *Listahanan* and PNSL (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Number of TES grantees



Source: CHED (2023b)

While there are no duplications in GIA programs, one CHEDRO respondent articulated that TDP is still in place (also evident in Figure 9). The same respondent emphasized that the program has the same goals as the main TES program and, in the spirit of harmonization, should be subsumed under the TES program.

“There is no duplication in GIA programs. However, we still implement the *Tulong Dunong* Program, also a grant-in-aid. It should be included in the GIA programs. Why should it be separate? It has the same intention as the TES, but the requirements differ. The amount is also different. So, I don’t see the harmonization there.”

CHEDRO

UniFAST’s other functions are overshadowed by their roles in implementing FHE and TES.

One CHEDRO respondent expressed concerns that UniFAST has become an implementer of RA 10931, overshadowing their mandate of harmonizing all government-funded scholarships per RA 10687.

“We’re giving grants and subsidies instead of harmonizing the sources. Based on the UniFAST law, UniFAST has many functions, but we cannot do those since we’ve become implementers of the free higher education and tertiary education subsidy. We’re unable to harmonize financial assistance programs, implement career guidance and counseling, etc.”

CHEDRO

When asked if they see a value in mandating HEIs to have a more proactive policy for affirmative action, a UniFAST respondent articulated that HEIs can be mandated, recognizing the role of the UniFAST Board in strengthening affirmative action.

“Yes, we need HEIs’ participation. UniFAST should be doing this, but we’re swamped with implementing the free higher education program and the TES. But we’re slowly doing this.”

Some operational challenges arise from UniFAST being attached to CHED.

CHEDRO and UniFAST respondents shared that the UniFAST Board does not have regulatory functions. They adopt the standards and guidelines set by CHED. In addition, CHED and other agencies like TESDA, DOST, and COCOPEA decide on policies.

“Policies are deliberated by the board, not by CHED alone. It just so happens that it is under CHED. There should be no issue because the UniFAST Board crafts guidelines.”

CHEDRO

Despite this, some CHEDRO and HEI respondents expressed hope for a standalone UniFAST due to operational challenges. One CHEDRO respondent noted that the specific regional offices have very few organic (thus accountable) personnel and shared that CHEDROs are not designed to accommodate the functions of UniFAST.

“We sense that UNIFAST should be an independent body because CHEDROs find it challenging to accommodate UniFAST functions. There are few plantilla positions, so accountability falls only on a few personnel, especially in the accounting department. Checking is faster if we have more personnel, but we could not make a request because DBM will tell us there are unfilled positions in the central office.”

CHEDRO

When asked if the solution is to hire more organic personnel or to decongest workload through a third-party co-implementer, another respondent from the same CHEDRO shared that the solution was neither and was vocal about a standalone UniFAST.

“The main solution is to separate UniFAST from CHED. That way, UniFAST can have their Plantilla positions. It can hire its personnel and have its strategies for human resource development.”

CHEDRO

One non-PNSL respondent also supported a standalone UniFAST, pointing out the operational challenges of the UniFAST Board being attached to the CHED (per RA 10687).

“UniFAST is seen as a subsidiary of CHED. They decide at an operational level or want to make a decision, but they cannot until there’s a CHED concurrence or a CHED clearance. So, there’s codependence, and I am unsure if that’s being tended. UniFAST wanted its regional offices, but the counterargument is that CHED has regional offices, so why not use the CHEDROs?”

non-PNSL

5.3.4. Third-party implementer

There was duplication of work and redundancy of requirements when PEAC was a co-implementer.

Several private HEI respondents agreed with this insight, sharing the burden of redundant requirements to be submitted to CHEDRO and PEAC. They shared that they needed to prepare two sets of documents and encode information in two different portals.

“We had challenges when PEAC was around because there were redundancies in processing documentary requirements. We must deal with a lot of paperwork. We’re already done with the documents for CHEDRO, and CHEDRO was starting to validate, but the process was repeated with PEAC. PEAC validated again. That was our experience at that time. That’s why there were delays in the application and validation, and thus, disbursement.”

PNSL

Accountability is also a concern.

Weighing in on the presence of a co-implementer, some CHEDRO respondents articulated the acceptability of outsourcing some tasks but only to government entities where processes are heavily vetted or to personnel that CHEDROs can still supervise. Respondents shared that they remain accountable for releasing the funds, and it is in their best interest to ensure they release the money to rightful recipients. This potentially explains the duplication of tasks on the part of HEIs and CHEDROs during the period when PEAC was a co-implementer.

“We can outsource, but we’re more comfortable if we are outsourcing to people who will be stationed in CHEDROs. For example, we will outsource validation, but CHEDROs will still release the funds. It’s difficult for me to imagine releasing the funds to grantees we did not validate.”

CHEDRO

Opposing the presence of a third-party implementer, some respondents shared that a better strategy is to increase CHEDRO’s personnel. One PNSL respondent noted that increasing the personnel can help speed up the validation process. A rough estimate of the cost of hiring CoS in CHEDROs is around PHP3,195,553/month or PHP38,346,636/year (Table 17), around PHP1.3 million higher than the PEAC’s fee when it was a co-implementer¹⁶.

“Increase CHEDRO’s personnel. We must submit documents for COA. CHEDRO is very helpful, but it takes time to process and validate the documents. Other than that, things are still faster without PEAC.”

PNSL

Table 18. Rough estimates of the costs of the TES personnel in CHEDROs

Region	TES grantees (AY 2022-2023)	Hypothetical Number of CoS workers ¹	Hypothetical CoS composition ²		Hypothetical salary (PHP) ³	
			SG12	SG15	SG12	SG15
	A	B=A/2,325	C1=B*0.4	C2=B*0.6	D1=C1*salary	D2=C2*salary
SOCCCKSARGEN	29,909	13	5	8	145,825	292,952
Northern Mindanao	23,253	10	4	6	116,660	219,714
Central Luzon	19,229	8	3	5	87,495	183,095
Bicol	17,168	7	3	4	87,495	146,476
Central Visayas	14,231	6	2	4	58,330	146,476
Ilocos Region	13,507	6	2	3	58,330	109,857
Caraga	13,117	6	2	3	58,330	109,857
BARMM	12,868	6	2	3	58,330	109,857
CALABARZON	11,414	5	2	3	58,330	109,857
Eastern Visayas	11,094	5	2	3	58,330	109,857
Cagayan Valley	10,866	5	2	3	58,330	109,857
Western Visayas	10,800	5	2	3	58,330	109,857

¹⁶ Based on the interview with PEAC.

Region	TES grantees (AY 2022-2023)	Hypothetical Number of CoS workers ¹	Hypothetical CoS composition ²		Hypothetical salary (PHP) ³	
			SG12	SG15	SG12	SG15
	A	B=A/2,325	C1=B*0.4	C2=B*0.6	D1=C1*salary	D2=C2*salary
MIMAROPA	9,401	4	2	2	58,330	73,238
Davao Region	9,313	4	2	2	58,330	73,238
Zamboanga Peninsula	9,229	4	2	2	58,330	73,238
NCR	8,479	4	1	2	29,165	73,238
CAR	2,327	1	0	1		36,619
Total CoS salary/month					1,108,270	2,087,283

Sources: Second column: CHED (2023b). The rest are authors' computations based on the information gathered in interviews and published salary grades.

Notes: 1/ Based on the information gathered in an interview with a CHEDRO with 10 CoS workers or 2,325 caseloads per CoS; 2/ Based on the interview, the typical CoS composition is 40 percent SG12 and 60 percent SG15; 3/ Based on the published step 1 salary grade

CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon), MIMAROPA (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan), CAR (Cordillera Administrative Region), NCR (National Capital Region), SOCCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, General Santos), Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao)

Should a co-implementer exist, consultations with regional offices will level expectations, draw limitations, define roles, and establish trust.

Some PNSL respondents who are open to a third-party implementer articulated that the third-party implementer and CHED should have a good working relationship. They suggested the two should distribute the responsibilities in the process flow to avoid duplication of work.

“It would be good if the co-implementer and CHED could agree on the work distribution because the schools and focal persons suffer from the redundancy of work. We’re already done complying with CHED, then we need to comply with PEAC, which is stricter.”

PNSL

One CHEDRO respondent articulated why the involvement of a co-implementer did not work, noting that the central office decided on onboarding PEAC, and the regional offices were not consulted. Consultations could have helped level the expectations and establish trust between CHEDROs and PEAC.

“Actually, we’re open to outsourcing some tasks at the regional office. My apprehension is that we were not consulted. That’s why it’s difficult for us to think we will disburse to a list approved by somebody we did not know. Maybe because we had no relationship with PEAC. We did not have interactions before the implementation, so we don’t know them. Eventually, PEAC was removed because of the duplication of work.”

CHEDRO

A co-implementer can have roles in the validation and monitoring of indicators relevant to the program implementation.

Some HEI respondents gave PEAC benefits of the doubt. They articulated that while there were delays resulting from PEAC’s validation, they understand that the process was designed to ensure

that the subsidy was used for intended beneficiaries. This can be gleaned from the quotes below, with respondents sharing the pros and cons of having a co-implementer.

“We need to submit documents to CHEDRO and PEAC. Then, it takes time for PEAC to validate. So, it also takes time for us to send the billing invoice. They check individually, and if there are discrepancies, they will ask about them. It’s ok if they will be part of the implementation. But it takes a long time before we can get paid.”

PNSL

“We understand the objective of the scrutiny. We hope for better means to achieve the objective.”

PNSL

When asked if a third party has room in the program implementation, one respondent in a region with many grantees noted that the third party can help monitor HEIs to ensure that liquidation goes smoothly.

“A third party can help in monitoring the liquidation. That’s a big help. The regional office can focus on validation, tend to complaints, and receive documents. We have to do other tasks in the office, not only UniFAST tasks. If a group is already monitoring compliance with liquidation reports, we can focus on validation, processing of billing, and conducting orientation when there are changes in the guidelines.”

CHEDRO

Meanwhile, some HEI respondents identified validation as a potential third-party involvement. One SUC respondent agreed and shared that a third party can help deload CHEDROs of some tasks, specifically validation. One PNSL respondent suggested that the third party can enhance transparency and improve the program implementation.

“The third party can participate in validation so that it’s not only CHED who will have the final say. They can also participate in monitoring to ensure transparency and reduce leakages, but it should not affect the application.”

PNSL

Another PNSL respondent agreed to the third party’s role in validation. However, the respondent, drawing from their experience with PEAC, shared that information immaterial to awarding subsidies can be monitored but should not cause delay.

“They can participate in the validation. They can scrutinize relevant information but not information that does not have a bearing in awarding, like the number of units in the certificate of enrollment. Students can receive a subsidy if they are enrolled and qualified. We had cases before in which students were enrolled for 18 units. We submitted the documents, including the certificate of enrollment. Then, the students added a subject, making the total units to 21. Then, we submitted it to PEAC again, including the updated certificate of enrollment. They flagged the discrepancy, and we experienced too much delay because many students had such cases.”

PNSL

Table 19. Summary of issues in other aspects of the TES implementation

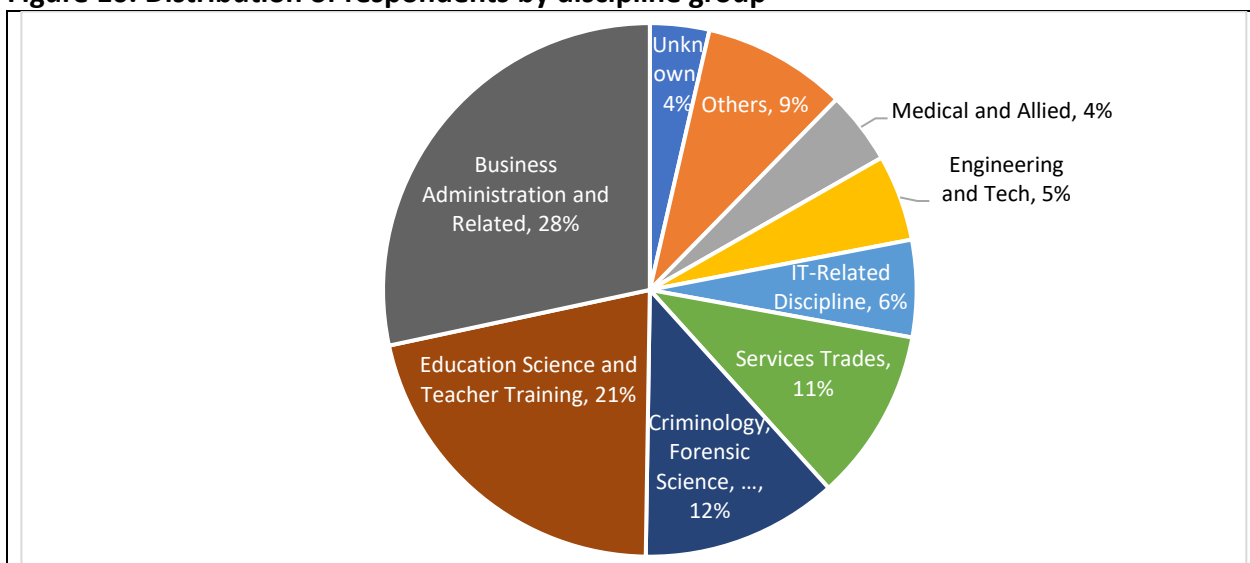
Other aspects	Positive features	Issues	Results	Outcomes
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Adequate reportorial mechanisms ✓ Notice of LOA from students 			
Ensuring quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ CHED's enforcement of regulatory standards ✓ HEIs' enforcement of retention policies 			
HEI student support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Presence of coordinators ✓ Conduct of orientation about the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of quality of instructions in secondary education No funds for bridging programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some grantees unable to maintain required grades Some grantees unable to maintain the subsidy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspension of subsidy until students can comply Suspension of subsidy until students can comply
Amount of the subsidy		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak information campaign on HEI and program credentials Decrease to PhP10000 Same subsidy for public and private HEI students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subsidy as allowance to public HEI students, as tuition to private HEI students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grantees choosing affordability over quality Equity issue due to free tuition fee in public HEIs
UniFAST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Crafting policies that adapt to the needs of and changes in the ecosystem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UniFAST being attached to CHED TES being a major GIA program Tulong Dunong Program (TDP) not yet subsumed to the GIA programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational challenges in CHEDROs UniFAST focusing on FHE and TES Need for improved GIA program harmonization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Validation issue especially in regions with many grantees UniFAST's other functions overshadowed by the FHE and TES implementation Added workload in CHEDROs
Third party implementer*		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duplication of work and redundancy of requirements Accountability concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays in the release of the subsidy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HEIs' operational challenges Adverse effects on students' schooling decisions and subsidy use

Note: *Based on the respondents' experience with PEAC in AY 2021

6. Product evaluation: How effective is the TES program in achieving its goals?

Leveraging the 2023 PIDS TES online survey of grantees, this section analyzes whether and how the TES program achieved its goals, analyzing the grantees' household profiles and school choices and highlighting the grantees' perceptions and experiences of the program. While the results are not representative of the population of the TES grantees, the findings provide useful insights for potential program improvements.

Figure 10. Distribution of respondents by discipline group

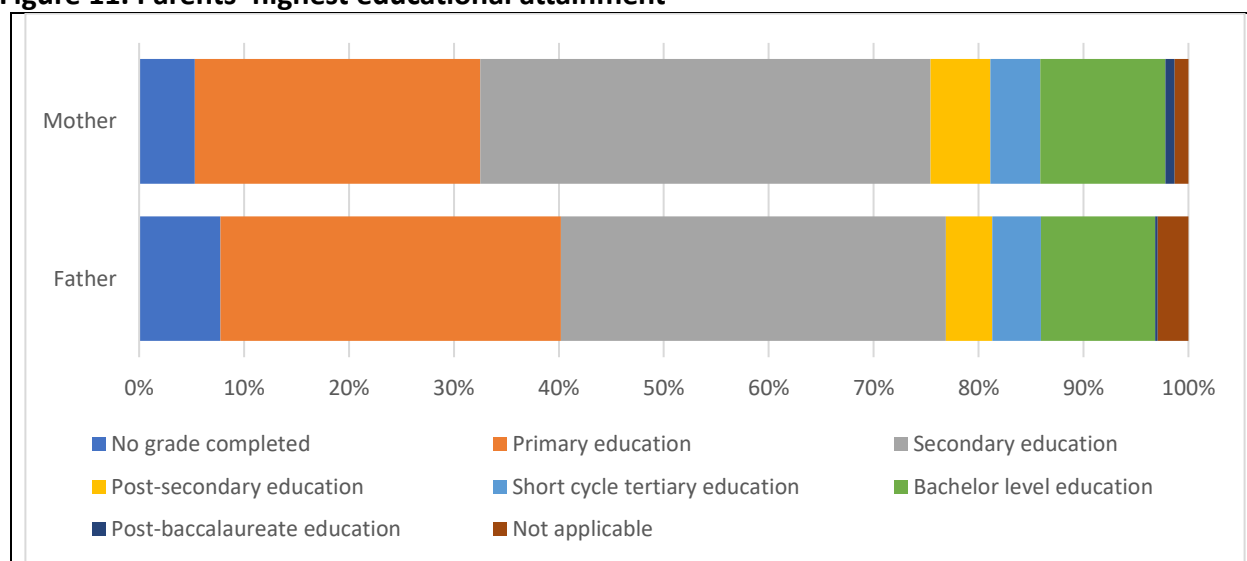


Source: PIDS (2023)

More than one-fourth of respondents were enrolled in courses in business administration and related disciplines (Figure 10). This was followed by students in education science and teacher training at 21%. Around one out of 10 sampled students were enrolled in courses in criminology, forensic science, police administration, and other civil security and military disciplines, while 11 percent were enrolled in services trades. IT-related disciplines, engineering and technology, and medical and allied fields collectively accounted for a notably lower proportion of respondents in the survey, totaling only 16%.

Most sampled grantees had parents who completed primary or secondary education (Figure 11). This underscores the significance of the TES program in potentially breaking the cycle of limited educational attainment within families. In terms of household characteristics, the sample belongs to a household with an average of six members, larger than the national average of around four members in 2020¹⁷.

Figure 11. Parents' highest educational attainment



Source: PIDS (2023)

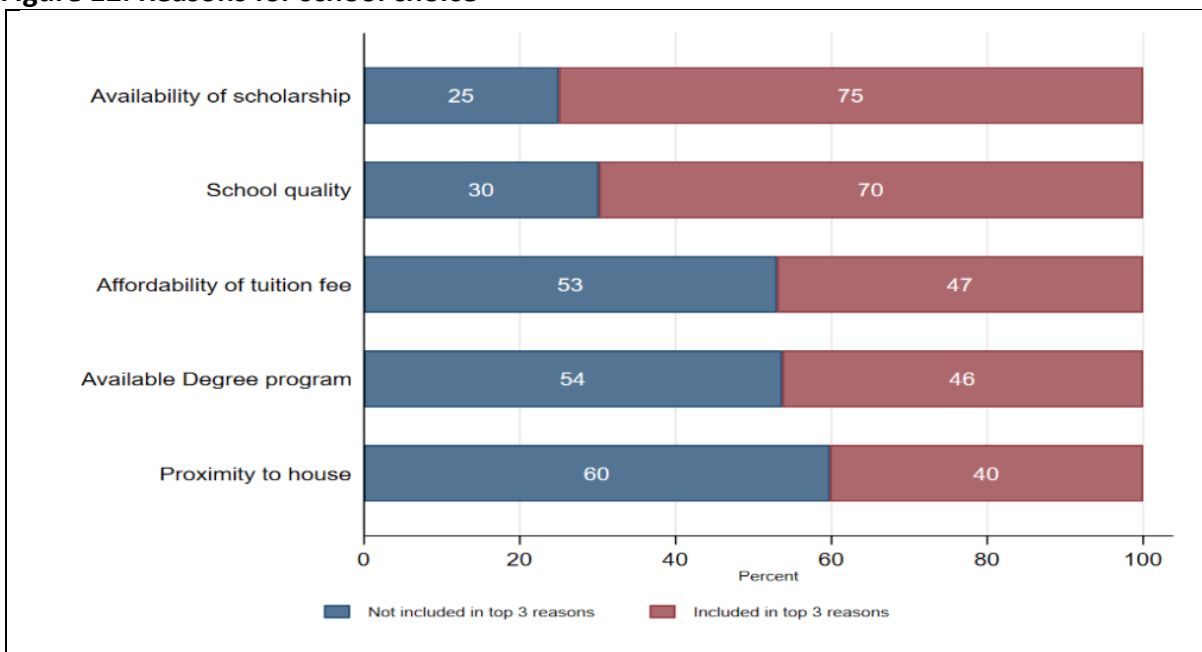
On the reasons for school choice, grantees were heavily influenced by factors like the presence of aid/scholarships, school/program quality, and school proximity (Figure 12).

- **Financing:** Three out of four sampled grantees indicated that the availability of scholarships influenced their school choice, and around 47 percent indicated affordability as a determining factor. Knowledge about available financial aid can significantly influence students' decisions when choosing a school. When students are aware of the financial support available, it can mitigate uncertainties that often accompany the college selection process. Rather than being limited by the cost of education, students can be more empowered to select institutions that best match their academic goals and future career aspirations.

¹⁷ Philippine Statistics Authority. 2022. Household Population, Number of Households, and Average Household Size of the Philippines (2020 Census of Population and Housing). https://psa.gov.ph/system/files/phcd/2022-12/1_Press%2520Release_Number%2520of%2520Households_RML_032122_rev_RRDH_CRD-signed.pdf (accessed on July 24, 2024).

- **School and programs:** Around 70 percent and 47 percent indicated school quality and availability of degree programs as considerations, highlighting the importance of a stronger information campaign in the quality of schools and programs to guide students' decisions and choices.
- **Proximity:** Around 40 percent indicated distance to the place of residence as a factor.

Figure 12. Reasons for school choice



Source: PIDS (2023)

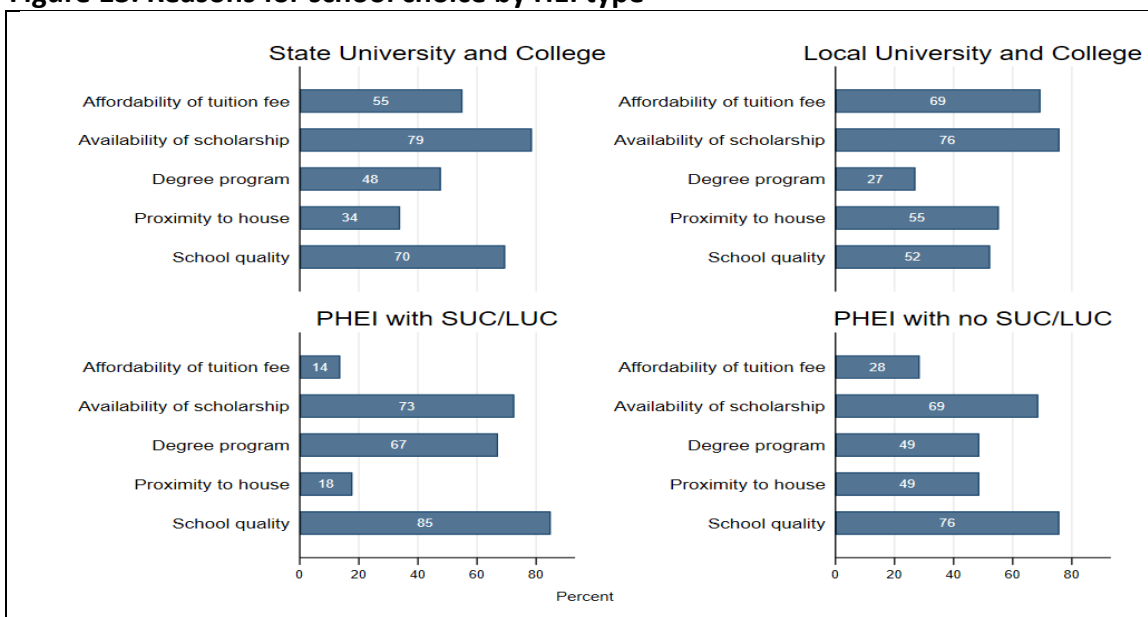
Note: Respondents were asked to select the top three reasons for choosing their school

Reasons for school choice differed depending on the HEI type (SUC, LUC, PNSL, non-PNSL) the students were enrolled in (Figure 13).

- Many students in SUCs and private HEIs indicated the availability of scholarships and school quality as reasons for their school choice. For SUCs, these findings potentially reflect the overall perception that SUCs have high academic standards and additional benefits since SUCs are beneficiaries of the free tuition law. Meanwhile, students in private HEIs receive tuition subsidies (TES-1), which help defray miscellaneous costs. Thus, as a reason for many private HEI students, the school quality potentially reflects the premium students/their families put on value-for-money as they maximize the private HEIs' value proposition. These are also reflected in the choice of many private HEI students, who chose their schools due to the available degree programs and the quality of school facilities. While almost half of public HEI students indicated the available degree programs, only a small percentage indicated that the quality of facilities had influenced their school choice.
- Meanwhile, those enrolled in LUCs cited proximity to their homes, next to the affordability of tuition fees and availability of scholarships, as a reason for their school choice. These reflect the premium they/their families placed on convenience and reduced travel costs. While LUCs may not always match some SUCs and private institutions' academic reputations and resources, their affordability makes them practical options for many students.

- Similarly, almost half of the sample enrolled in PNSL indicated proximity to their homes as a reason for their school choice. The program prioritizes students in PNSL and incentivizes students to choose private schools within their vicinity rather than moving to other areas to study.

Figure 13. Reasons for school choice by HEI type



Source: PIDS (2023)

Note: Respondents were asked to select the top three reasons for choosing their school

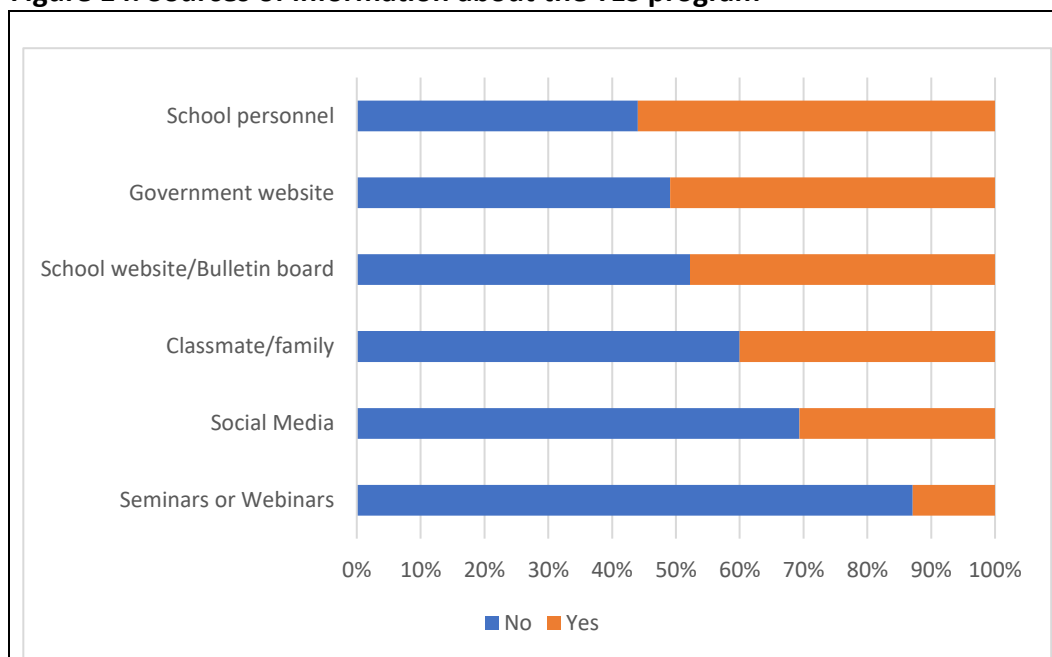
On the sources of the TES information, most grantees learned about the program through their school administrators and/or teachers and from government websites (Figure 14). Even though social media can be considered an effective tool to capture the attention of younger individuals, only around one-third of students have learned about the program through this mode. More common sources were school personnel (likely the UniFAST coordinator), the government website, and the school bulletin/website.

Grantees rated the promotion of access to education and the helpfulness of program coordinators highly.

- Financing is a key factor in enhancing outcomes such as students' enrollment in post-secondary institutions and the continuity and completion of their academic journey. Most respondents agreed that lowering the cost of education through free tuition and miscellaneous fees will encourage post-secondary enrollments. They also believed that this would increase completion rates for tertiary education. This is further supported by the respondents' response to a separate question, wherein 95 percent of eligible respondents¹⁸ are likelier to enroll in the next school year.
- Most respondents confirmed the presence of the TES focal persons in the HEIs and generally agreed with their helpfulness in the program implementation.

¹⁸ Only includes non-graduating respondents for the reference school year.

Figure 14. Sources of information about the TES program



Note: Respondents were asked to select all applicable sources of information

Source: PIDS (2023)

While there was positive feedback about the program, there was a tendency for students to give neutral responses especially on the adequacy of the benefits, students' awareness of the program, and the timeliness of subsidy release. These highlighted potential areas for improvement.

Program's benefits: Around ten percent were neutral, and seven percent disagreed/strongly disagreed that the personal allowance provided by the program is adequate (

Figure 15. Broken down by HEI type, a larger percentage of private HEI students shared this perception (23% versus 10% in LUCs and 16% in SUCs,

- Figure 16, left panel).

Timeliness of the release of the subsidy: More students enrolled in private HEIs indicated that they neither agreed/disagreed (29% versus 14% in SUCs and 15% in LUCs,

- Figure 16, right panel).

Awareness of potential grantees about the program: Around 19 percent were neutral, and seven percent disagreed/strongly disagreed that SHS graduates and college/TESDA students were aware of the TES program (

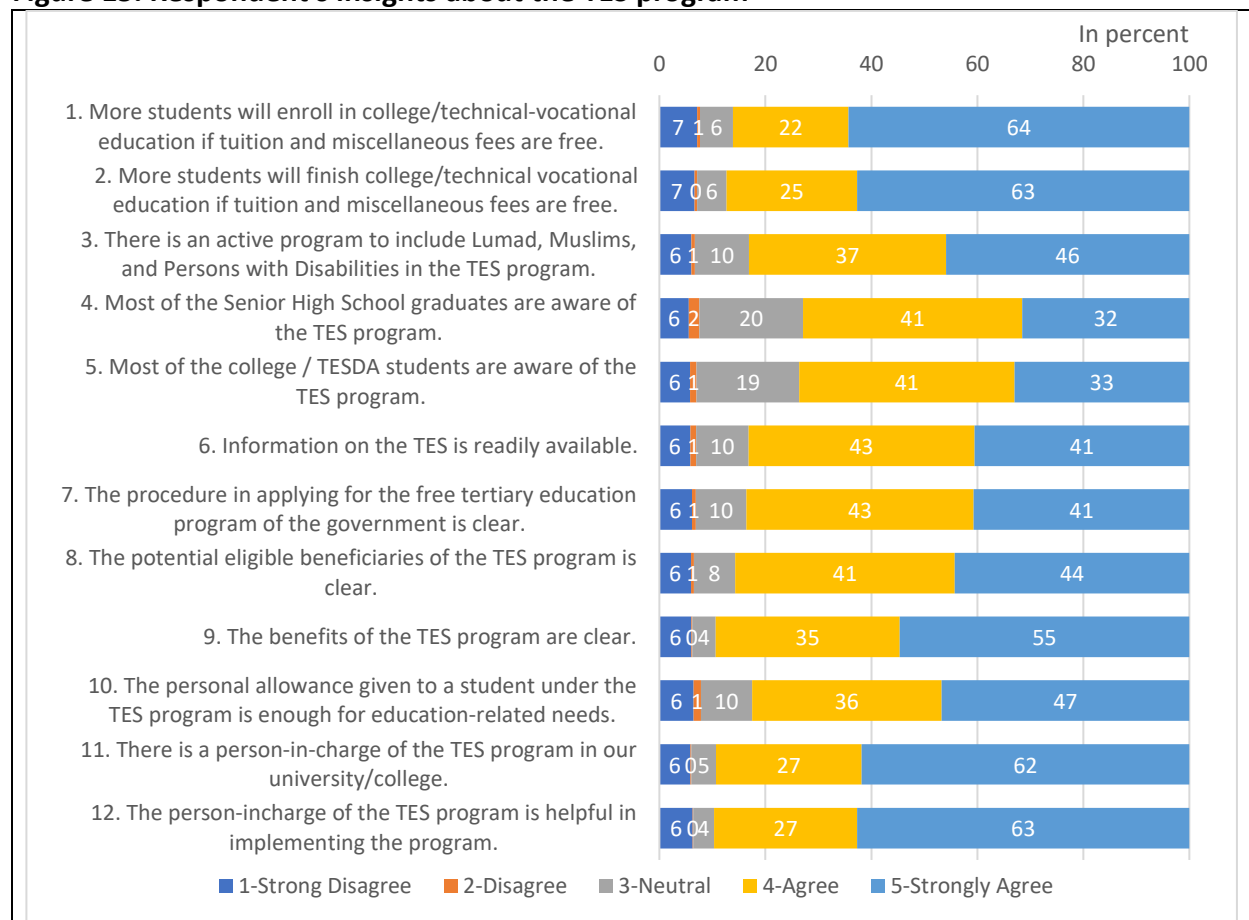
- Figure 15).

Awareness about the program's affirmative action: Around ten percent of the respondents neither agreed/disagreed on whether they knew the marginalized groups' inclusion into the program (

- Figure 15). Increasing the visibility of these initiatives can help ensure that more students are aware of the resources available to them. A smaller portion (around 7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating the perceived inadequacies of the program's inclusivity

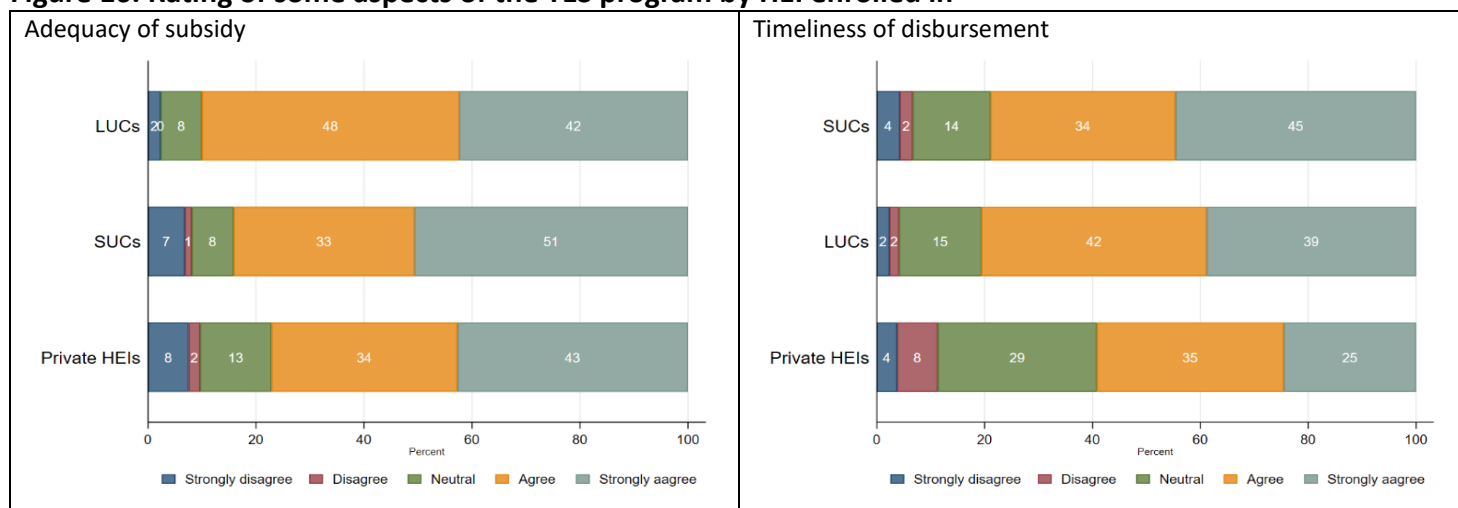
efforts. This may stem from personal experiences or observations where vulnerable groups were excluded, highlighting the need for improved outreach and support for marginalized communities.

Figure 15. Respondent's insights about the TES program



Source: PIDS (2023)

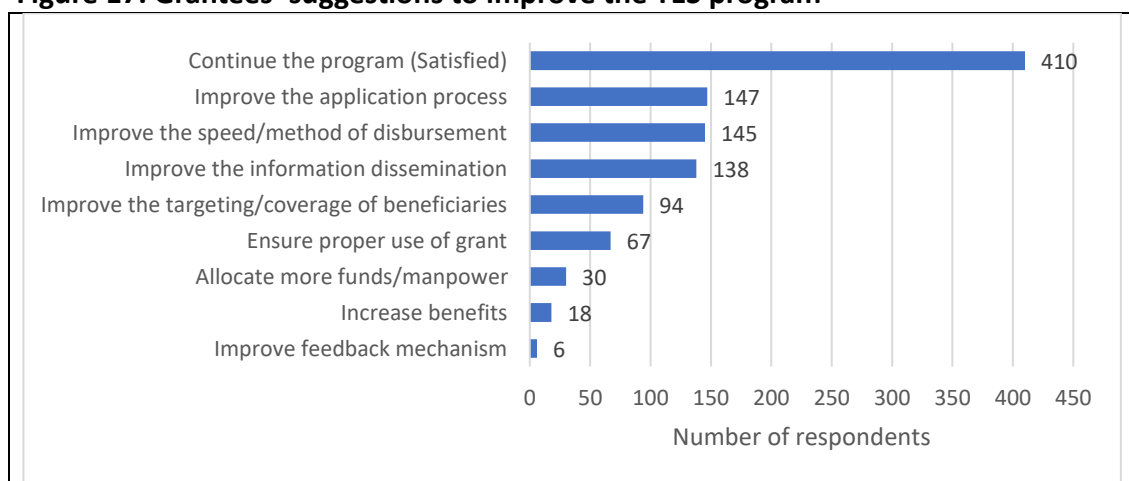
Figure 16. Rating of some aspects of the TES program by HEI enrolled in



A significant number of respondents expressed overall satisfaction with the current state of the program and expressed hope for its continued implementation. Insights (based on the open-ended question and summarized in Figure 17) were generally consistent with the insights gathered in the process evaluation and provided useful suggestions to improve the program.

- **Application process:** Some advocated for more streamlined documentary requirements, especially for continuing students, and emphasized the importance of adequate time for students to comply with requirements.
- **Speed and mode of the release of the subsidy:** Students articulated hope in receiving the subsidy in the same semester they are enrolled in to help defray tuition fees and/or living allowance. Some students shared that they struggled to pay the tuition fee and encountered problems enrolling the following semester unless their balance in the previous semester was settled. Other than the timeliness of the release of the subsidy, the channel in releasing the subsidy can also be improved, with some beneficiaries advocating for the use of the Land Bank card because of its convenience.
- **Information dissemination:** Students articulated the need for clear and easily understandable information, wider dissemination platforms such as social media and the TES website, and regular seminars to keep students updated. Recognizing that connectivity can be an issue for some potential beneficiaries, some students suggest using flyers and leveraging the LGU's help in the TES information drive. Some hoped for transparency in the selection of the TES grantees.
- **Targeting and coverage of beneficiaries.** While students expressed the need to improve the coverage, they also articulated the need to award the grant to deserving students. Some observed that some are grantees despite their parents' financial capacity, and others are not despite the clear need for financial support.
- **Use of the grant:** Some respondents recognized the grant as a tool to achieve their educational aspirations. Some emphasized that the money should be used to defray education-related costs, observing that some beneficiaries use the grant for non-educational expenses.

Figure 17. Grantees' suggestions to improve the TES program



Source: PIDS (2023)

Note: Responses were grouped into similar themes

7. Summary and recommendations

Using the Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) evaluation framework and a mixed method approach to data collection (i.e., primary data collected through interviews and an online survey of student grantees and secondary data like administrative and microdata), this paper analyzed whether and how the program responded to the intended goals of the law and investigated the past and current contexts, the instruments used and whether and how these evolved, the issues and challenges in implementation, and whether and how the program achieved its goals.

The context evaluation indicated that convergence in enrollments in the public and private HEIs was observed even before the UAQTEA. While the dispersion in enrollment narrowed, there was geographical inequality in college progression, with CAR (SOCCSKSARGEN) having the highest (lowest) progression rate. While reasons for attending college shifted from educational costs to employment or looking for one (from 2014 to 2022, educational costs remained as reasons in BARMM. In 2022, the lack of interest had bigger shares, especially in Bicol, Central Visayas, Eastern Visayas, and Cordillera Administrative Region. Positive developments occurred in some HEI quality indicators, including the increasing share of faculty members with graduate degrees. However, challenges remained in board passing rates, institutional and program accreditation, HEI regulation status, and even more so in labor market outcomes, including skills mismatch and lack of appropriate training.

The input evaluation showed changes in the order of prioritization, although *Listahanan* remained the key prioritization instrument. *Listahanan* was not used in PNSL, the students of which automatically qualified for the subsidy (conditional on the submission of required documents). Quality was ensured through various mechanisms like the CHED registry of programs, the Certificate of Program Compliance in public HEIs, and the private HEIs' compliance with the PSG by the regional quality assurance team. There were changes in the subsidy amount, currently at PhP10000 for both public and private HEI students. Consistent with the TES serving as the overall GIA program, the ESGP-PA will end once its grantees graduate. However, the *Tulong Dunong* Program remains a stand-alone program.

The process evaluation indicated some changes in the prioritization scheme to address issues about the program needing to target more students belonging to 4Ps households. The evaluation also identified several good practices like using an online portal for partner institutions, streamlining documentary requirements, decentralizing fund release (from the central office to CHEDROs), instituting student-HEI sharing agreements, giving a longer period for liquidation, enforcing HEIs' retention policies, ensuring HEI grantees' compliance with regulatory standards, and requiring students' LOA. However, several issues and challenges were noted. These include the selection of non-poor grantees arising from the use of *Listahanan* and the PNSL category, equity issues arising from the same subsidy amount given to public and private HEI students, some grantees' inability to meet HEIs' retention standards, disbursement delays, and weak information campaign on HEI and program credentials.

The product evaluation showed that grantees' parents only finished primary or secondary education, highlighting the program's potential to break the cycle of limited educational attainment

within families. The availability of scholarships, affordability, and school quality were reasons for school choice, highlighting the program's role in promoting access and the need for a wider dissemination drive to inform potential and existing grantees about the program. However, respondents observed non-poor grantees and poor non-grantees, confirming the insights gathered in the process evaluation. Similarly, grantees highlighted the need for timely subsidy release and noted the advantages of ATM cards as an alternative disbursement mode.

Given these, the following recommendations can be explored:

Design

Sharpen the prioritization scheme. Since TES is a grants-in-aid program, prioritizing the most deserving (i.e., those who need assistance) is imperative. *Listahanan* is currently used to sort beneficiaries of TES. However, the *Listahanan* database includes poor and non-poor households, the eligible 4Ps beneficiaries (i.e., those whose estimated income are below the poverty threshold) must be identified from the same *Listahanan*. *Separate departments in DSWD maintain Listahanan and 4Ps databases.* Thus, it would be helpful if the *Listahanan* provided by DSWD to UniFAST already includes 4Ps beneficiaries. Meanwhile, eligibility for those above the poverty threshold must be based on the income per capita ranking. The principle of minimizing leakages and improving targeting efficiency should remain even if the prioritization instrument changes in the future.

Apply the prioritization scheme across the board. To minimize leakages, the prioritization scheme should be applied regardless of the type of HEI (public, PNSL, or non-PNSL HEIs) the students are enrolled in. This means the absence of an eligible public HEI in the area should not warrant a grant-in-aid.

Reiterate and clarify the components of the TES grants in determining the grant amount. Doing these will avoid confusion, particularly in the prevailing case where SUCs and LUCs students get free tuition. As a GIA program, the TES targets those in need (i.e., the poor). Given this, the grant must cover the total education cost: (a) tuition, (b) living allowance, and (c) other learning materials (Table 20). The original design of TES was adopted from the ESGP-PA designed for students from poor households. The tuition grant should be equivalent to the average tuition in public HEIs in the area because this is what students in public HEIs get from the free higher education program¹⁹. The eligible poor students in private HEIs (PNSL or non-PNSL) should get all the components of the TES. The eligible poor TES beneficiaries in SUCs and LUCs should be eligible only for the living allowance, books, and other learning material components. The eligible differently abled should get the additional allowance (TES-3A), whether in private or public HEI. Finally, the eligible who are taking board examinations should get TES-3B.

Table 20. TES components and type of HEI, by recipient.

Type of HEI	Tuition (TES-1)	Living Allowance (TES-2)	Books and other learning materials (TES-3)	Additional allowance for the differently abled (TES-3A)	Assistance for board exam (TES-3B)
Private HEI: Poor	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SUC/LUC: Poor	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

¹⁹ Assuming that tuition fees in public HEIs reflect full costs.

Private HEI: Non-Poor	No	No	No	No	No
SUC/LUC: Non-Poor	No	No	No	No	No

Periodically review the grant amounts to reflect current costs. The current practice of letting the budget determine the amount of the grant to cover the pre-determined number of beneficiaries undermines the program's effectiveness in achieving better access to quality education for the poor. Low subsidies discriminate against the poor who cannot top-up to cover the cost of education. The tuition, living allowance, and books and other learning materials grants²⁰ should be constantly reviewed to keep pace with increases in tuition and other fees and inflation. To maintain horizontal equity, the tuition grants for eligible private HE students should be equivalent to the average tuition in SUCs and LUCs. The prevailing cost of room and board should determine the living allowance of grantees, including for the differently abled and board takers.

Provide TES eligibility information ahead of college enrollment. Early information on eligibility, preferably on the second term of the SHS, has several advantages. It can guide students' schooling decisions since funding is a key consideration for poor students. Getting the information ahead allows them to plan and choose. It can also mitigate disbursement delays since CHED would know how much funds to request. It can also address the concerns of some implementers receiving advisory on additional grantees after HEIs have already processed the billing, which can contribute to additional work in CHEDROs and delays. Thus, UniFAST must coordinate with DepEd to get the names of graduating SHS and potential college students and create a website that enables SHS students to check their eligibility online (i.e., students to register personal information to check their eligibility). The registered information can be integrated into the portal for partner institutions, minimizing HEIs' work in encoding students' information and enhancing efficiency (i.e., HEIs can search in the database for their students' names).

Ensure that TES eligibility of HEIs is based on quality. HEIs allowed to accept TES grantees must be constantly vetted for the quality of its programs using existing instruments such as compliance with PSGs and accreditation.

Operation

Release the students' subsidy through the ATM card. HEIs' instruction to their partner banks to release the money to the students' accounts can eliminate the issue of cheque preparations (i.e., the need to wait for cheque signatories and signing many cheques). This process also provides a paper trail that proves that the subsidies are indeed released to the grantees, mitigating delays due to liquidation.

Make UniFAST an independent agency. While the dependence on CHED in the interim was necessary in its infancy, this dependence on personnel compromised its primary role of independently harmonizing student financial assistance programs. UniFAST must evolve into an

²⁰ Tuition grant was originally set at 10,000 per semester or 20,000 per year; living allowance at 3,500 per month for 10 months, and books and other learning materials is set at 2,500 per semester or 5,000 per year.

independent agency as originally designed, with commensurate personnel attached to CHED for program and policy coordination purposes.

Consider the benefits of a third-party implementer; Clarify its roles and establish open communication (if a co-implementer is included in the implementation). The short and mixed experience with PEAC as a third-party implementer for TES can be attributed to the lack of clarification of roles, resulting in the duplication of activities and accountability concerns. As a new agency, UniFAST can benefit from the assistance of a specialized third-party implementer, given the clarity of roles and open communication lines between UniFAST and the third-party implementer. It can potentially benefit from improved data management, monitoring, and evaluation. This is what happened in implementing the Education Service Contracting (ESC) and Senior High School Voucher Program (SHSVP), where PEAC handled the application and vetting of students and schools while DepEd was responsible for payments.

Subsume Tulong Dunong Program into the TES program to improve the harmonization of nationally funded GIA programs. To avoid unnecessary duplication of programs resulting in inefficiencies, subsume all grants-in-aid programs, including the *Tulong Duong* Program, into the TES.

Student support services

Include the budget for bridging and career counseling programs in the administrative support cost. Students with poor socioeconomic backgrounds also have poor academic preparation. This has been evident in the ESGP-PA program. However, an assessment of the program showed that with student support, bridging courses, and career counseling, students with low socioeconomic backgrounds perform at par with their counterparts after about two years (Silfverberg and Orbeta, 2017). Thus, TES grantees with difficulties complying with the HEIs' retention policies should be assessed to determine if a bridging and/or career counselling is needed. Bridging programs have been shown to help students overcome academic challenges, improve retention rates, and enhance their overall learning experience. Meanwhile, career counseling programs are critical support services for students' education and training (e.g., HEI vs TESDA) and career choices.

Improve the information campaign to assist students in making informed choices about schools and programs. Information campaigns on HEI and program credentials that can help students/parents make informed school choices and decisions can be improved.

Monitoring

Use PhilSys ID in collecting administrative data. To improve the integrity of GIA and subsidy recipients, include the PhilSys ID in the TES beneficiaries' database. This would facilitate validating eligible beneficiaries by providing the link with other administrative databases.

Collaborate with HEIs for tracer surveys. One cannot overemphasize the importance of tracer studies in evaluating the impact and improving informing program design and implementation. CHED should continuously collaborate with HEIs to conduct tracer studies. Tracer studies can

help assess graduate employability, identify skills gaps and mismatches, and measure returns on investment. It can also inform program design and implementation by improving targeting and prioritization, strengthening student support services, and enhancing program sustainability.

Others

Improve the quality of integral inputs to tertiary education. Given higher education's low and uneven quality, strengthening faculty development, promoting accreditation, and improving curriculum relevance must be important components of higher education development programs. The TES can be used as an instrument to promote these by requiring HEIs aspiring to take in TES grantees to be transparent about the quality of their faculty, levels of accreditation, and description of their programs. Informed school choice is a critical component of promoting quality.

Use the Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF) to assist HEIs' accreditation initiatives COEs and CODs' development. Promoting quality among HEIs is an important objective for the higher education ecosystem. The use of the fund to promote HEIs' accreditation, strengthen existing COEs and CODs, and help more HEIs attain COE and COD status are essential for promoting quality in higher education.

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ANNEX A

Table A1. Online availability of HEI and program registry in the CHED regional and central office

CHEDRO	Name of page/Description	HEI list	Program list	Link
CHEDRO Ilocos Region	List of authorized HEIs in Region I	Yes	No	https://site.chedro1.com/list-of-authorized-heis-in-region-1/
CHEDRO Cagayan Valley	Higher Education Institutions in Region II	Yes	No	https://chedregion2.com/index.php/higher-education-institutions-in-region-2/
CHEDRO Central Luzon	1) list of higher education in Region III 2) Program Registry	Yes	Faulty link	1) https://chedro3.ched.gov.ph/hei-directory/ 2) https://chedro3.ched.gov.ph/program-registry-positive-list/
CHEDRO CALABARZON	List of Recognized programs	Yes	Yes	https://romis.chedcalabarzon.com/HEIs/index/PositiveList
CHEDRO MIMAROPA	HEI Directory	Yes	No	https://mimaropa.ched.gov.ph/hei-directory/
CHEDRO NCR	No list found	No	No	-
CHEDRO CAR	1) Recognized Higher Education Institutions in CAR 2) Programs of HEIs in CAR as of 2023	Yes	Yes	1) https://chedcar.com/program-and-discipline-code/ 2) https://chedcar.com/programs-of-heis-in-car/
CHEDRO Bicol	No list found	No	No	-
CHEDRO Western Visayas	No list and website found	No	No	-
CHEDRO Central Visayas	HEI Directory	Yes	No	https://chedro7.vercel.app/directory
CHEDRO Eastern Visayas	No list and website found	No	No	-
CHEDRO Zamboanga Peninsula	No list found	No	No	-
CHEDRO Northern Mindanao	List of Programs by HEIs	Yes	Yes	https://ro10.ched.gov.ph/hei-profile/list-of-programs-by-heis
CHEDRO Davao Region	List of HEIs and programs (recognized programs per HEI)	Yes	Yes	https://ro11.ched.gov.ph/list-of-heis-and-programs/
CHEDRO SOCCSKSARGEN	No list and website found	No	No	-
CHEDRO Caraga	List of authorized HEIs in Caraga	Yes	No	https://chedcaraga.ph/list-of-authorized-heis-in-caraga/
Other lists:				
CHED	List of graduate programs (master/doctorate)	Yes	Yes	https://ched.gov.ph/list-of-higher-education-institutions-2/graduate-programs/
UniFAST	List of Participating Higher Education Institutions in the CHED Registry	Yes	No	https://unifast.gov.ph/hei-list.html
UniFAST/CHEDRO	[need to login] UniFAST CHEDRO Portal Registry of Programs	Unknown	Yes	https://registry.unifast.gov.ph/

Source: Authors' compilation (as of September 18, 2024)

Note: CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon), MIMAROPA (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan), CAR (Cordillera Administrative Region), NCR (National Capital Region), SOCCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, General Santos), Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao)