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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/20843

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/20843>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON SPECIAL TERTIARY EXTENSION SERVICE PROGRAM (STESP) FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN SARANGANI PROVINCE, PHILIPPINES.

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 18 February 2025

Final Accepted: 22 March 2025

Published: April 2025

Key words:-

Impact assessment, scholarships,
indigenous beneficiaries, socio-
economic empowerment, program
improvement

Abstract

This impact study examines the efficacy, sustainability, and transformative capacity of Malandag Special Tertiary Extension Service Program (STESP) in enhancing indigenous learners and redefining the educational framework of Sarangani. By assessing both qualitative and quantitative results, this provides light on how the program not only expands access to tertiary education but also develops indigenous identity, strengthens local capacities, and promotes long-term socioeconomic development. It evaluated the benefits students received from the scholarship, assessed the impact of scholarship support on their lives, and identified areas for program improvement. A mixed-methods research design was employed. Data collection methods included surveys and interviews, with findings revealing significant positive effects on education, career advancement, and community development. Although the program has been successful in enabling indigenous students to pursue higher education, overcome socioeconomic obstacles, and contribute to their communities, challenges such as funding constraints and inadequate facilities highlight the need for continuous improvement. Key recommendations included reviving the program, provided that identified challenges are addressed and sustainable funding is ensured.

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Introduction:-

In the southern part of the Philippines lies Sarangani Province, a region that is home to a variety of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) with a rich cultural heritage who have long struggled with the intertwined issues of socioeconomic marginalization, physical isolation, and limited access to high-quality education. The Special Tertiary Extension Service Program (STESP), a groundbreaking program designed to close the educational gap and empower IP communities via inclusive, accessible, and culturally sensitive higher education, was established in response to these persistent disparities.

The MSU-GSC Malandag Extension Program was a five-year initiative aimed at providing tertiary education to economically disadvantaged Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in Sarangani Province. The program concluded in May 2016. This collaborative effort between MSU-GSC, the Department of Education-Sarangani Division, and "The Special

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Tertiary Extension Service Program” (STESP)— the main component of the project—offered a BEED program as identified by the Provincial Local Government Unit (PLGU) to address the educational needs of IPs in Sarangani.

Recognizing the educational rights of IPs as outlined in international and national laws, the program aimed to bridge the educational gap between IPs and the mainstream population. In alignment with the Local Government Code of 1991 and Republic Act No. 8371, the project prioritized indigenous education as a means of cultural preservation and socio-economic development. Moreover, the program’s objectives and outcomes correspond with the Sustainable Development of the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda targeting goals such as ensuring Quality Education (SDG 4), promoting Gender Equality (SDG 5), reducing Inequalities (SDG 10), and fostering Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

To ensure quality instruction, the College of Education at MSU-GSC served as the main service provider, employing instructors with expertise in their fields. The curriculum mirrored that of the main campus, covering professional and general education subjects. Despite financial challenges and geographical isolation, students received learning materials and access to technology-enhanced instruction.

The program’s success was evident in the graduation of 87 BEED students across three batches. Graduation ceremonies highlighted the program's impact, with graduates expressing gratitude for the opportunities it provided. Coming from impoverished backgrounds, graduates experienced improvements in their socioeconomic status and an increased capacity to contribute to their communities. Furthermore, a significant number of graduates passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET), enhancing their employability and contributions to the education sector. The program was strongly supported by the PLGU, MSU-GSC, and the local community, which is vital to its execution and success.

This impact study of the Malandag Extension Program provided educational opportunities to Indigenous Peoples with limited access to higher education. Although the program ended in 2016, it left a lasting impact on its beneficiaries. This study aims to evaluate its effects on education, employment, and community development by thoroughly assessing its outcomes. It explores who benefited from the program, the challenges faced, and areas for improvement. Ultimately, the goal is to highlight the program’s significance and provide insights into sustaining similar initiatives to support Indigenous communities in Sarangani Province and beyond.

METHODOLOGY:-

Research Design

A mixed methods approach was employed, primarily utilizing a quantitative survey administered to alumni students who were program beneficiaries. Data collection took place through both face-to-face interviews and online surveys, accommodating students' diverse geographical locations and availability for participation. A specialized tool was created for students to gather input regarding scholarship assistance. The feedback tool was exclusively quantitative, comprising primarily closed-ended replies, supplemented by a limited number of open-ended questions for articulating ideas and opinions. Impact assessment and Theory of Change were also utilized to provide a structured way to design, implement, and evaluate the project’s effectiveness.



Figure 1. Impact Assessment Framework

This impact assessment of the Malandag Extension Program used this framework to evaluate the program's effectiveness in empowering indigenous beneficiaries from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. At the outset,

planning and coordination were undertaken to set clear objectives, establish timelines, and mobilize resources effectively. Stakeholder engagement was prioritized to ensure alignment of efforts and foster collaborative partnerships essential for the success of the assessment.

Data collection used an online survey and interviews. The study is mostly quantitative. Furthermore, data management protocols were established to safeguard data integrity, confidentiality, and accessibility, facilitating efficient analysis and interpretation. As the assessment progresses, the focus shifts towards learning and improving, leveraging the findings to inform programmatic adjustments and strategic decisions. Reflection on lessons learned, identification of areas for enhancement, and adaptation of program strategies based on emerging evidence and insights are prioritized. Moreover, transparent reporting mechanisms are set to be taken to communicate the assessment findings, conclusions, and recommendations to key stakeholders, ensuring accountability and transparency in program implementation.

Central to the assessment is the creation of the program's theory of change, delineating the pathways through which inputs and activities lead to desired outcomes. This theory provides a logical framework for understanding the program's logic model and guides the selection of appropriate indicators for measuring progress and impact. Indicators included education attainment, employment status, income levels, and community engagement carefully curated to capture the multifaceted dimensions of the program's impact.

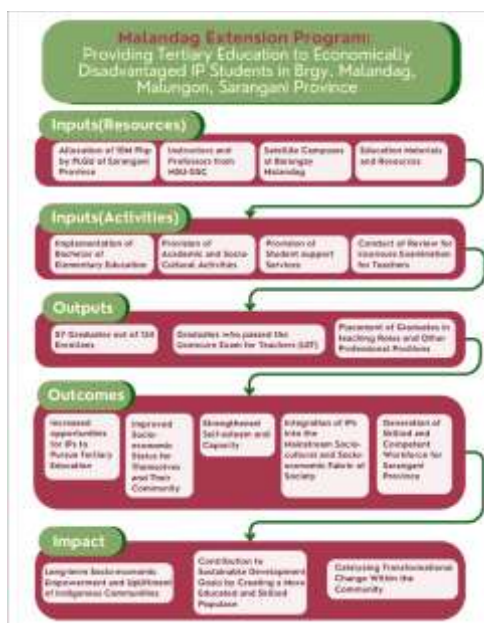


Figure 2. Theory of Change

Research Locale

The study was carried out in Malandag, Malungon Sarangani Province where the beneficiaries reside and are employed. Malandag is located on the island of Mindanao at around 6.3096, 125.2527. It is estimated that the elevation at these coordinates is 192.8 meters, or 632.5 feet, above mean sea level. Malandag is a barangay located in the province of Sarangani's municipality of Malungon. 15,975 people were living there as of the 2020 Census. This accounted for 15.15 percent of Malungon's total population.

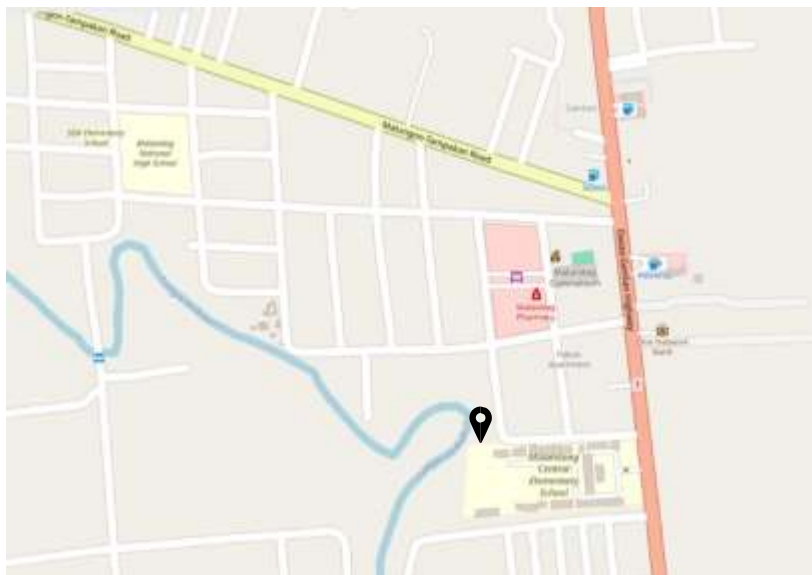


Figure 3. Source: <https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=15/6.30960/125.25270>

Research Participants

A total of 52 scholarship recipients are participants in this impact assessment study. There were 35 (67%) females and 17 (33%) males.

Table 1. Sex Distribution of Scholars

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	17	33%
Female	35	67%
Total	52	100%

Most scholars (70%) are in the 30-32 years age range. The age and distributions of scholars are illustrated in the following diagrams.

Table 2. Age Distribution of Scholars

Age	Frequency	Percentage
36-38	1	2%
33-35	7	13%

30-32	36	70%
27-29	8	15%
Total	52	100%

Thirty-four (65%) of the respondents identify as members of the Blaan Tribe, 17 (33%) as Tagakaulo, and 1 (2%) as Mandaya.

Table 3. Ethnicity Distribution of Scholars

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
B'laan	34	65%
Taga-Kaulo	17	33%
Mandaya	1	2%
Total	52	100%

In terms of marital status, 52% of the respondents reported being married, while 46 % stated they were single, and 2% indicated they were separated.

Table 4. Marital Status Distribution of Scholars

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	27	52%
Single	24	46%
Separated	1	2%
Total	52	100%

Research Instrument

A survey tool was designed to gather data from the participants. The questionnaire was also programmed in Google Forms with an online link for wide dissemination.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers gathered the list of student recipients from the College of Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education, and asked permission from the Project Leader to identify the designated student leaders for each of the three batches of the extension program. These student leaders were tasked to disseminate the survey link to their respective batchmates via group chats and email addresses. It was presumed that all students received the communication and were thereby invited to participate in the survey. A separate on-site interview was also conducted with the participants who willingly responded to the invitation. The researchers visited the schools where the recipients of the extension project (STESP) were employed.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical principles to uphold the integrity, confidentiality, and protection of all participants. Respondents were thoroughly informed about the study's purpose, methodology, and potential outcomes before their participation. Informed consent was obtained to ensure voluntary involvement and granting participants the choice to withdraw at any time without repercussions.

All personal data collected through surveys and interviews were anonymized and securely stored, with access restricted to authorized researchers to maintain confidentiality. The study also ensured that no participant experienced harm, discrimination, or undue pressure. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was secured from the MSU-GSC institutional ethics committee. Moreover, cultural sensitivity was maintained by respecting the traditions, values, and beliefs of the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) involved.

The study aimed to protect participants' rights and dignity while ensuring the credibility and reliability of its findings by adhering to these ethical standards.

Results and Discussion:-

This chapter outlines the key findings from the quantitative survey conducted with scholarship-supported alumni students. The subsequent sections detail the study's components across various dimensions. The survey elicited 52 responses, representing all three batches: 17 (33%) from Batch 1, 15 (29%) from Batch 2, and 20 (38%) from Batch 3. Among the respondents, 49 (96%) are graduates, with 3 (4%) indicating they have not graduated. This response rate provides valuable insights into the perceptions of the surveyed population. With a 95% confidence level, it was estimated that the true proportion of the population sharing similar sentiments lies within the range of 29.9% to 47.7%. While the margin of error stands at approximately 9%, it remains acceptable given the context of our research and the modest sample size of 52 respondents out of a total population of 134. Such response rates, although not exhaustive, still offer meaningful perspectives, particularly when balanced with considerations of feasibility and resource constraints.

Parents' Education :-

A significant portion of parents have elementary education as their highest level of academic achievement, with 71% of fathers and 58% of mothers reaching this level. This suggests that many parents have basic academic backgrounds. Conferring to Davis-Kean (2005), parental education directly influences children's academic outcomes through both educational expectations and home learning environments. The results also revealed that fewer parents have gone on to higher levels of education, with only around 4% of fathers and 8% of mothers graduating from high school. Similarly, college education is less common, with only 10% of fathers and 2% of mothers having completed at least a college education. Parents with limited schooling are less likely to engage in cognitively stimulating activities with their children, contributing to a cycle of educational disadvantage (Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008). Moreover, research by Reardon (2011) emphasizes how educational inequalities are reproduced across generations, with children from less educated families typically having fewer opportunities to succeed academically. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (1977) also explains that parents with lower educational attainment may have limited ability to transmit the cultural knowledge and skills valued in formal education settings.

Table 5: Distribution of Students by their Parents' Education

Educational Attainment	Father (%)	Mother (%)
No Grade Completed	17	17
Elementary Undergraduate	38	35
Elementary Graduate	15	6
High School Undergraduate	8	19
High School Graduate	4	8
College Undergraduate	6	8
College Graduate	8	2
Post Baccalaureate Graduate	2	0
N/A	2	6
TOTAL	100	100

Parents' Occupation

Most fathers of the respondents are engaged in farming (48%), while most mothers are unemployed or homemakers (75%). Self-employment is reported by 6% of both fathers and mothers, while a smaller proportion hold government jobs, with 4% of fathers and 6% of mothers. Only a minimal percentage of fathers, 2%, are employed in the private sector, while 5% of mothers are also engaged in farming. Similarly, the study of Bliznashka, Jeong, and Jaacks, (2023) found that around 40-53% of fathers were employed in agriculture, especially in poorer households, reflecting the prevalence of farming as a primary occupation for men in rural areas. Likewise, mothers being unemployed or homemakers aligns with global trends where women in rural and agricultural communities often engage in unpaid domestic labor or informal work rather than formal employment (Hossain, & Madon, 2022).

Table 6. Distribution of Students by their Parents' Occupation

Employment Status	Father (%)	Mother (%)
Farming	48	10
Government Job	4	6
House Maker/Unemployed	17	75
Private Sector Job	2	0
Self-employed	6	6
N/A	23	4
TOTAL	100	100

Scholarship Award and Entrance Examination Process

The survey results for the MSU-System Admission and Scholarship Examination (SASE) and PLGU of Sarangani scholarship application reveal a predominant sentiment of neutrality, with approximately 55% of respondents indicating a neutral perception. However, notable proportions perceive the exam and application process differently, with 18% finding it very easy, 14% finding it easy, 14% finding it difficult, and only 2% finding it very difficult. The results are parallel to Çirak, (2016) where senior high school students' feelings about university entrance exams found a mix of anxiety, fear, and neutral or ambivalent attitudes. Students expressed emotions ranging from panic and concern to viewing the exam as a "door to the future," indicating diverse perceptions of difficulty and significance. These findings suggest a diverse range of experiences and perceptions among respondents, indicating the varying levels of ease or difficulty encountered during the exam and application procedures. Similarly, Cassady and Johnson, (2002) found that some students find exams easy and manageable, while others experience high stress and difficulty.

Table 7. Perception on Scholarship and Entrance Examination Process

Response Category	Percentage (%)
Very Easy	18
Easy	14
Neutral	55
Difficult	14
Very Difficult	2
TOTAL	100

Source of Information on the Scholarship

The survey results indicate that most respondents primarily got the scholarship information from their local government officials or employees, constituting approximately 52% of respondents. Friends or neighbors also play a significant role in disseminating this information, with 25% of respondents relying on them. High school teachers

and family members are cited to a lesser extent, comprising 10% and 13% of respondents, respectively. These findings highlight the importance of community connections in accessing scholarship-related updates and announcements. Rivera et al., (2019) on educational outreach in rural communities found that local government personnel are pivotal in spreading awareness about scholarships and educational programs, particularly where digital access is limited.

Table 8. Source of Information on Availability of Scholarship Opportunity

Source	Percentage (%)
LGU Official or Employee	52
Friends or Neighbors	25
Family Members	13
High School Teachers	10
TOTAL	100

Type of Financial Aid Received

The Malandag Extension Program financial aid included free tuition for the entire duration of their studies and a monthly allowance of Php 500 per student. To assess the effectiveness of these benefits, respondents were asked about their level of satisfaction. The survey findings reveal that participants have a high level of satisfaction with program's offerings. Regarding free tuition, an overwhelming majority (84%) expressed being very satisfied, indicating strong support for this aspect of the program. Similarly, a significant portion of respondents (43%) reported being very satisfied with the monthly allowance, highlighting the positive impact of the financial support provided. Moreover, a notable proportion of participants expressed satisfaction with both benefits, with 10% and 35% indicating satisfaction with free tuition and the monthly allowance, respectively. These findings underscore the success of the program to meet the needs and expectations of its recipients, contributing to their overall satisfaction and well-being. Similarly, No (2023) found that students receiving scholarships, including tuition subsidies and allowances, reported very high satisfaction with scholarship services. This satisfaction correlated positively with their academic persistence and integration into college life, indicating that financial aid contributes significantly to students' academic success and well-being. The results were further supported by Galvez (2023), which emphasized that scholarship grantees who are satisfied with financial aid services experience reduced financial stress, that affect positively affects the beneficiaries' academic performance and motivation to complete their studies.

Table 9. Level of Satisfaction on Financial Aid Received

Satisfaction Level	Free Tuition (%)	Monthly Allowance (%)
Very Satisfied	84	43
Satisfied	10	35
Neutral	6	18
Dissatisfied	0	4
Very Dissatisfied	0	0
TOTAL	100	100

Quality of Instruction

The survey results indicate a high level of satisfaction among respondents regarding various aspects of instructional quality within the Malandag Extension Program. Specifically, a significant majority (86%) reported being very satisfied with the quality of teaching methods employed, reflecting positively on the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches used. Moreover, a substantial portion of participants (73%) expressed high satisfaction levels regarding engagement and interaction in the learning process, indicating active involvement and participation in educational activities. Additionally, an equally impressive percentage of respondents (73%) reported a supportive learning environment, suggesting a conducive atmosphere for academic growth and development. Furthermore, although to a slightly lesser extent, technology integration received favorable feedback, with 42% of participants indicating high satisfaction levels in this aspect. These findings collectively highlight the program's commitment to delivering

quality instruction and fostering an enriching educational experience for its beneficiaries. The research results were similar to McKim et al., (2013) where extension educators found that commitment to learner engagement and interactive teaching methods are key indicators of teaching effectiveness, which strongly correlate with participant satisfaction and learning outcomes. On the same vein, a study by Joshi et al. (2024) highlights that extension programs that address participants' subjective knowledge and perceptions before training foster more effective behavior change and engagement.

Table 10. Level of Satisfaction on Quality of Instruction

Satisfaction Level	Quality of Teaching Methods	Engagement and Interaction	Supportive Learning Environment	Technology Integration
Very Satisfied (%)	86	73	73	42
Satisfied (%)	12	27	27	0
Neutral (%)	2	0	0	42
Dissatisfied (%)	0	0	0	16
Very Dissatisfied (%)	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

School Facilities and Amenities

The assessment of school facilities and amenities within the Malandag Extension Program uncovers diverse perspectives among respondents. While a significant number expressed contentment with the physical condition (81%) and accessibility (79%) of the facilities, satisfaction levels dipped notably when considering amenities and services (37%) as well as technology and resources (38%). Furthermore, although a majority indicated satisfaction with the comfort and environment (73%), fewer respondents reported being very satisfied in this regard (23%). MCGowen's (2007) highlights that well-maintained, accessible school facilities contribute positively to student achievement, behavior, and attendance. Noteworthy dissatisfaction was primarily concentrated in amenities and services (11%) and technology and resources (11%). Accordingly, Facilities with good maintenance, adequate furniture, and functional equipment reduce behavioral problems and enhance teaching effectiveness, which indirectly influences student satisfaction with amenities and services (Morris, 2003).

Table 11. Level of Satisfaction on the School Facilities and Amenities

Satisfaction Level	Physical Condition	Accessibility	Amenities and Services	Technology and Resources	Comfort and Environment
Very Satisfied (%)	33	37	10	8	23
Satisfied (%)	48	42	50	50	50
Neutral (%)	19	21	27	31	23
Dissatisfied (%)	0	0	11	11	0
Very Dissatisfied (%)	0	0	2	0	4
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

Impact of the Malandag Extension Program on Recipients

The participants rated the impact of the Malandag Extension Program (STESP) on their lives. These students were presented with varied situations, and their perceptions were gathered. The graph below shows their perception of the extent of impact that the program has made.

Table 12. Extent of Impact on the Lives of the Program Beneficiaries by Situations

Impact	Supported Completion of Education	Motivation/Inclination to Study hard and Excel	Prioritized Education Against Job/Earning	Eased Economic Burden on Family
Major Impact (%)	75	73	73	63
Some Impact (%)	25	27	27	35
No Impact (%)	0	0	0	2

TOTAL	100	100	100	100
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A substantial majority reported major impacts on supported completion of education (75%), motivation to study hard and excel (73%), prioritizing education over job or earning (73%), and easing the economic burden on their families (63%). Additionally, a notable proportion noted some level of impact across these areas, demonstrating the program's multifaceted contributions to enhancing educational opportunities and alleviating financial pressures for the beneficiaries. The results show the profound influence of the scholarship program in facilitating academic pursuits and fostering personal growth among the recipients. The results indicate the significant contribution of the Malandag Extension Program to the professional careers of the respondents. A large majority of participants passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) successfully (81%), highlighting the program's efficacy in preparing them for their teaching careers. The Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) studied on the impact of the government's scholarship programs for teacher education found that scholarship recipients had higher LET pass rates and better employment outcomes than non-recipients (Reyes et al., 2019). Furthermore, 83% of the respondents reported being employed, indicating that the program has facilitated their entry into the workforce and supported their professional development. A recent analysis of LET (Licensure Examination for Teachers) performance found that well-prepared graduates from supportive programs have higher passing rates. Factors such as curriculum alignment, academic support, and financial aid contribute to LET success and subsequent employment (Abao et al., 2023). These findings underscore the program's effectiveness in equipping the student Ips of Sarangani Province with the necessary qualifications and opportunities for employment, thus enhancing their prospects in the job market. Similarly, Bolaños et al., 2023 found that Tertiary Education Subsidy beneficiaries highlight that financial aid, combined with academic support, prepares students well for professional careers and increases their resilience in overcoming challenges to graduation and employment.

Contribution of the Program in the Professional Career

The results indicate the significant contribution of the Malandag Extension Program to the professional careers of the respondents. A large majority of participants passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) successfully (81%), highlighting the program's efficacy in preparing them for their teaching careers.

Table 13. Distribution of LET Results among Program Beneficiaries

LET	Percentage
Passer	81%
Non-Passer	19%
Total	100%

Furthermore, 83% of the respondents reported being employed, indicating that the program has facilitated their entry into the workforce and supported their professional development.

Table 14. Distribution of Employment Status among Program Beneficiaries

Employment Status	Percentage
Employed	83%
Not Employed	17%
Total	100%

These findings underscore the program's effectiveness in equipping the student Ips of Sarangani Province with the necessary qualifications and opportunities for employment, thus enhancing their prospects in the job market.

According to Amanonce and Maramag (2020), the LET is a key benchmark for teacher competence and institutional quality. Passing the LET is not only a requirement for professional practice but also a reflection of the effectiveness of teacher education institutions (TEIs). Moreover, the findings of Bedural et al., (2014) indicated that more government support for teacher education is likely to improve LET performance for education graduates. In light of the objective of improving the overall performance of the graduates on the national licensure exam, it is still prudent to maintain or even increase the investments made in teacher education or preparation.

Type of Employment

On the type of employment among program beneficiaries, the survey results demonstrate a predominant concentration in teaching roles, particularly in public schools, which accounts for 68% of the respondents. Additionally, some respondents are also engaged in other teaching-related positions, including head teacher roles in public schools (2%), teaching in Thailand (7%), and teaching in private schools (2%). The results are similar to the study of Sahatciu (2016) where the pattern that the training program and education achievements positively impact job opportunities. Furthermore, a minority of respondents (21%) are employed in non-teaching positions. These results highlight the significant impact of the program in fostering careers primarily within the education sector, while also facilitating opportunities for teaching roles in diverse settings. Hence, Corpuz, et al., (2022) prove that extension initiatives attract both providers and consumers in high volumes. Furthermore, Joshi et al., (2024) suggested that to promote long-lasting behavior change, extension programs had to concentrate on addressing participants' preexisting beliefs. Extension can more successfully convert knowledge into useful, long-lasting behavior by creating programs that take these preexisting perspectives into account.

Table 15. Distribution of Employment Types Among Program Beneficiaries

Employment Type	Percentage (%)
Teaching in a Public School	68
Teaching in a Private School	2
Teaching Abroad	7
Head Teacher in Public School	2
Job Other Than Teaching	21
TOTAL	100

The figure below is a geographical representation depicting the locations of some of the beneficiaries who are working locally. The map includes pins indicating the various locations where beneficiaries are employed, providing insight into the geographical spread of employment opportunities secured through the program. It can be observed that majority of beneficiaries have been assigned to teach indigenous students in the Municipality of Malungon. This outcome aligns closely with one of the primary objectives of the program, which aims to produce graduates from indigenous communities to serve as educators for indigenous students



Figure 5. Geographical Distribution of Beneficiaries' Job Placements

Nature of Employment Contract

The survey findings indicate the distribution of employment contracts among program beneficiaries, showing that the majority (71%) hold permanent positions. This data is significant, particularly considering a program within the Department of Education in Sarangani Province that prioritizes offering teaching item positions to indigenous people applicants. Additionally, 21% reported contractual employment, while 8% indicated other types of employment contracts. This distribution sheds light on the stability and nature of employment opportunities attained by respondents within their respective fields, showcasing the program's impact on securing sustainable employment for its beneficiaries. Apunyo, et al., (2022) highlights that stable employment, including permanent contracts, is a key outcome for youth programs globally.

Table 16. Nature of Employment Contract Distribution

Nature of Employment	Percentage (%)
Permanent	71
Contractual	21
Others	8
TOTAL	100

Level of Income

There is a diverse range of current income levels among program beneficiaries, who hail from indigenous backgrounds. Remarkably, a significant majority (67%) reported earning between ₱18,200 to ₱36,400, reflecting a substantial improvement from previous economic circumstances. Additionally, a notable portion (14%) reported earning less than ₱9,100, underscoring the socioeconomic challenges faced by some individuals prior to their participation in the program. However, it's worth highlighting that a small but noteworthy percentage (5%) now earn at least ₱182,000 and up, showcasing the program's efficacy in providing substantial job opportunities and economic upliftment for its beneficiaries. According to Ibanez, Austin, & Garnett, (2016) informants from indigenous backgrounds respected inclusive and participatory procedures, but they also valued outside funding and assistance. Although there is a strong desire for economic upliftment, there was also a general consensus that plans should embrace more Indigenous knowledge and that methods for economic upliftment should include approaches to revitalize Indigenous culture and ways of knowing.

Table 17. Current Income Distribution of Program Beneficiaries

Current Income	Percentage (%)
Less than Php 9, 100	14
Between Php 9, 100 to Php 18, 200	9
Between Php 18, 200 to Php 36, 400	67
Between Php 36, 400 to Php 63, 700	2
Between Php 109, 200 to Php 182, 000	3
At least Php 182, 000 and up	5
TOTAL	100

Pursuit of Higher Education

Another factor considered is if the recipients are pursuing a higher or another degree. The results show that a majority of beneficiaries (58%) are not currently pursuing any further degrees after the Malandag Extension

Program. However, a notable proportion are engaged in higher education pursuits, with 37% currently pursuing a Master's Degree and 1% indicating pursuit of a Doctorate Degree. A small percentage (2%) have completed a Master's Degree, while a similar percentage (2%) are pursuing another Bachelor's Degree. Studies have shown that participation in extension and supplemental education programs can influence educational aspirations, but not all beneficiaries choose to pursue further degrees (McCormick, 1997). These results provide insights into the educational aspirations and pursuits of the program beneficiaries, highlighting a significant focus on Master's Degree programs. McCormick (1997) further discussed that most post-baccalaureate learners either enter the workforce or opt for master's programs, with only a small subset advancing to doctoral studies or seeking a second undergraduate degree, often for career shifts or specialized fields.

Table 18. Status of Beneficiaries Pursuing Further Education

Status	Percentage (%)
No	58
Yes, I am currently pursuing another Bachelor's Degree	2
Yes, I am currently pursuing a Master's Degree	37
Yes, I have finished a Master's Degree	2
Yes, I am currently pursuing a Doctorate Degree	1
TOTAL	100

Challenges Encountered by Program Beneficiaries

The survey findings indicate various challenges encountered by the beneficiaries of the program. While a significant percentage expressed agreement with the effectiveness of academic support provided by MSU Gensan and LGU Sarangani (79%) and the impact of personal or family responsibilities on their engagement in the program (44%), there were notable concerns regarding personal financial limitations hindering full participation in completing their degree (33%), language barriers affecting academic progress (31%), and inadequate facilities or resources at the Malandag Extension campus (19%). These results highlight the multifaceted obstacles faced by the beneficiaries in their academic journey and highlight areas that require attention for program improvement and support. Hence, in comparison to students without scholarships, those who receive scholarships not only enroll in college more frequently but also score higher on important metrics like success and achievement rates.(Berlanga & Corti, 2025). Moreover, to improve graduation rates, grade point averages, and employability skills among scholars, scholarships are essential for improving student performance and directing future scholarship programs.(Byantoro, et al., 2024).

Table 19. Challenges Encountered by Program Beneficiaries

Challenges Encountered	Personal or Family	Facilities or Resources	Language Barriers	Academic Support	Financial Limitations
Strongly Disagree (%)	0	2	4	0	5
Disagree (%)	4	6	2	0	0
Neutral (%)	10	27	21	0	12
Agree (%)	42	46	42	21	50
Strongly Agree (%)	44	19	31	79	33
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

Areas for Improvement

The survey results indicate areas for potential improvement within the scholarship program. A majority of respondents expressed strong agreement that better financial assistance to students in need (62%), improved academic support services (50%), enhanced efforts for cultural sensitivity and inclusivity (54%), infrastructure and facility improvements (46%), and active student participation in addressing community needs (58%) are necessary. Additionally, a significant proportion agreed with these sentiments, highlighting the importance of addressing these aspects to enhance the overall effectiveness and impact of the program. According to Berlanga and Corti (2025), enhancing financial aid and academic support services leads to higher retention and graduation rates, particularly for disadvantaged students. Accordingly, increased financial aid reduces dropout rates and improves degree completion, especially for low-income and marginalized students. It stresses that adequate financial support is crucial for academic persistence (Dynarski, Page, & Scott-Clayton, 2023).

Table 20. Areas of Improvement for the Malandag Extension Program

Areas of Improvement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
The program should provide opportunities for students to actively participate in addressing the needs and concerns of the local community.	0	0	8	35	58
Infrastructure and facilities at the campus must be improved.	0	0	8	46	46
Efforts to promote cultural sensitivity and inclusivity within the program should be enhanced.	0	0	12	35	54
Academic support services could be improved to better meet the needs of students.	0	2	10	38	50
The scholarship program could offer better financial assistance to students in need.	2	0	4	33	62
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

Overall Satisfaction

The results on the overall satisfaction regarding the Malandag Extension Program is notably high. A significant majority, comprising 67% of the participants, expressed being "very satisfied" with the program. Additionally, 33% of the respondents reported feeling "satisfied." Importantly, none of the participants indicated feeling neutral, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied, suggesting a widespread positive sentiment towards the program among the beneficiaries. Accordingly, Galvez & Ignacio (2024) study on scholarship grantees in the Philippines found that the majority of respondents expressed high satisfaction with the student financial aid program, particularly regarding the quality of staff, services, and facilities. Consequently, results also showed that satisfaction with scholarship services was linked to reduced financial stress and improved academic focus.

Table 21. Overall Satisfaction with the Malandag Extension Program

Satisfaction Level	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	67
Satisfied	33
Neutral	0
Dissatisfied	0
Very Dissatisfied	0
TOTAL	100

The excerpts of the statements provided by the recipients of the STESP are presented as follows.

“The scholarship influenced me to finish my degree, enabling me to land a good job. [KII_P1]

This scholarship truly improved me as an individual in society. It has been more helpful to my family because without the scholarship offered by the government, I could not have reached my life goals.”[KII_P3]

"I am incredibly grateful for being chosen as a scholar, which helps me prove that "poverty is not a hindrance to success." The financial support provided has relieved significant burdens and has helped shape me into who I am today."[KII_P1]

"Having financial support from LGU Sarangani has a big impact because during those times, my parents were both farmers and couldn't support my studies. But thanks to LGU for supporting us with free tuition and an allowance to meet our needs."[KII_P2]

"Less worries when it comes to tuition fees as you don't have to find money just to take exams. However, it was a little struggle for me because I needed to travel from Alabel to Malandag just to reach the school thrice a week. But then, with four days

free in a week, I managed to find a sideline or part-time job to earn money for my fare going to school so that my parents don't need to find money for my fare."[KII_P4]

"It helps me a lot. It's because of the help I don't have work right now. Although I couldn't finish that degree, I thank all the people behind this program. This made me who and where I am today."[KII_P2]

"As a teacher in an IP community, it's great to think that I'm helping my fellow IPs, inspiring them to reach their full potential and making a meaningful impact on their lives and to the community."[KII_P5]

CONCLUSION:-

The Malandag Extension Program has significantly transformed the lives of indigenous beneficiaries living in Sarangani Province, who are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The program has provided crucial opportunities for education, economic upliftment, and community empowerment. Despite its conclusion in 2016, the program's enduring impact resonates strongly among its beneficiaries, highlighting the need for its revival. The program's effectiveness in empowering Indigenous students to pursue higher education, overcome socio-economic challenges, and contribute to their communities is evident, but challenges such as financial limitations and inadequate facilities highlight the importance of ongoing program improvement. The study revealed significant benefits derived by students from the scholarships provided. These benefits include increased access to education, alleviation of financial burdens, and improved academic performance. The provision of free tuition and monthly allowances has been particularly instrumental in enabling students to pursue their educational aspirations without financial constraints. Furthermore, the impact assessment demonstrates the profound influence of scholarship support on students' individual lives. It has empowered them to overcome socio-economic challenges, pursue higher education, and secure employment opportunities. Moreover, the scholarships have instilled motivation, confidence, and a sense of purpose among students, enabling them to envision a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

Through the assessment, several areas for program improvement have been identified. These include the need for better financial assistance to address diverse needs, enhanced academic support services to ensure student success, and efforts to promote cultural sensitivity and inclusivity within the program. Additionally, infrastructure and facility improvements are essential to provide students with conducive learning environments. By addressing these areas, the program can further enhance its effectiveness and impact on the lives of its beneficiaries. This study catalyzes continuous improvement and innovation within the Malandag Extension Program, reaffirming its commitment to fostering educational excellence, social empowerment, and inclusive development. By prioritizing the identified areas for enhancement and building upon its successes, the program can continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of Indigenous students and communities, contributing to the overall well-being and prosperity of Sarangani Province.

Contributions of Authors

All authors were involved in the concept, design, collection of data, interpretation, writing, and critical revising of the article. All authors approved the final version of the article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that this study was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could have created a conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

The authors acknowledge the participants, the PLGU Sarangani, DepEd Sarangani, and MSU-General Santos.

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