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STUDENTS' VIEW ONFREE HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY IN A UNIVERSITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the students' views on the free higher education policy at one of the Universities in the Philippines by surveying two hundred thirteen (213) students using a researcher-made questionnaire validated by experts. The result revealed that the view of students, when grouped as a whole and categorized according to academic and other related expenses, admission and retention, housing and accommodation, and student loans, and when grouped according to socio-economic status, sex, and year level, is more or less negative, which can be attributed to their concern about its implementation, the decline in the quality of education, their desires, and the dynamics of their view as they progress in the upper year. The significant differences are the variation of the students' needs, which can be attributed to their aspiration to finish a bachelor's degree with matriculation, while, on the other hand, some students are more apprehensive about the number of students they aspire to be admitted, the huge financial expenses of the government, and the potential decline in the educational quality of higher education (Reyes, 2020). It should be noted that these findings only pertain to the selected participants and cannot be extended to the entire population.

KEYWORDS: Free Higher Education, Higher Education, Student, and Students' view.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education is a level of education where students pursue a degree after finishing a basic education program, and it plays a vital role in a person's progress. For various reasons and in modern times, a lot of students aspire to enroll in higher education (Rosas, 1988; Tan, 2009; Cuy& Salinas, 2019), especially if it is free. To fulfil this aspiration, the Congress enacted the Universal

Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act in 2017, making tuition and other fees free in Public Higher Education. This piece of legislation was welcomed with praise by almost all people and sectors in the Philippines, regardless of background, ideology, or affiliation, claiming that it has the potential to "make higher education more accessible to Filipinos" (Bacungan, 2017).

Nearly 6 years had passed, and there were studies on free higher education in the Philippines that primarily focused on its policy implementation and whether it was beneficial to all or not (Abadilla, 2017; Orbeta Jr. & Paqueo, 2017; Cepeda, 2018; Ortiz et al., 2019; & Punongbayan, 2019). There are, however, a number of studies that focus specifically on the students' perceptions of free higher education, but they were each conducted separately and the research was conducted more than three years ago (Cruz, 2019; Garcia, 2018; Lim, 2017; Lim, 2020; Reyes, 2019; Reyes, 2020; Santos, 2017; Santos, 2018). In addition, news stories and social media rarely discuss the perspectives of students. These show a gap in the research on students' perspectives on free higher education, which is crucial for administrators and legislators to understand in terms of their viewpoints on the current system of public higher education. In this study, the students' views on free higher education in one of the universities in the Philippines were investigated, specifically towards academic and other related expenses, admission and retention, housing and accommodation, and student loans. Through this study, it will provide additional evidence on their outlooks, desires, preferences, and expectations toward the aforementioned policy, which is essential in attaining the goal of Free Higher education, especially among educators and policymakers alike.

Statement of the Problem:

This study aimed to determine the students' views on the Free Higher Education at one of the universities in the Philippines. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the view of students on Free Higher Education Policy when grouped as a whole and when categorized according to academic and other related Expenses, admission and retention, housing and accommodation, and student loans?
2. What is the view of students on Free Higher Education Policy when grouped as a whole and when categorized according to socio-economic status, sex, and year level?
3. Is there a significant difference in the views of students on the Free Higher when grouped as a whole and when categorized according to Socio-Economic Status, sex, and Year Level?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Free Higher Education Policy

Free Higher education is a by-product of Republic Act No. 10931, enacted in 2017, which is a piece of legislation in the Philippines that promotes universal access to quality tertiary education. As an effect, it resulted in free tuition and other school fees in public higher education. It intends to offer higher education accessible to all. As stated in its implementing rules and regulations, it seeks to provide mechanisms for the participation of all socio-economic classes in tertiary education, provide all Filipinos with equal opportunity to quality tertiary education, give priority to students who are academically able and who come from poor families, etc. (Free Higher Education Act, 2017). The agency of the government that spearheaded the implementation of the free higher education law as well as higher education in the Philippines is the CHED (Commission on Higher Education) to ensure access to quality higher education (Enhanced Basic Education Act, 2013) and the promotion of equitable access in the higher education institutions and their programs (CHED,

n.d.). In other words, the CHED has the primary role of ensuring that quality higher education is accessible to all, particularly those who are not financially capable.

The aforementioned legislation on free public higher education was widely hailed in the Philippines for its vision toward universal access to quality tertiary education. It was highly welcomed by government officials, regardless of whether they are from the administration or the opposition, who praised the passing of the Free Higher Education Act in the Philippines, which included then Senator Bam Aquino expressing his gratitude to then President Rodrigo Duterte. Added, Senator JV Ejercito is delighted in the enactment of the law; Senator Angara lauds the law but is vigilant on its implementation; Carlos Zarate also applauds the law, as do Win Gatchalian, Karlo Norgrales, Harry Roque, and many more (Bacungan, 2017). In other words, it was warmly welcomed both by the administration and its supporters and the opposition and lauded both by left- and right-leaning groups and organizations, especially by the ordinary Filipino.

Prior to its implementation, there was news report in the first month of 2017 on the conflict of view of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Chair Patricia Licuanan with the then Commissioner and now the Chair of Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Prospero De Vera whether Free Higher Education is beneficial or not where Licuanan cautioned the people concerned that freeing the public higher education from tuition and other fees does not benefit the poor because they only comprised 8% of the total population in the higher education that they are more likely to drop in their degree which vehemently opposed by De Vera arguing that free higher education will lead to universal access to higher education especially to the underprivileged Filipinos (Barahan, E.2017).

More than a half decade after free public higher education was implemented, there have been studies conducted towards it, such as the study by Orbital and Pacque (2017), which warned the public of the influx of rich students into public higher educational institutions because of free tuition and other school fees. Added to this, another study conducted on free public higher education in the Philippines by Ortiz et al. (2019) investigated and discussed the disparity in the chance to enter public higher education, which is a higher acceptability rate for college-educated families with a good family background and a lower acceptability rate for low educational attainment families. Others are still primarily focusing on its policy implementation, whether it is beneficial to all or not, based on commentaries from economists, etc. (Abadilla, 2017; Punongbayan, 2019). There is a specific study about a student's perception of Free Higher education, but the country of study is South Africa, and it does not talk about free higher education in the Philippines in all aspects of its study (Dunga & Mncayi, 2016). It shows that there is no study specifically on the views of students on free higher education in the Philippines. Added, there are few research on the perception of the students on Free Higher Education but it was in a singular variable and the time where the research published was more or less 3 years ago (Cruz, 2019; Garcia, 2018; Lim, 2017; Lim, 2020; Reyes, 2019; Reyes, 2020; Santos, 2017 & Santos, 2018). There is also a need look at the, views of the students which are not usually been talked on news and social media.

The aforementioned studies and commentaries are evidences of a research gap in the body of knowledge on Free Higher education, specifically based on the students' view on availing of the policy, which is vital policy making in the operation and administration of free higher education in public higher educational institutions, especially among stakeholders and agencies concerned. This is the reason the study was conducted: to determine the students' views on Free Higher Education in one of the universities in the Philippines, specifically towards academic and other related expenses, admission and retention, housing and accommodation, and student loans. By conducting this study, it will elucidate on students' outlooks, desires, preferences, and expectations toward the Free Higher Education policy, which is equally significant in achieving the objectives of the Free Higher Education policy toward universal access to higher education, especially among educators and policymakers alike.

Free Higher Education and Academic & Other related Expenses Admission & Retention, Housing & Accommodation and Student Loan

The discussion on Free Higher education revolves around its implementation, specifically in its academic and other related expenses, admission and retention, housing and accommodation, and student loans. There were few studies on the previously mentioned variables. Though the intention of the law is to make Philippine public higher education inclusive, Canlas (2016) explains that the benefits derived from higher education are not tantamount to inclusive education. It is because monetary capacity is an influential determinant in the enrollment process. In relation finances, families with financial difficulty will more likely to borrow money to pay for their children's tertiary education, which is an indicator that entering college is more about the person's capacity to finance than the student's intellectual capability. In this, free higher education enters the scene with an intention to provide a remedy to this difficulty in higher education, but in a 2017 news report in the Philippines, several economic managers warned the Philippine government that having free higher education will not benefit the poor and asserted the rich will benefit from it (Mateo, 2017). They argued that it is not the tuition fee that has a huge portion in the college education but the standard of living, payment for housing, loans, and other socio-educationally related expenses and circumstances that, similar to the latter studies cited and added, hinder the students from entering or finishing their respective tertiary education, where socio-economic background is the highest factor (Amaral, 2022; Callender & Jackson, 2005; Callender & Mason; Canlas, 2016; Heller, 1997; 2021; Kane, 1995; Leslie & Brinkman, 1987; Ortiz et al., 2017). A research study in the Philippines conducted by Orbital and Pacque (2017) showed similar results and warned of the influx of rich students into state universities and colleges.

Canlas (2016) also shows how tough it is to pay for higher education in the Philippines because there aren't any loans available and parents must put money aside for their children's college education. This demonstrates that financial ability to pay for education takes precedence over academic aptitude. This circumstance occurs in many other nations as well, not only the Philippines. The Philippines could benefit from learning from the experiences of countries such as Argentina (Schugurensky, 2002), Austria (Usher and Cervenán, 2005), Brazil (Horch, 2014; Jackson, 2015; Gayardon and Bernasconi, 2016), Chile (Delisle and Bernasconi, 2018), Germany (Oltermann, 2019; Usher and Cervenán, 2005), etc., but more importantly, Finland (Ortiz, 2019; Usher and Cervenán, 2005).

Aside from making higher education free, Kroth (2015) notes that the implementing agency also needs to consider the financial status of the parents, the age and number of siblings in the family, and whether these siblings are still dependent on their parents or not when providing additional education aid to make higher education accessible and inclusive. The Philippines can learn from Finland in making public higher education universally accessible, where aside from making higher education free, Finland provides the following: (1) educational grants; (2) loans; and (3) accommodations benefits (Ortiz, 2019; Usher and Cervenán, 2005). Similar to the recommendation of Kroth (2015), Finland did it in its implementation, such as if the student is: (1) single, married, etc.; (2) dependent on parents or not; (3) with minor children (InfoFinland, 2019). Additional educational aid will be given Depending on the status of the student concerned. Added to this, the amount for housing accommodations and loans depends on rent paid, age, and location of the educational institution (European Commission, 2014). Finland's main target is students who are not working or who experience financial difficulty paying for their education, ages 25–64 (OECD, 2005).

The various discussions on the implementation of free higher education in the Philippines from the perspectives of the students are equally important as the aforementioned related literature that focuses on implementation. The latter literature will show the existing study on students' perspectives on free higher education in relation to academic and other related expenses, admission and retention, housing and accommodation, and student loans.

In the study conducted by Santos (2017), students view free higher education as an opportunity to relieve the financial burden of paying for tuition, books, and other academic expenses. Without the burden of financial constraints, students may experience satisfaction and an improved sense of motivation to continue their tertiary education. On the other hand, a study in terms of admission and retention shows that student' views on the admissions and retention processes have an impact on free higher education policy. According to Garcia (2018), students from poor socio-economic backgrounds saw free higher education as a way to increase their chances of finishing a degree. These students believed removing financial obstacles would raise their chances of being admitted to public higher education institutions and their chances of finishing their studies. Lastly, another factor that affects students' perceptions of free higher education is the availability of cheap housing and accommodations. According to studies conducted by Reyes (2019), students from rural or low-income areas viewed free higher education favorably because it eliminated the need to move or find expensive housing close to educational institutions. These students viewed the availability of free higher education as a chance to continue their tertiary education without being concerned about accommodation costs. In terms of student loans, Student loans have various influences on students' views, despite the reality that free higher education policies attempt to lessen the reliance on student loans. According to a research study conducted by Lim (2020), there are students who expressed concern about the possibility of a decrease in the availability of student loans as a consequence of the adoption of the free higher education policy. These students stressed the significance of putting in place alternative financial support systems to help students who still need extra money for non-tuition costs. To culminate all previous discussion, the current literate show that there are several actors, including academic and other associated costs, admission and retention procedures, housing and accommodation availability, and the impact on student loans, that affect students' perceptions

towards free higher education in the Philippines. Students perceive free higher education as a method to alleviate financial hardship, enhance access to higher education, and reduce the need for expensive living arrangements. Various financial assistance schemes must be taken into consideration in order to guarantee full support for all students.

Views on Free Higher Education and Socioeconomic Status, Year Level&Sex

In the years since the implementation of free public higher education, it holistically changed tertiary education in the Philippines. In this context, it is highly significant to consider the perspective of the students in the execution of the said policy. In this study, it will explore the body of knowledge towards the view of the students and its connection to socio-economic status, year level, and sex.

Before the implementation of the Free Higher Education policy, there were studies on the views and perspectives of the students and their respective backgrounds. Rosas (1988) contends that Filipino parents wanted to send their children to college, and they were willing to sell their property to get them enrolled, which is still a reality in the current times. Added to this, it explains that enrollment in tertiary education is favorable to the upper class and not to the poor, which has implications for the student and their family because of their socio-economic background. The study conducted by Philam Life shows that only 23 percent of Filipinos were able to finish tertiary education, and it is because of financial constraints, particularly the difficulty of the parents lack of education funds to enroll and continue sending their children to college (PNA, 2017). In other words, there are only 2.3 out of 10 Filipinos who are able to finish college. Added to that, 1 out of 10 Filipinos ages 6 to 24 is an out-of-school youth, and 20.2% of them said that it is due to expensive education (PSA, 2017). In Orbeta, Aniceto, and Paqueo (2017), their study provides statistical data where the number shows a gap in access to Public higher education, specifically explaining that there are more rich students with a 17.2% in comparison to 12.5% among poor students in the state universities and colleges.

One of the evidences of its benefits was reported by the Philippine News Agency in 2021, the official news agency of the Philippine government, reporting the number of students who benefited from it. There were 1.6 Million Filipino students who benefited from free higher education during National Higher Education Day in 2021, but it did specify the number based on their corresponding socio-economic strata, which is worthwhile to investigate.

There were few studies on Free Higher Education that focused on the students' socio-economic status, year level, and sex. The views of students from different socioeconomic classes regarding free higher education have been explored in several studies. According to Santos (2018), students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to believe that free higher education will increase their chances of having a job and alleviate their poverty. These students highlighted the value of equal access to educational opportunities and indicated an unwavering belief in the capacity for change in education. On the other hand, Students from higher socioeconomic classes have varied perspectives. Some students raised concerns about possible academic quality compromises and the long-term sustainability of free higher education. These students underlined the need to uphold strict educational standards and make sure that budgets are used appropriately (Cruz, 2019). In terms of year level, there are studies that have explored the views of students on

free higher education at various year levels and have shown different viewpoints. According to Reyes (2020), college freshmen have a leaning towards having a favorable view of free higher education. They viewed it as a chance to pursue their educational goals free from the burden of financial constraints. As students advanced to their higher years of college, though, several were concerned about the potential influx of students into public tertiary institutions and their influence on the standard of education. There is research discussing how sex influences students' opinions on free higher education. In one of the studies by Lim (2017), it was shown that views on free higher education were typically similar for both male and female students. Both sexes acknowledged the potential benefits of social equality and educational opportunity. However, women tended to express more worries about the possible difficulties in balancing family obligations and schooling, as well as the requirement for suitable support systems.

In conclusion, the present study shows that variables like socioeconomic position, year level, and sex have an interrelationship with the students' perceptions of free higher education in the Philippines. It is true that students from higher socioeconomic origins may have reservations as compared to those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, which tend to view free higher education more favorably. Additionally, as students advance through various year levels, their views may change, with initial enthusiasm possibly giving way to worries about the quality of education and the influx of students. This is the reason this study was conducted: to fully understand students' perspectives and examine the interconnections of these variables with the free higher education policy.

The aforementioned study shows the necessity to consider the implication of socio-economic status, year level, and sex on the implementation of free higher education in the Philippines. Though we can deny that there has been noteworthy progress in its implementation, especially the move to make it free, it is equally important to look at its impact among students in light of that policy and to investigate the perspectives of the students with consideration of their various backgrounds.

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

This part includes discussions on the research method employed in the study, the population and sample involved the sampling procedure, the instrument and its validity and reliability and the data analysis and research procedure.

Research Design

This research is a quantitative study employed the survey research design using survey questionnaire as data gathering instrument. According to Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun (2012), survey research seeks to provide quantitative description of the feature of the population being studied. It investigates in determining the context and situation of respondents chosen to study. The collection of data from chosen population in order to provide description of their feature or characteristics particular their preferences, view and perspective, cognition and disposition was taken from the students views on free higher education policy. In addition to that, collection of data was done through survey questionnaire which is the primary data in the study taken from the sample in the population.

Respondents

The respondents were the 213 college students enrolled in one of the universities in the Philippines who were taken from data given by the teacher who referred to the students to be respondents, upon the approval of the letter, which was drawn as a sample from the population. The Respondents of the study are purposively selected from the chosen characteristics based on case of interest needed in the study and these are: (1) a college student in a State University; and (2) who avail the free higher education. The sampling method employ in the study in the selection of key informants was done through purposive sampling specifically snowball method. The selected of the respondents were represented in table 1 below.

Table 1
Profile of the Respondents

Category	f	%
A. Entire Group	213	100
B. Sex		
Female	167	78.4
Male	46	21.6
C. Year level		
First Year	20	9.4
Second year	108	50.7
Third year	62	29.1
Fourth year	23	10.8
C. Socio Economic Status		
Poor	74	34.7
Low Income	105	49.3
At least Lower Middle	34	16.0

The demographic profile of the thirty-two (213) students covered in this study is presented in Table 1.

Research Instrument

The research instrument utilized in gathering necessary information is a researcher-made survey question on the view of the students on the Free Higher Education Policy patterned after the Free Higher Education Act of 2017. The questionnaire was presented to three validators for face and content validation. The validators are composed of experts in the fields of statistics, specifically tests and measurements, evaluation, research, and social research. The research instrument has two (2) parts: part 1 is the profile of the respondents, while part 2 is the main survey question on the students' views on the Free Higher Education Policy. Part 1 is all about the information on the profile of the respondents, which includes sex, year level, and socio-economic status. The second part is an item on the students' view of the Free Higher Education Policy. The researcher-made survey question on students' views on Free Higher Education was purposely constructed for this study. This instrument was composed of checklist statements developed by the researchers. For part 2 of the survey questions, each respondent was asked to click the circle mark on the Google forms provided to answer among the different choices in the checklist on Students View on Free Higher Education. The result taken from the Google forms taken from the checklist for each item

represented the respondent's answer. The obtained mean score was computed. To determine the view of the students on free higher education, the researcher will obtain the means of their scores. For part 2 of the Questionnaire, there were statements about the View on Free Higher Education Policy divided into Academic and Other related Expenses, Admission and Retention, Housing and Accommodation, and Student loans.

Data Gathering Procedure

Upon approval of the validators after content and face validation, and after the Dean of the College where the teacher is under referred the respondents to the researcher as participants of the study, the data gathering instrument was personally administered by the researchers to the chosen respondents using the snowball method through the referral of the teacher. The questionnaires will then be distributed to the chosen respondents for the study.

After the administration of the instruments, the collected data was tallied, tabulated, and computer-processed, analyzed, and interpreted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

Statistical Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data undergone a computer-processed statistics employed in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. All inferential statistics was set at a 0.05 alpha level.

Frequencies. The frequencies used to determine the number of responses to specified categories such as sex, socioeconomic status, and year level

Standard Deviation. The standard deviations used to determine the respondents' homogeneity

Kruskal Wallis. The Kruskal Wallis was used to determine the significant difference in the views of students on Free Higher when categorized according to socio-economic status, sex, and year level.

Chi-Square. The chi-square used to determine the significant difference in the views of students on Free Higher when categorized according to socio-economic status, sex, and year level.

Kolgomorov Smirnov. The Kolgomorov-Smirnov method was used to determine the significant difference in the views of students on Free Higher when categorized according to socio-economic status, sex, and year level.

Frequency Count. The frequency counts are used to determine the number and percentage of students in relation to their respective variables, such as socio-economic status, sex, and year level.

Mean. The mean used to determine the view of students on the Free Higher Education Policy when grouped as a whole and when categorized according to academic and other related expenses, admission and retention, housing and accommodation, student loans, and socio-economic status, sex, and year level

Mean Score	Interpretation
3.26 - 4.00	Highly Positive View
2.51 - 3.25	Positive View
1.76 - 2.50	Negative View
1.00 - 1.75	Highly Negative View

RESULTS

Table 2

Students' View on the Free Higher Education Policy when grouped as a whole and when categorized according to academic and other related expenses, admission and retention, housing and accommodation, and student loan

	Std. Deviation	Mean	Interpretation
Academics and others	0.51319	2.2119	Negative View
Admission and Retention	0.67308	2.4008	Negative View
Housing and Accommodation	0.58969	1.8216	Highly Negative View
Student Loan	0.63099	2.1127	Negative View
Total	0.49355	2.2167	Negative View

Table 2 shows the students views on the Free Higher Education Policy in one of the universities in the Philippines when grouped as a whole and when categorized according to academic and other related expenses, admission and retention, housing and accommodation, and student loans. In terms of academic and other related expenses, the standard deviation is 0.51319 with a mean of 2.2119, and the interpretation is negative. Added to that, in terms of admission and retention, the standard deviation is 0.67308 with a mean of 2.4008, and the interpretation is negative. Moreover, in terms of housing and accommodations, the standard deviation is 0.58969 with a mean of 1.8216, and the interpretation is a highly negative view. Furthermore, in terms of student loans, the standard deviation is 0.63099 with a mean of 2.1127, and the interpretation is negative. In total, the standard deviation is 0.49355 with a mean of 2.2167, and the interpretation is a negative view.

Table 3

Students' View on the Free Higher Education Policy when taken as a whole and categorized according to Sex, Year Level, & Socio-Economic Status

	Std. Deviation	Mean	Interpretation
Sex			
Male	0.59854	2.1952	Negative View
Female	0.46240	2.2226	Negative View
Year Level			
First Year	0.64343	2.1598	Negative View
Second Year	0.42220	2.1671	Negative View
Third Year	0.40931	2.1438	Negative View
Fourth Year	0.62327	2.6957	Positive View
Socio-Economic Status			
Poor	0.49259	2.1965	Negative View
Low-income	0.50469	2.2248	Negative View
At least Lower Middle	0.47322	2.2353	Negative View
Total	0.49355	2.2167	Negative View

Table 3 shows the students' views on the Free Higher Education Policy according to sex. Among male respondents, the standard deviation is 0.59854 with a mean of 2.1952, and the interpretation is a negative view. On the other hand, among females, the standard deviation is 0.46240 with a mean of 2.2226, and the interpretation is negative. In relation to the students' view on the Free Higher Education Policy according to year level, the standard deviation is 0.64343 with a mean of 2.1598,

and the interpretation is a negative view. Added to that, among second-year respondents, the standard deviation is 0.42220 with a mean of 2.1671, and the interpretation is a negative view. Moreover, among third-year respondents, the standard deviation is 0.40931 with a mean of 2.1438, and the interpretation is a negative view. Furthermore, among fourth-year respondents, the standard deviation is 0.62327 with a mean of 2.6957, and the interpretation is positive. In terms of students views on the Free Higher Education Policy according to socio-economic status, among poor respondents, the standard deviation is 0.64343 with a mean of 2.1952, and the interpretation is a negative view. Added to that, among low-income respondents, the standard deviation is 0.42220 with a mean of 2.1671, and the interpretation is a negative view. Furthermore, among at least lower middle-class respondents, the standard deviation is 0.40931 with a mean of 2.1438, and the interpretation is negative. In total, the standard deviation is 0.42220 with a mean of 2.2167, and the interpretation is negative.

Table 4

Significant difference on the Students' view on the Free Higher Education Policy and when as a whole and when categorized according to Socio-Economic Status, Sex & Year Level

	Asymptotic (Sig.)	Interpretation
Socio-Economic Status	0.980	Not Significant
Sex	0.907	Not Significant
Year Level	0.010	Significant

Table 4 shows the significant difference in the students' views on the Free Higher Education Policy when grouped as a whole and when categorized according to socio-economic status, sex, and year level. In terms of socio-economic status, the Asymptotic (Sig.) is 0.980, and there is no significant difference. Added to that, in terms of sex, the Asymptotic (Sig.) is 0.907, and the interpretation is that there is no significant difference. Moreover, in terms of year level, the Asymptotic (Sig.) is 0.010, and the interpretation shows a significant difference.

DISCUSSION

The negative view in the free higher on its overall perspective and particularly to its academic and other related expenses, admission, retention, housing and accommodation, and student loan can be attributed to several factors as shown in Table 2. Though the original intention was to make public higher education inclusive to all Filipinos regardless of background, particularly increasing the number of financially challenged students entering public higher education, there were several reasons revolved around students negative views pertaining to the ability of the government to maintain and continue free higher education and its implications, especially the current condition of the republic. Cruz (2019) contends that the government coffers will be put to the test with the amount of budget needed by free higher education, and we understand that tuition and other fees are only one of the aspects of public higher education, and there are other functions involved, from staff to faculty, etc. This can be inferred as to why there is a negative view toward free higher education and why students view their complete higher education journey under the banner of free higher education. The free higher education cover free tuition and other fees but that is not the only expenses in education in fact, tuition and other are only small portion and it is because it is not the

tuition fee has huge portion in the college education but the standard of living, payment for housing, loans and other socio-educationally related expenses and circumstances which similar to the latter studies cited and added, these hinders the students to enter or finish their respective tertiary education where students socio-economic background is the highest factor (Amaral, 2022; Callender& Jackson, 2005; Callender& Mason; Canlas, 2016; Heller, 1997; 2021; Kane, 1995; Leslie & Brinkman, 1987; Ortiz et al, 2017). Added to this, Santos (2017) explains that there are other expenses aside from the free tuition and other fees, and these are textbooks, school-related supplies and equipment, fieldtrips, and immersions that are not covered under free higher education, which can be attributed to the negative views of the students towards academic and other related expenses under the Free Higher Education Act, which is a reasonable and actual expense in public higher education. There is a possibility that the students realize that the money needed for other expenses aside from tuition and other fees is vital in making their college studies better, which leads to a mental and financial burden for the student to think about other expenses while studying the public higher education, and the student views it as a necessary room for the improvement of the inclusivity of the free higher education.

This discussion revolves around academic and other related expenses as one of the aspects of the free higher education policy. In terms of admissions and retentions, the negative view of the students may be attributed to the higher possibility of an influx of students in public higher education and massive and wider competition among students in the utilization of the finite finances of the state universities and colleges (Garcia, 2018). This study is more or less similar to that of Orbital and Pacque (2017), who warned the public of the influx of students, especially rich students, into public higher educational institutions because of free tuition and other school fees. Added to that, it will lessen their chance of admission to the chosen university. Also, there are students who think that increasing the number of students in school and classrooms will not lessen the likelihood that they will be given enough educational attention, especially as individuals, which they view as a possible deterioration of the value of learning and services that the student may receive.

College Education comes with housing and accommodations, especially for students whose homes are far from the campus where they are enrolled. The number of reasonably priced housing or boarding houses is vital to the students' view of free higher education. It is true that free higher education lessens the budget needed for college studies, but the expense derived from housing will be borne by the student, which can be attributed to their negative view of free higher education. There is an increasing rent for housing around colleges and universities, which is an additional financial burden for students. According to Reyes (2019), the highly negative view of the student towards housing and accommodation came from the prices of the dwelling places near the colleges and universities, which is an additional financial burden to students who are well-off and come from places near the school. They view it as an additional and possible improvement in free higher education, either in terms of the possibility of looking at the costs of housing and accommodation or financial aid in relation to these expenses. In relation to student loans, prior to the implementation of free higher education, the woes of financial difficulty in Philippine higher education are also shown in a study conducted by Canlas (2016), where there is a deficiency in loans and, as a result, the parents need to set aside savings for the college education of their children, showing that having a college education depends on a person's financial capacity but not

on educational capability. The availability of loans decreased as free higher education took place in public higher education. According to Lim (2020), the free higher education policy resulted in a scarcity in the number of available loans for students. The loan can be interpreted as an alternative financial support for many students to compensate for other expenses aside from tuition and other fees, which the student used as payment. In this sense, the decline in the availability of student loans leads to a negative view among students toward free higher education. To sum up everything in the discussion in Table 2, the mostly negative view of the students toward the Free Higher Education Policy can be attributed to maintaining a long-term implementation of the policy, possible setbacks in the quality of education, problems arising in the expenses aside from matriculation, struggles in the admission and retention policy, expensive housing and accommodation, and the precariousness of educational and financial aid to the students.

The inferences on the negative view towards free higher education as presented in Table 3 are identical to the previous explanations in Table 2, and these are: (1) a question on continuous viable implementation of the policy, such as the huge amount needed; (2) a possible bargain arises from free higher education, such as the quality of education sprung from the influx of students and the increase in the number of students in a classroom (Cruz, 2019). Specifically, the negative view that arises from various social backgrounds depends on the social hierarchy to which the student belongs. According to Santos (2018), an increase in enrollment in a class and the number of applicants for public higher education both have an impact on the quality of education. According to Garcia (2018), this fear about free higher education causes people to perceive it negatively and is not just present among students in the higher socioeconomic strata but at all levels which is a discussion that revolves around the negative view in terms of socio-economic status. In terms of sex, the negative views on the Free Higher Education Policy can be attributed to the various needs and wants of male and female respondents. Lim (2017) explained that female students are concerned about study-life balance, particularly their responsibility to fulfill it and the support received in the family, and that free higher education does not provide an enabling mechanism to help achieve this. On the other hand, male students have more or less similar concerns, but with more emphasis on possible deterioration in the quality of education and siphoning of government coffers. This discussion is subject to additional inquiry to validate the findings of the study.

In terms of year level, the view of the students on the Free Higher Education Policy changes as they move into their respective upper year levels. According to Reyes (2020), students in the lower year view the policy positively, specifically as an avenue to achieve their dream occupation through finishing a degree, but as they progress in the higher year, their concern toward the influx of students, possible reduction of budget, and deterioration of the quality of higher education set in, which is their basis for viewing the free higher education policy negatively. The changes in their views are the result of their exposure and actual experiences of the said policy, which they view as a restriction and hindrance, but in Table 3, it shows a different result where the data show, which is the opposite of Reyes (2020), that as the student progresses, the view of the student becomes positive, particularly for the 4th year students, which is subject to further probing to further elucidate the differences in the result. The mostly negative view of the students on the Free Higher Education Policy came from their concern over consistent and efficient implementation, deterioration in the quality of education, the complexities of the needs and wants of the students in

relation to their different backgrounds, and the dynamics of their view as they progress to a higher level in their chosen higher educational institution.

The [no] significant difference as shown in Table 4 in the students' view on the Free Higher Education Policy when categorized according to socio-economic status, sex, and year level is due to various aspects both in the implementation and regulations of the policy in relation to the backgrounds and situations of the students. The socio-economic status of the students has a vital role in shaping their views towards free higher education, but the results show that there is no significant difference among the poor, low-income, and at least lower middle class because, despite the difference in their social status, their concerns and views are similar, which is the quality of education due to the increase in the number of students applying to public higher education and the increase in the number of students in a class (Santos, 2018; Garcia, 2018). In relation to sex, there is also no significant difference because both sexes, although they may have little variation, view the policy based on quality of education and accumulation of resources, which for them is important for their tertiary education (Lim, 2017). The only variable that has significant differences is the year level due to their views on finishing a bachelor's degree without tuition and other fees for some students, while other students are more concerned with the influx of students, siphoning of budget in the government coffers, and possible deterioration in the quality of education in higher education (Reyes, 2020). Despite the difference in terms of its significance, it is highly important to look at it in terms of socio-economic status, sex, and grade level.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study were as follows:

1. Generally, the respondents' view the Free Higher Education Policy negatively.
2. Generally, the respondents show a negative view towards the Free Higher Education Policy, specifically on its academic and other related expenses, admission and retention, and student loans, except that they are highly negative towards housing and accommodation.
3. The respondents show a mostly negative view towards the Free Higher Education Policy, specifically socio-Economic status, sex, and year level, except for the 4th year respondents, who view the previously mentioned policy positively.
4. There is no significant difference in the students' views on Free Higher Education when categorized according to sex and economic status, but there is a significant difference in terms of year level.

In view of the findings of this investigation, the following conclusions were drawn: The respondents' negative view of free higher education can be attributed to their concern about the sustainability and efficiency of its implementation, a possible decline in the quality of education, the intricacies of the necessities and desires of the students in terms of their socio-economic background, and the underlying changes in their view as they progress in the upper year of their chosen program in the higher educational institution. Added to this, there is a problem with the expenses aside from matriculation, the struggle in the admission and retention policy, expensive housing and accommodation, and the precariousness of educational and financial aid to the students. This seems to indicate that the respondents wanted free higher education aside from free tuition and other fees to consider expenses from school requirements and other related materials, a subsidy on the increasing rent for housing and accommodation, consideration in admission and

retention, and the additional availability of student loans. It shows that there is no significant difference when categorized according to socio-economic status and sex, which can be explained by the fact that there are similar views and they are more or less identical, but the only factor is the year level that has significant differences which can be attributed to their view of the students on finishing a higher education degree with no fees collected for while some students are more apprehensive on the number of students aspire to be admitted, huge financial expenses of the government, and potential decline in the educational quality in the higher education (Reyes, 2020). Lastly, all results in this study are only applicable to the respondents at one of the universities in the Philippines and thus cannot be generalized to all.

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