

# ESGP-PA Scholars in the University of Eastern Philippines: Their Academic Performance, Challenges, and Perceived Solutions

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## ABSTRACT

The ESGP-PA scholars in the University of Eastern Philippines, in spite of the financial grant, have their fair share of challenges at home, in school, and with the scholarship management. This descriptive-qualitative study delved into documenting the scholars' academic performance, discovering a myriad of their challenges, unlocking in them their perceived solutions, and mapped-out recommendations designed to help the ESGP-PA Scholarship Management for the academic advancement of the scholars. Results revealed that the scholars are fairly performing their academics but are affronted of school-related challenges ranging from hectic class schedule and time limitations in requirement submissions to pressures in maintaining their grades given their non-regular school attendance. For school management-related, they get to experience delays of the financial grant, and long queues for scholarship renewal and other submissions. At home, they are torn between their school and family priorities. This is aside from experiences of low familial support to their education and financial obligation, where the bulk of their allowance goes to aid their family needs and as capital build-up for the livelihood ventures of their parents. In the light of these circumstances, the scholars thought of perceived solutions, which to them are the be-all answers.

**KEYWORDS:** Academic performance, ESGP-PA scholars, challenges, coping mechanisms

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Expanded Students Grants-in-Aid Program for Poverty Alleviation (ESGPPA) is the exact answer of the Philippine government in consonance with the provision "to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all" (Article XIV, Section 1 of the Philippine Constitution and Article XIV), and to establish and maintain a system of scholarship, grants, student loan programs, subsidies, and other incentives which shall be available to deserving students in both public and private schools, especially to the underprivileged (Section 2 (3)).

As a financial assistance program, ESGP-PA considers the poor but deserving students, more especially from families who are direct beneficiaries of the *PantawidPamilyang Pilipino* Program (4Ps), a poverty reduction strategy that provides grants to extremely poor households to improve their health, nutrition, and education by providing incentives for poor families to invest in their future by ensuring that mothers and children can avail of the free healthcare as well as the free education for children. These students, however, should be enrolled in the priority programs of the Commission on Higher Education and other course offerings aligned with government key growth areas (CMO No. 1, s. 2014)

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Scholars as they are, they are no excuse of challenges that affront them as college students. These scholars are one the pride of a university. It is really true that problem –seeking|| and problem –solving|| is what most of students' life is all about (Klafki, 1977).

At present, the University of Eastern Philippines (UEP) accommodates 380 ESGP-PA scholars who are required to maintain academic requirements in line with the guidelines set by the primary agency in the implementation of the program. Of these stat, 38% are enrolled in the College of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Natural Resources; 25% at the College of Science; 10% at the College of Engineering; nine (9) percent at the College of Education; five (5) percent at the College of Arts and Communication and the College of Veterinary Medicine; four (4) percent at the College of Business Administration; and one (1) percent at the College of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences. However, as of this writing, no study was yet conducted that assesses the academic performance, challenges, and coping mechanisms of these scholars. Further, problems were forwarded by these students in ordinary encounter by the researchers with these recipients and the University Guidance Counselor on the problems met which are of varying forms and degrees. This therefore urges the conduct of this study.

**2. Objectives**

This study sought to shed light on the hereto enumerated objectives:

1. Documented the academic performance of the 4Ps ESGPPA scholars.
2. determined the home-related, school-related, administrative-related, and other forms of problems met by the scholars;
3. analyzed the perceived solutions of the scholars to the identified problem; and
4. Mapped-out recommendations designed to help the ESGP-PA Scholarship Management for the academic advancement of the scholars.

**3. Review of Literature**

The financial burden of college tuition is significant and rising. In light of the increasing price of college, education, many families are facing significant challenges in financing their children’s education (Zabala and Gutierrez, 2017). This is why scholarship has been given birth. In the Philippines, scholarships for college come in various programs - entrance scholars, for salutatorian and valedictorian graduates; academic scholars for those who can maintain grade-based scholastic standing; sports varsities; externally funded scholarships through government agencies and the private sector; and the coming of the ESGP-PA.

ESGP-PA addresses the 4P’s limitation to primary and secondary education and to act on the commitment of the Philippines state to the SDG-updated MDG, the CHED, the Philippines higher education regulatory authority. It holistically provided for all the schooling needs of the students so that there would be no excuse for the grantee not to finish college education. Jointly undertaken by CHED, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), this social intervention provided the means and opportunities for grantees to land high value-added jobs and/or generate employment for their families and communities (CHED, 2019).

Then again, scholars are no excuse of challenges. College life is known to all as something difficult. It presents the first real challenge to students’ academic motivations and skills (Astin, 1979). Moreover, college is a stage where students face myriad of pressures and challenges in the academic environment as they seek to maintain optimal performances or even to remain in the academic program (Wortman, 2004). For some individuals, college is a high point in their lives where they look forward to it enjoys it and carries pleasant memories when they graduate. Along with this unforgettable memories are experiences filled with anxiety, doubt and struggle (Sears, 1964). There are a lot of things that could happen in college and many demands that should be satisfied (Abdullah, 2009). According to a study by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the main reason why of students dropping out of college in 2009 was this conflict of interest between school, the job and the family (Agustin, 2020). As Charlton and David (1993) puts it, one problem that mostly gives impact to the emotional problem of a child is the family at home.

**4. Methodology**

This is study is descriptive and qualitative in nature. It used of secondary data to document the academic performance of

the ESGP-PA scholars which raw were retrieved from the Office of the Registrar at the lone state university in Northern Samar, the University of Eastern Philippines. Its data were treated using frequency count and percentage. On one hand, open interviews were done to solicit needed information to 41 purposively sampled participants – a combination of ESGP-PA scholars for the School Year 2018-2019 and the focal person for the program. This was further triangulated by two (2) groups of focus group discussions with the same key informants.

**5. Results and Discussions**

**Academic Performance**

**Table 1 Academic Performance of the ESGP-PA Scholars**

Academic Performance		Frequency	Percentage
Adjectival Rating	Grade		
Excellent	1.00	-	-
Very Good	1.25	-	-
	1.50	6	4.51
Good	1.75	8	54.88
	2.00	22	
	2.25	43	
Fair	2.50	36	39.85
	2.75	17	
Passed	3.00	1	0.75
Failure	3.25 below	-	-
Total		133	100

Table 1 shows the academic performance of the ESGP-PA scholars in the University of Eastern Philippines. The bulk of the scholars were “good”, 54.88%. It can be noted as well, that a significant number, 39.85% were “fair”. These data suggest that a majority of the scholars are not that “very good” and “excellent” but at least are not just “passed”. These raw find support in the study conducted by Dimayuga, of the same subject, at Masbate State College, Philippines in 2018.

**Challenges Encountered**

The challenges met by the ESGP-PA scholars along their stay in UEP were categorized into three(3), home-related, scholarship management-related, and school-related.

**School-related Challenges**

The ESGP-PA scholars find college difficult. It is. As reiterated by Astin in 1979, college presents the first real challenge to students’ academic motivations and skill. Moreover, college is a stage where students face myriad of pressures and challenges in the academic environment as they seek to maintain optimal performances or even to remain in the academic program (Wortman, 2004).

*“College life is way difficult (p7).”*

The scholars faced time management as they were shooting two (2) pressures at the same time, their hectic class schedules and maintaining their grades. This same problem was cited in the study of Guimba, *et al* (2009). This can be rooted in the fact that they are torn between school, family needs, and night work – given that to them the allowance is never enough. Students’ insufficient allowance is one of the leading problems of college students (Galemba, 2005; Gegato, 2007). They spend a lot for food, fare, photocopy, and the like. Thus, others cannot attend school regularly and

worst, others just decided to drop. According to a study by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the main reason why of students dropping out of college in 2009 was this conflict of interest between school, the job and the family. In According to Times Higher Education, in Germany, one (1) out of four (4) college students broke off their studies early due to financial problems. These situations hampered them from participating in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, joining school-based organizations, and volunteering in community-based programs. With the bulk of requirements that each course required them it became harder on their part to beat deadlines given time, financial, and gadget/technological limitations. These data are found to be similar in the study of Zabala and Gutierrez (2017).

*"I am pressured because of our hectic schedules (p2)."* One participant said, *"I could no longer join clubs and it's way harder for us to participate in school activities(p40)."*

*"I am very much pressured maintaining my grades (p15)."* One added, *"Semester requirements are too many; I no longer know what to prioritize (p35)."* And that, *"Sometimes, I cannot submit my requirements on time. I don't have laptops and internet load is expensive (p30)."*

Other participants reiterated that their scholarship allowance is never enough. *"I work at night still, as our allowance is no longer enough (p26). My parents would need my money, too, for food, debt payments, etc. (p39)."* *"Sometimes I ran out of allowance for our daily fare (p29)."* On one hand, one claimed that, *"I slice a big amount for our boarding house, (p16 and p32)."* Thus, there a participant mentioned, *"Actually, there were times that I cannot attend school regularly. Some of my friends even opted to just drop (p22)."*

It was found out that the ESGP-PA scholars experienced delays in their allowance pay-out primarily caused by the delay of their course professors' submissions of grades. The same result was revealed in the study of Zabala and Gutierrez (2017).

*"At times, I get to experience delays of my allowance just because our grades are not yet complete (p33)."*

*"Record shows that 70% of the latter come from non-academic subjects, i.e. National Service Training Program (NSTP) and Physical Education (p41)."*

### Scholarship Management-related

The scholars experienced long queues – of waiting for the document signing and for renewal of scholarship grants. The same result transpired in the study of Zabala and Gutierrez (2017). This not-so-friendly situation indeed posts inconvenience and stress on the part of the students. As Pfeiffer (2001) maintains, stress is created by excessive environmental and internal demands that need constant effort and adjustment.

*"I always experience a long line of waiting for the document signing (p39)."*

In situations when the teachers delay the submission of grades, the students clamor for consideration, in order for them to receive their scholarship allowance on time. But to no avail, no consideration was made. The same scenario was actually felt by the research participants of Zabala and Gutierrez (2017). Data showed that the respondents were challenged on the late issuance of their scholar fund support from the sponsoring agency, late submission of grades delayed them to claim their fund support, and tedious preparing of documents challenged the scholars.

*"What's not good is, the delay of our grades would also mean delay of our allowance (p40)."*

### Home-related Challenges

Some participants divulged, that they don't get full trust from their parents that they can finish their studies due to parental inclination that just like them, they will indulge in early/teen marriages. This finds conformity in the study of Montazeri, et al (2016) where it highlighted the cultural values of parents that *"people think when a girl grows up physically, she is ready for marriage"*; *"my family believed that it's better for girls to get married early"*; and *"my sisters all got married before the[sic] turned 16 too"*.

*"Actually my parents are in doubt with my interests to pursue tertiary education, because of the inherent possibility of involving myself to teenage/early marriage (p8)."*

There were participants who shared that they do not enjoy autonomy of their scholarship allowance as they need to turn-over the sum of the money to their parents. As such, their school needs are compromised as the entrepreneurial/livelihood activities of their parents become their allowances' top-priority. This means that their allowance becomes their parents' start-up capital small-scale business and ventures and at times as payments for debts from lending institutions and individuals. Worst comes to worst, when their ATMs are pawned. As Charlton and David (1993) puts it, one problem that mostly gives impact to the emotional problem of a child is the family at home.

*"My parents make hold of my scholarship's ATM(p5)."*

Other participant added *"my parents would make use of my scholarship's allowance as down payment for motor bikes used as habal-habal (p20)."*

And, another participant said *"my mother uses the money to pay her debts from the Bombays(p16)".*

*"There were times that my ATM, primarily intended for my scholarship allowance, got pawned by my mother (p36)."*

At times, the scholars lost the appetite of continuing their studies with the thought in mind that they do not get holistic support from their respective homes. It finds congruency in the study of Berowa (1988) as cited by Abo and Tawacal (2001) revealed that home and family problems appear to be a dominant cause for failures for the children.

*"Sometimes, we end up crying and would feel like quitting school because after all, our parents even our family don't support our studies (p13)."*

### Perceived Solutions

To overcome the challenges posited as school-related, scholarship management-related, and home-related, the ESGP-PA scholars narrated their perceived solutions.

For school-related, the perceived solutions include the provision of trainings on soft skills, values formation, time management, and the like. This will help the students overcome fears, psychological and financial stress, and pressures that await them as college students.

*"I must say that a lecture on financial literacy is what we need (p6)." As in the words of another participant, "I am thankful of the moral values formation that the scholarship management is giving us. I just hope that it will be frequently done (p21)."*

On scholarship management-related, the ESGP-PA scholars highlighted on simplifying the steps as regards renewal of scholarship grant and in devising strategies to avoid longer queues for follow-ups and other directives.

*"I look forward to days when the steps for scholarship renewal will be simplified (p18)."*

There was also a mention of establishing feedback mechanisms geared at entertaining the issues and concerns of both student-scholars and parents through text messages, drop box, or other means. This goes to show that the scholars are aspiring for a participatory scholarship management.

*"I think what would really help is when our issues would reach the scholarship management (p8)." It was supported by another participant, "Yes, like a drop box for our feedback or comments will be good enough (p37)."*

As regards home-related, the participants agreed on upholding the monthly meeting usually conducted with them and their parents as audiences. It does not end there as it will motivate their parents to observe regular visit at the Office of the University Guidance Counselor or the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. It can be deduced that the ESGP-PA scholars are up to spaces where their parents can take part as these are learning opportunities to clearly understand what college life is and know better the struggles they are facing. Full support of the parents is indeed of greater value on the education of their children. In one study, it was revealed that students' achievement can also be impacted by the support they receive from their parents (Diaz, 2003; Dryfoos, 1990; Miller, 1980). Parental involvement in the educational process of their children was found to have a significant effect in improving their academic performance (Rafiq, Fatima, Sohail, Saleem & Khan, 2013; Selvam & Panneer, 2013).

*"I hope that the monthly meeting with our parents will be done continuously (p38)." It was added by another participant, "This would encourage our*

*parents to regularly visit the offices of the VPAA and the Guidance Counselor (p22)."*

### Recommendations for ESGP-PA Scholarship Management Designed to Help for the Academic Advancement of the Scholars

In the pursuit of helping the ESGP-PA Scholarship Management to advance the academic performance of its scholars, the hereto recommendations were designed by the researchers.

1. Strengthen the collective responsibility between the government thru the CHED and the university thru the scholarship management, the faculty handling courses to ESGP-PA scholars, the latter together with their parents, and other stakeholders.
2. Ensure the long-term sustainability, efficiency, and flexibility of the scholarship grant.
3. The scholarship management shall willfully perform not only its coordinating role but also its enabling capacity to develop more programs anchored on the needs and interests of the scholars.
4. Improve information and communication mechanisms by ensuring fair and effective dissemination leaving no scholar behind.
5. Institutionalize other benefits that the scholars can enjoy, i.e. subsidy for theses, internships, seminars, educational field exposures, board examinations.
6. Fortify the tracking of its scholars to safeguard degree completions.
7. Invest in research and development.

### 6. Conclusions

The ESGP-PA scholars in the University of Eastern Philippines enjoy allowances for their tertiary education through joint circular memorandum No. 01, series of 2016 of the CHED, DSWD, DBM, and DOLE. They are fairly performing academically, and despite the financial grant they receive, they have their fair share of challenges at home, in school, and in the scholarship management. In light of these, they envisioned solutions which are exact answers to these challenges. Lastly, the researchers designed recommendations to help the ESGP-PA Scholarship Management advance the academic rigors of the scholars.

### 7. Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this study, few recommendations are hereby forwarded. First, alternative initiatives, not limited to coaching, tutorials, and learning reinforcement sessions, to at least maintain or better the academic performances of the ESGP-PA scholars should be given a priority. Second, for the scholarship management to deliberately come into play in sound fulfillment of the perceived solutions of the participants. Third, for the university to consider constructing or finding a dormitory which can solely house the ESGP-PA scholars to lessen financial challenges, ensure school attendance, and ease of monitoring. And, lastly, for the conduct of similar studies in the future with a broader scope.

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