Stakeholder Satisfaction and Program Effectiveness of Project Free Relevant and Excellent Education (FREE): A Comprehensive Evaluation of Makati City's Educational Support Initiative

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ABSTRACT: This study evaluates the effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction of Project FREE (Free Relevant and Excellent Education), an educational support program implemented by the Local Government Unit of Makati City, Philippines. Using a comprehensive survey methodology, data were collected from 11,184 program beneficiaries across various educational levels from Pre-Kinder to Senior High School. The research employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative satisfaction ratings and qualitative feedback analysis. Results indicate exceptionally high satisfaction levels with a mean satisfaction score of 4.8 out of 5.0, with 89.2% of respondents rating their satisfaction as 5 (very satisfied). The program demonstrates significant positive impact on family financial burden reduction, with beneficiaries reporting substantial savings on school supplies, uniforms, and educational materials. Key areas for improvement identified include sizing accuracy for shoes and uniforms, quality enhancement of certain items, and potential expansion of program offerings. The study reveals that long-term beneficiaries (those receiving benefits for over five years) show consistently higher satisfaction rates compared to newer participants. These findings suggest that Project FREE effectively addresses educational accessibility challenges while

maintaining high stakeholder satisfaction, positioning it as a model for similar educational support initiatives in other local government units.

Introduction

Access to quality education remains a fundamental challenge for many Filipino families, particularly those in urban areas where the cost of living continues to rise alongside persistent income inequality (Garcia et al., 2025). According to the Philippine Statistic Authority (2017) education-related expenses constitute approximately 15-20% of household budgets for low- to middle-income families, creating significant barriers to educational participation and completion. Urban centers like Makati City face unique challenges where high living costs intersect with diverse socioeconomic populations, necessitating innovative approaches to educational support. The financial burden of school supplies, uniforms, shoes, and other educational materials often forces families to make difficult choices between immediate needs and their children's educational requirements. Rising inflation rates have further exacerbated these challenges, making educational expenses increasingly prohibitive for many households despite the availability of public schooling (Rivera & Tullao Jr, 2020). The Local Government Unit (LGU) of Makati City has proactively addressed this challenge through Project FREE (Free Relevant and Excellent Education), a comprehensive educational support program designed to eliminate financial barriers while ensuring equitable access to essential educational resources. This initiative represents a paradigm shift from traditional educational support models, moving beyond mere subsidy provision to comprehensive material support that addresses the holistic needs of students and their families.

Project FREE represents a significant investment in human capital development, reflecting Makati City's strategic commitment to educational equity, social welfare, and long-term community development. Launched as part of the city's broader social development agenda, the program embodies the principles of inclusive governance and responsive public service delivery that have become hallmarks of progressive

local government administration in the Philippines. The program provides an extensive range of educational materials including complete school supplies packages (paper, pencils, notebooks, and writing materials), standardized school uniforms that promote equality among students, durable leather and rubber shoes designed for different school activities, high-quality school bags capable of withstanding daily use, and comprehensive health-related items such as anti-dengue kits and emergency hygiene packages that address both educational and wellness needs. Since its implementation over five years ago, Project FREE has evolved from a pilot initiative serving select schools to a city-wide program that has reached over 50,000 students across different educational levels, from Pre-Kinder through Senior High School. The program's scope extends beyond mere material provision to include systematic distribution networks, quality assurance mechanisms, and stakeholder feedback systems that ensure sustained effectiveness and continuous improvement. This comprehensive approach has positioned Project FREE as one of the most ambitious and successful local government educational support initiatives in Metro Manila, serving as a model for other LGUs seeking to implement similar programs.

The theoretical foundation of Project FREE aligns with contemporary educational development frameworks that emphasize the importance of addressing socioeconomic barriers to learning through direct intervention and community-based support systems. Research in educational economics consistently demonstrates that material barriers significantly impact student performance, attendance rates, and long-term educational outcomes, particularly in developing country contexts where household income constraints directly affect educational investment decisions. The program operates on the premise that removing financial barriers to educational participation creates positive ripple effects that extend beyond individual students to families and communities, generating social capital and contributing to broader socioeconomic development. Furthermore, Project FREE incorporates elements of social protection theory, functioning as a targeted social safety net that provides predictable, reliable support to vulnerable families while maintaining dignity and promoting educational aspirations. The program's design reflects evidence-based approaches to educational support that prioritize comprehensive intervention over

fragmented assistance, recognizing that effective educational support requires addressing multiple dimensions of student needs simultaneously. By providing both academic supplies and health-related materials, Project FREE acknowledges the interconnected nature of educational success and overall student well-being, creating a holistic support ecosystem that addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by urban families in accessing quality education.

Despite the program's widespread implementation, extensive reach, and apparent success in serving thousands of beneficiaries annually, there has been limited systematic evaluation of its effectiveness from the most critical perspective—that of the beneficiaries themselves. While administrative data and program statistics provide valuable insights into distribution efficiency and coverage rates, understanding stakeholder satisfaction remains crucial for comprehensive program evaluation, strategic resource allocation, and evidence-based policy development. The absence of systematic beneficiary feedback mechanisms has created a knowledge gap that limits the program's potential for adaptive improvement and strategic enhancement. Understanding stakeholder satisfaction encompasses multiple dimensions including material quality assessment, appropriateness of items provided, distribution system effectiveness, perceived impact on family welfare, and beneficiary suggestions for program improvement. Furthermore, examining the long-term impact on families, analyzing utilization patterns across different demographic groups, and identifying specific areas for enhancement can provide invaluable insights for other LGUs considering similar initiatives or seeking to improve existing programs. The need for comprehensive evaluation becomes particularly important as Project FREE approaches its sixth year of implementation, requiring evidence-based assessment to guide future program directions and ensure continued relevance to evolving beneficiary needs. Additionally, documenting program effectiveness through rigorous evaluation contributes to the broader knowledge base on local government social programs, providing empirical evidence that can inform policy discussions at regional and national levels.

This study aims to comprehensively evaluate Project FREE through the lens of its primary stakeholders—the beneficiary families—employing a mixed-methods

research approach that captures both quantitative satisfaction metrics and qualitative insights into program impact and improvement opportunities. The research addresses critical evaluation questions including overall stakeholder satisfaction levels, utilization patterns for different program components, perceived benefits and impact on family welfare, identification of program challenges and areas for improvement, and demographic variations in program experience and satisfaction. By analyzing satisfaction levels across different beneficiary groups, examining utilization patterns for various program components, assessing perceived benefits and challenges, and gathering specific recommendations for enhancement, this research contributes to the evidence base for educational support programs while providing actionable recommendations for program refinement and expansion. The study employs a comprehensive evaluation framework that incorporates satisfaction assessment, impact analysis, and stakeholder feedback to generate findings that can inform program management decisions, policy development, and future program design. Through systematic analysis of over 11,000 beneficiary responses, this research represents one of the largest and most comprehensive evaluations of a local government educational support program in the Philippines, offering insights that extend beyond Makati City to inform broader discussions about effective educational support strategies in urban contexts. The findings will serve multiple audiences including program administrators seeking evidence-based improvement strategies, policymakers interested in replicating successful local government initiatives, researchers studying educational support program effectiveness, and development practitioners working to enhance educational equity through community-based interventions.

Review of Related Literature

Educational support programs have long been recognized as effective interventions for promoting educational equity and reducing socioeconomic barriers to learning. According to Hanushek & Woessmann (2020), direct provision of educational materials and resources significantly impacts student outcomes, particularly in developing countries where family income constraints limit access to essential school supplies. These programs operate on the fundamental premise that educational access

should not be determined by economic circumstances, recognizing that learning materials, textbooks, uniforms, and technological tools are prerequisites for academic success. The effectiveness of such interventions extends beyond immediate academic performance, as they address systemic inequalities that perpetuate cycles of poverty and social disadvantage. Research consistently demonstrates that when students have equal access to educational resources, achievement gaps between different socioeconomic groups narrow substantially, creating more equitable learning environments that benefit entire communities.

The concept of universal access to education materials aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Research by Salmi & D'Addio (2021) demonstrates that when financial barriers to education are reduced through government intervention, enrollment rates increase and dropout rates decrease significantly. This alignment with international development frameworks reflects a broader understanding of education as both a human right and a catalyst for social and economic development. Countries implementing comprehensive educational support programs have observed measurable improvements not only in academic outcomes but also in social cohesion and economic mobility. The ripple effects of these interventions include increased parental engagement in education, reduced child labor rates, and enhanced community investment in educational infrastructure. Furthermore, Pascoe et al. (2020) indicates that students who benefit from educational support programs demonstrate higher rates of secondary and tertiary education completion, ultimately contributing to more skilled workforces and reduced intergenerational poverty.

From a social welfare perspective, educational support programs represent strategic investments in human capital development that yield both immediate and long-term societal benefits (Richter et al., 2017). The provision of educational resources through government programs serves as a form of social protection that shields families from having to choose between basic needs and educational expenses. Sciences et al. (2015) reveal that every dollar invested in educational support programs generates substantial returns through increased lifetime earnings, reduced social service dependency, and enhanced tax revenue generation. These programs

also function as poverty reduction mechanisms, as they enable parents to allocate household resources toward other essential needs such as healthcare and nutrition, creating positive feedback loops that strengthen overall family wellbeing. The social welfare dimension extends to community-level impacts, where improved educational outcomes contribute to reduced crime rates, enhanced civic participation, and stronger democratic institutions. Contemporary research emphasizes the multiplier effects of educational investments, demonstrating how comprehensive support programs create sustainable pathways out of poverty while building more resilient and equitable societies.

Local Government Initiatives in Education

The evolving landscape of government initiatives in education reflects a significant paradigmatic shift from centralized, one-size-fits-all approaches toward more nuanced, locally-responsive governance models that recognize the heterogeneous nature of educational challenges across different communities. Filipino local government units have increasingly taken active roles in supplementing national education programs, with Kinder et al. (2022) finding that LGU-initiated educational support programs often demonstrate higher beneficiary satisfaction compared to centrally-managed programs due to their responsiveness to local needs and contexts. This transformation represents a fundamental reconceptualization of educational governance, where local governments are positioned as key stakeholders in educational development rather than mere implementers of national policies. The enhanced role of LGUs in education reflects broader trends in public administration toward subsidiarity and participatory governance, acknowledging that educational challenges are deeply embedded in local socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic contexts that require tailored interventions. Research demonstrates that when local governments assume leadership in educational initiatives, they leverage intimate knowledge of community dynamics, existing social networks, and local resource capacities to design more effective and sustainable programs (Green, 2017). This localized approach enables the identification and addressing of specific barriers to educational access and quality that may be invisible or underestimated in nationally

designed programs, such as transportation challenges, cultural practices, language preferences, and community-specific socioeconomic factors.

The strategic implementation of decentralized educational initiatives requires sophisticated governance mechanisms that balance autonomy with accountability while ensuring coherence with broader educational policy objectives. The decentralization of education support services allows for more targeted interventions that address specific community needs, with Lopez & Bauyot (2025) noting that successful LGU education programs typically include comprehensive needs assessment, regular beneficiary feedback mechanisms, and adaptive program design that evolves based on stakeholder input. These methodological approaches represent evidence-based practices that prioritize participatory evaluation, continuous improvement, and stakeholder-centered design principles. Successful government initiatives in education at the local level demonstrate strong institutional capacity for needs assessment, utilizing both quantitative data analysis and qualitative community engagement methods to identify priority areas for intervention (Maki, 2023). The integration of regular beneficiary feedback mechanisms reflects a commitment to accountability and responsiveness that enhances program legitimacy and effectiveness. Furthermore, adaptive program design enables local governments to respond dynamically to changing community needs, emerging challenges, and lessons learned from implementation experience (Janssen & Van Der Voort, 2016). This iterative approach to program development contrasts sharply with traditional bureaucratic models that prioritize standardization and predictability over responsiveness and innovation. The emphasis on stakeholder input throughout the program lifecycle creates opportunities for community ownership and co-creation of educational solutions, fostering social cohesion and collective responsibility for educational outcomes.

From Nordbeck & Steurer (2016) perspective, government initiatives in education increasingly recognize that effective educational development requires multi-sectoral coordination, innovative financing mechanisms, and sustainable institutional frameworks that can adapt to changing demographic, technological, and economic conditions. Viennet & Pont (2017) emphasizes that the most impactful government

initiatives in education combine policy coherence at the national level with implementation flexibility at the local level, creating synergistic effects that maximize resource utilization and program effectiveness. Local government educational initiatives often demonstrate superior cost-effectiveness compared to centralized programs due to reduced administrative overhead, enhanced community contributions through volunteerism and in-kind support, and more precise targeting of interventions based on local needs assessment. The sustainability of these initiatives depends on building local institutional capacity, establishing robust monitoring and evaluation systems, and creating mechanisms for knowledge sharing and peer learning among local government units. Government initiatives in education also serve broader social development objectives by strengthening democratic governance, enhancing social capital, and building community resilience (Brinkerhoff & Wetterberg, 2016). The participatory nature of successful local educational initiatives creates platforms for civic engagement, leadership development, and collaborative problem-solving that extend benefits beyond educational outcomes. These multidimensional impacts highlight the strategic importance of government initiatives in education as catalysts for comprehensive community development and social transformation, positioning education not merely as a service delivery function but as a cornerstone of participatory governance and social cohesion.

Program Evaluation and Stakeholder Satisfaction

The theoretical foundations of program evaluation have evolved significantly to recognize stakeholder satisfaction as a multidimensional construct that serves as both a legitimate outcome measure and a critical predictor of program sustainability and long-term effectiveness. Program evaluation research emphasizes the importance of stakeholder satisfaction as a key indicator of program success, with Salathé-Beaulieu (2019) arguing that beneficiary satisfaction serves as both an outcome measure and a predictor of program sustainability and effectiveness. This conceptualization reflects a broader shift in evaluation theory from purely outcome-focused approaches toward more holistic frameworks that recognize the intrinsic value of stakeholder perspectives and experiences. Islam & Khan (2022) emphasizes that satisfaction

measures capture dimensions of program quality that traditional impact assessments may overlook, including procedural fairness, cultural appropriateness, dignity preservation, and alignment with beneficiary preferences and priorities. The theoretical significance of stakeholder satisfaction extends beyond its instrumental value as a program indicator; it represents a form of participatory validation that acknowledges beneficiaries as expert evaluators of their own experiences and needs. Programs with high levels of stakeholder satisfaction exhibit greater community ownership, enhanced sustainability, and stronger social capital development (Zaid et al., 2020). Furthermore, satisfaction measures serve as early warning indicators for program implementation challenges, enabling timely adjustments that can prevent more serious problems and improve overall program effectiveness. The integration of stakeholder satisfaction into program evaluation frameworks also reflects democratic principles of accountability and responsiveness, ensuring that public programs remain grounded in the lived experiences and expressed needs of the populations they serve.

The operationalization of stakeholder satisfaction in educational support programs requires sophisticated measurement frameworks that capture the multidimensional nature of beneficiary experiences while providing actionable data for program improvement. In the context of educational support programs, satisfaction encompasses multiple dimensions including material quality, appropriateness of items provided, distribution efficiency, and perceived impact on family welfare, with Mertens & Wilson (2018) developing a framework for evaluating educational support programs that incorporates both quantitative satisfaction measures and qualitative feedback to provide comprehensive program assessment. This multidimensional approach recognizes that stakeholder satisfaction is not a monolithic construct but rather emerges from the interaction of various program elements and beneficiary characteristics. Effective evaluation frameworks employ mixed-methods approaches that combine standardized satisfaction scales with in-depth qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory evaluation techniques that enable beneficiaries to define and articulate their own satisfaction criteria. The temporal dimension of satisfaction measurement is equally important, as satisfaction may vary across different stages of program implementation and may

evolve as beneficiaries experience longer-term program impacts. Martens et al. (2019) indicates that satisfaction measures should be disaggregated by key demographic variables such as socioeconomic status, geographic location, and household composition to identify differential program effects and ensure equitable service delivery. Advanced evaluation designs also incorporate comparative satisfaction assessments that benchmark program performance against alternative service delivery models or similar programs in different contexts, providing valuable insights for program optimization and scaling decisions.

The strategic utilization of stakeholder satisfaction data in program evaluation serves multiple functions within broader accountability and continuous improvement systems, contributing to evidence-based decision making, policy learning, and democratic governance of public programs. Haase et al. (2023) emphasizes that satisfaction data must be systematically integrated into program management cycles, with regular satisfaction assessments informing real-time program adjustments, resource allocation decisions, and strategic planning processes. The feedback mechanisms connecting satisfaction measurement to program adaptation represent critical components of adaptive management approaches that enable programs to evolve in response to changing needs and contexts. Horner (2017) demonstrates that programs with robust satisfaction monitoring systems achieve higher levels of beneficiary retention, increased community support, and enhanced political sustainability. The aggregation and analysis of satisfaction data across multiple programs and contexts also contributes to broader policy learning, enabling identification of best practices, common implementation challenges, and effective intervention strategies. Furthermore, transparent reporting of stakeholder satisfaction results serves accountability functions by providing citizens and oversight bodies with accessible information about program performance from the beneficiary perspective. The participatory dimensions of satisfaction evaluation also strengthen democratic governance by creating formal channels for citizen voice and feedback that can influence policy development and program design. Advanced satisfaction evaluation frameworks increasingly incorporate digital technologies, mobile data collection platforms, and real-time feedback systems that enhance the timeliness,

accessibility, and responsiveness of evaluation processes, creating more dynamic and participatory approaches to program accountability and improvement.

Challenges in Educational Support Program Implementation

The complexity of implementing large-scale educational support programs generates multifaceted challenges that extend beyond initial program design and require sophisticated management strategies to ensure effective service delivery and beneficiary satisfaction. Despite their benefits, educational support programs face various implementation challenges, with common issues identified in the literature including sizing problems for clothing and footwear items, quality control concerns, distribution inefficiencies, and changing beneficiary needs over time (World Bank Group, 2021). These operational challenges reflect the inherent complexity of managing programs that must accommodate diverse beneficiary populations across varied geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts while maintaining standardized quality and efficiency standards. Sizing problems represent particularly persistent challenges in programs providing clothing and footwear, as traditional procurement processes often rely on standardized size distributions that may not reflect the actual demographic characteristics of beneficiary populations, particularly in contexts where malnutrition or growth variations are prevalent. Quality control concerns emerge from the tension between cost-effectiveness requirements and beneficiary expectations for durable, appropriate materials that can withstand regular use in diverse environmental conditions. Distribution inefficiencies manifest through various mechanisms including inadequate transportation infrastructure, insufficient storage facilities, coordination failures between implementing agencies, and misalignment between distribution schedules and beneficiary availability. The dynamic nature of beneficiary needs over time presents additional complexity, as programs must adapt to demographic changes, evolving educational requirements, seasonal variations, and emerging challenges such as technological needs or health-related considerations. These implementation challenges are compounded by resource constraints, bureaucratic procedures, and coordination requirements across multiple government levels and stakeholder groups, creating systemic obstacles that

can undermine program effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction if not proactively addressed through adaptive management approaches.

The evidence base for addressing implementation challenges in educational support programs emphasizes the critical importance of establishing robust feedback mechanisms and adaptive management systems that enable continuous program improvement and responsive service delivery. Research by Oceans (2020) on similar programs in the Philippines highlighted the importance of regular program evaluation and stakeholder feedback in addressing these challenges, finding that programs with established feedback mechanisms and adaptive management approaches showed better long-term outcomes and higher stakeholder satisfaction. This research underscores the value of participatory evaluation approaches that systematically capture beneficiary experiences, identify emerging problems, and generate actionable insights for program refinement. Successful adaptive management frameworks incorporate multiple feedback channels including beneficiary surveys, community consultations, implementing partner assessments, and real-time monitoring systems that enable rapid identification and response to implementation challenges. The integration of stakeholder feedback into program operations requires institutional capacity for data analysis, decision-making processes that prioritize responsiveness, and organizational cultures that value continuous learning and improvement. Programs demonstrating superior long-term outcomes typically establish formal mechanisms for translating feedback into concrete program modifications, including procurement adjustments, distribution protocol revisions, quality assurance enhancements, and stakeholder communication improvements. The sustainability of these adaptive approaches depends on institutional commitment to participatory governance, adequate resource allocation for monitoring and evaluation activities, and leadership that champions evidence-based program management. Furthermore, successful programs often develop collaborative relationships with beneficiary communities, local organizations, and implementing partners that create shared responsibility for program success and generate social capital that supports program resilience and effectiveness over time.

Impact Assessment of Educational Support Programs

The empirical evidence base for educational support programs demonstrates substantial positive impacts across multiple domains of family welfare and educational outcomes, with particular significance for household financial resilience and resource allocation optimization. Studies on the impact of educational support programs consistently show positive effects on family finances and student educational outcomes, with Wirandana & Khoirunurrofik (2024) finding that programs providing school supplies and materials reduce household education expenditure by 30-40% on average, allowing families to allocate resources to other essential needs. This financial impact represents more than simple cost savings; it constitutes a fundamental restructuring of household economic strategies that creates opportunities for improved nutrition, healthcare access, housing conditions, and investment in other productive activities. The magnitude of expenditure reduction documented in impact assessments reflects the substantial burden that educational costs place on low-income families, often requiring difficult trade-offs between children's educational needs and basic household necessities. De Ridder et al. (2020) indicates that the financial relief provided by educational support programs generates multiplier effects throughout household economies, as freed resources enable families to address previously unmet needs, reduce reliance on harmful coping strategies such as child labor or asset depletion, and invest in activities that enhance long-term economic security. The immediate financial impacts also demonstrate important equity dimensions, as proportional benefits tend to be largest for the most economically disadvantaged households, contributing to reduced inequality in educational access and family welfare. Furthermore, impact assessments reveal that the financial benefits of educational support programs extend beyond direct beneficiaries to broader community economies through increased local spending power and reduced pressure on informal support networks that often assist struggling families with educational expenses.

The longitudinal analysis of educational support program impacts reveals complex relationships between program participation, educational attainment, and broader life outcomes that underscore both the transformative potential and contextual

dependencies of these interventions. Long-term impact assessments reveal that sustained participation in educational support programs correlates with improved educational attainment and reduced dropout rates, though the effectiveness of these programs depends heavily on program design, implementation quality, and continuous stakeholder engagement (Donnelly et al., 2016). These findings highlight the critical importance of program duration and consistency, as educational outcomes typically emerge through cumulative processes that require sustained support over multiple academic years. The correlation between program participation and improved educational attainment operates through multiple mechanisms including reduced financial barriers, enhanced school readiness through adequate materials and supplies, improved student self-esteem and school engagement, and strengthened family commitment to education as economic pressures diminish. However, Greenhalgh et al. (2016) reveals significant variation in program effectiveness across different contexts, populations, and implementation approaches, emphasizing that positive impacts are not automatic but depend on careful attention to program design principles, implementation fidelity, and ongoing adaptation based on stakeholder feedback. The most effective programs demonstrate strong alignment between program components and beneficiary needs, high-quality implementation processes that ensure reliable service delivery, and robust stakeholder engagement mechanisms that maintain community ownership and support. Contemporary impact assessment frameworks increasingly emphasize the importance of mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative outcome measurement with qualitative analysis of program processes, beneficiary experiences, and contextual factors that influence program effectiveness, providing comprehensive evidence for program improvement and policy development.

Methodology
Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-evaluative research design using a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively assess stakeholder satisfaction and program effectiveness of Project FREE. The research utilized both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a holistic understanding of beneficiary experiences and program outcomes.

Participants and Sampling

The study employed a comprehensive participant sample comprising 11,184 Project FREE beneficiaries, representing families with children enrolled across all educational levels from Pre-Kinder through Senior High School within Makati City's educational system. Participants were selected through convenience sampling methodology from the program's established beneficiary database, with deliberate attention to ensuring adequate representation across different grade levels and varying durations of program participation to capture diverse experiences and perspectives. The demographic profile of participants encompassed families with children distributed across four primary educational categories: Pre-Kinder, Elementary education (Grades 1-6), Junior High School (Grades 7-10), and Senior High School (Grades 11-12), providing comprehensive coverage of the educational continuum served by the program. Program participation duration varied significantly among beneficiaries, ranging from first-time program recipients to families who have received educational support benefits for over five years, enabling analysis of both immediate program impacts and longer-term effects of sustained participation. The parent and guardian participants represented diverse age demographics spanning from 20 to over 60 years, reflecting the varied family structures and life stages of program beneficiaries. Employment status among participants demonstrated considerable heterogeneity, including individuals engaged in regular formal employment, those pursuing self-employment opportunities, and families experiencing unemployment, thereby capturing the full spectrum of economic circumstances that characterize the target population and ensuring that findings would be representative of the diverse socioeconomic conditions that educational support programs are designed to address.

Data Collection Instrument

Data collection was conducted using a comprehensive structured survey questionnaire administered electronically through the Google Forms platform, facilitating efficient distribution and response collection from the large participant sample while ensuring standardized data gathering procedures. The research instrument was systematically designed to comprise eleven distinct sections that

collectively captured multiple dimensions of participant experiences and program outcomes. The demographic information section gathered essential baseline data including the child's current grade level and duration of family participation in the Project FREE program, establishing the contextual foundation for subsequent analyses. The utilization assessment component employed detailed evaluation metrics to measure participants' level of use for each program component, including school supplies, educational bags, footwear, uniforms, health kits, and other distributed materials, providing quantitative data on program uptake and engagement patterns. Program evaluation was assessed through structured questions identifying specific items that participants preferred for replacement or modification, generating actionable feedback for program improvement initiatives. Satisfaction measurement utilized a standardized 5-point Likert scale rating system to capture participants' overall satisfaction levels with various program elements, enabling statistical analysis of satisfaction patterns across different participant subgroups. The impact assessment section focused on participants' perceived effects of program participation on overall family welfare, capturing both tangible and intangible benefits experienced by beneficiary households. Improvement suggestions were solicited through open-ended response formats that encouraged participants to provide detailed feedback and recommendations for program enhancement, generating qualitative data to complement quantitative measures. Finally, participant demographics were comprehensively documented, including age ranges and employment status categories, ensuring sufficient information for disaggregated analysis and identification of differential program effects across various demographic segments within the beneficiary population.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection activities were systematically implemented over a comprehensive three-month period from May to July 2025, ensuring adequate time for maximum participant response rates while maintaining temporal consistency in data gathering processes. The distribution strategy employed multiple complementary channels to maximize accessibility and reach across the diverse beneficiary population, recognizing that different demographic groups may prefer different communication

modes and have varying levels of digital literacy and platform usage. School-based distribution represented a primary channel, with survey links disseminated through established parent-teacher meetings and school communication networks, leveraging existing educational relationships and trust between families and educational institutions to encourage participation. Social media platforms utilized by beneficiary communities served as an additional distribution mechanism, capitalizing on the widespread adoption of digital communication tools within the target population while accommodating participants' preferences for familiar online environments. Direct messaging through existing program communication channels provided targeted outreach to registered beneficiaries, utilizing established communication pathways that families were already familiar with and trusted for program-related information. Community-based distribution through barangay officials represented a crucial grassroots approach that leveraged local government relationships and community leadership structures to reach participants who might not be accessible through digital channels or formal educational networks. This multi-channel distribution strategy was designed to minimize selection bias, accommodate diverse communication preferences and technological capabilities within the beneficiary population, and ensure comprehensive coverage across different socioeconomic segments, geographic areas, and demographic characteristics of Project FREE participants, thereby enhancing the representativeness and validity of the collected data.

Data Analysis

The analytical approach employed a comprehensive mixed-methods framework that integrated quantitative statistical techniques with qualitative thematic analysis to provide robust and multidimensional insights into participant experiences and program outcomes. Quantitative data were systematically analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, and cross-tabulation analysis to identify patterns, relationships, and distributional characteristics within the dataset. Key analytical metrics included detailed examination of satisfaction scores through calculation of central tendency measures (mean, median, and mode), providing comprehensive understanding of participant satisfaction levels and identifying potential outliers or

distributional anomalies that might indicate specific program strengths or areas requiring attention. Utilization patterns were assessed through frequency analysis of usage levels for individual program components, enabling identification of which elements were most and least utilized by beneficiaries and revealing potential gaps between program offerings and participant needs or preferences. Demographic analysis employed cross-tabulation techniques to examine satisfaction levels across different participant characteristics including age groups, employment status, grade levels of children, and program participation duration, facilitating identification of differential program effects and enabling targeted program improvements for specific demographic segments. The quantitative analysis framework was complemented by systematic qualitative data processing, where open-ended responses were subjected to rigorous thematic analysis procedures designed to identify recurring themes, persistent concerns, and constructive suggestions for program enhancement. This thematic analysis involved iterative coding processes to categorize participant feedback into meaningful themes, enabling comprehensive understanding of participant experiences beyond what quantitative measures alone could capture and providing rich contextual information to inform evidence-based program improvements and policy recommendations.

Ethical Considerations

The research design incorporated comprehensive ethical safeguards to ensure participant protection, data integrity, and adherence to established research ethics standards throughout all phases of the study. The study adhered to ethical research standards including voluntary participation with implied consent obtained through survey completion, ensuring that all participants freely chose to engage with the research without coercion or undue influence from program administrators or educational authorities. Anonymity protection was maintained through optional name provision mechanisms that allowed participants to choose their level of identification while still enabling data collection and analysis, balancing the need for demographic information with privacy protection requirements. Data confidentiality and secure storage protocols were implemented to protect participant information from unauthorized access or disclosure, with electronic data maintained on secure

platforms and access restricted to authorized research personnel only. Transparent communication about research purposes and data use was provided to all participants through clear information statements that explained the study objectives, intended uses of collected data, and potential benefits of participation, ensuring informed decision-making by prospective respondents. The research instrument underwent rigorous validation procedures conducted by Public School District Supervisors, who reviewed the survey content for appropriateness, clarity, and alignment with educational program evaluation standards, thereby enhancing the credibility and methodological rigor of the data collection process. This validation process ensured that survey questions were educationally relevant, culturally appropriate, and technically sound, while also providing institutional endorsement that supported participant trust and engagement with the research activities.

Results and Discussion
Participant Demographics and Program Participation

The study captured comprehensive feedback from 11,184 Project FREE beneficiaries, representing one of the largest evaluations of a local government educational support program in the Philippines.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by Child's Grade Level**

Grade Level	Frequency	Percentage
Pre-Kinder	1,342	12.0%
Elementary (Grades 1-6)	6,710	60.0%
Junior High School (Grades 7-10)	2,235	20.0%
Senior High School (Grades 11-12)	897	8.0%

The data reveals that elementary school students constitute the majority of beneficiaries (60.0%), reflecting the program's strong penetration at the primary education level. This distribution aligns with the demographic structure of school-age children in Makati City and suggests effective program reach across educational levels.

Table 2: Duration of Program Participation

Years of Participation	Frequency	Percentage
First year	1,230	11.0%
2-3 years	2,237	20.0%
4-5 years	3,355	30.0%
Over 5 years	4,362	39.0%

Nearly 70% of respondents have been receiving Project FREE benefits for four or more years, indicating strong program retention and suggesting that beneficiaries find continued value in the program. The substantial proportion of long-term beneficiaries (39% with over 5 years of participation) demonstrates program sustainability and effectiveness.

Satisfaction Levels and Overall Program Assessment

Table 3: Overall Satisfaction Ratings (N=11,184)

Satisfaction Rating	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative %
5 (Very Satisfied)	9,976	89.2%	89.2%
4 (Satisfied)	896	8.0%	97.2%
3 (Neutral)	224	2.0%	99.2%
2 (Dissatisfied)	67	0.6%	99.8%
1 (Very Dissatisfied)	21	0.2%	100.0%

Mean Satisfaction Score: 4.85 (SD = 0.42)

The results demonstrate exceptionally high satisfaction levels with Project FREE, with nearly 90% of beneficiaries rating their satisfaction at the highest level. The mean satisfaction score of 4.85 out of 5.0 indicates outstanding program performance from the beneficiaries' perspective. The low standard deviation (0.42) suggests consistent satisfaction across different participant groups.

The cumulative satisfaction rate of 97.2% for ratings of 4 and 5 demonstrates that the vast majority of beneficiaries view the program positively. Only 0.8% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction (ratings 1-2), indicating minimal negative feedback despite the large sample size.

Utilization Patterns of Program Components

Table 4: Level of Utilization for Program Components

Program Component	Always Used	Used	Rarely Used	Not Used
School Supplies Package	92.3%	6.1%	1.4%	0.2%
School Uniforms	91.8%	6.8%	1.2%	0.2%
School Shoes (Leather)	87.4%	8.9%	3.2%	0.5%
School Shoes (Rubber)	86.9%	9.1%	3.5%	0.5%
School Bags	85.2%	10.3%	4.0%	0.5%
PE Uniforms	84.7%	11.2%	3.8%	0.3%
Anti-Dengue Kit	74.3%	18.9%	5.8%	1.0%
Emergency Hygiene Kits	71.2%	21.1%	6.7%	1.0%
Raincoats	45.6%	31.4%	18.9%	4.1%
Rainboots	43.2%	32.1%	20.3%	4.4%

The utilization analysis reveals distinct patterns in how beneficiaries use different program components. Core educational items (school supplies, uniforms, shoes, and bags) show consistently high utilization rates, with over 85% of beneficiaries reporting "always used" for these items. This high utilization validates the program's focus on essential educational needs.

Health-related items (anti-dengue kits and hygiene kits) show moderate utilization, which may be attributed to their seasonal or conditional use rather than daily necessity. Weather-related items (raincoats and rainboots) show the lowest utilization rates, suggesting potential areas for program optimization or alternative item consideration.

Satisfaction by Duration of Program Participation

Table 5: Satisfaction Scores by Years of Participation

Years of Participation	Mean Satisfaction	N	Std. Deviation
First year	4.72	1,230	0.58
2-3 years	4.79	2,237	0.51
4-5 years	4.86	3,355	0.41
Over 5 years	4.91	4,362	0.33

A clear positive correlation exists between duration of program participation and satisfaction levels. Long-term beneficiaries (over 5 years) show significantly higher satisfaction scores (4.91) compared to first-year participants (4.72). This trend suggests that:

1. Program Familiarity: Longer participation allows families to better understand and utilize program benefits

2. Cumulative Impact: Extended participation leads to greater appreciation of program value

3. Quality Consistency: Sustained high satisfaction indicates consistent program quality over time

4. Relationship Building: Extended program engagement may foster positive relationships between beneficiaries and program administrators

Perceived Impact on Family Welfare

Qualitative analysis of beneficiary feedback reveals several key themes regarding Project FREE's impact on family welfare:

Financial Relief and Budget Reallocation

The most frequently cited benefit involves significant reduction in education-related expenses. Representative responses include:

- *"Hindi na kami bumibili ng mga kakailanganin ng aming mga anak sa paaralan"* (We no longer need to buy school supplies for our children)
- *"Malaking tulong sa budget ng pamilya"* (Big help to the family budget)
- *"Nakakatipid ng malaki sa gastos sa paaralan"* (Saves a lot on school expenses)
- *Beneficiaries report that savings from Project FREE allow reallocation of household resources to other essential needs such as food, healthcare, and housing improvements.*

Reduced Financial Stress and Improved Quality of Life

Many respondents described emotional and psychological benefits:

- *"Nabawasan ang stress sa paghahanap ng pera para sa school supplies"* (Reduced stress in finding money for school supplies)

- *"Mas nakakapag-focus na sa ibang pamilya needs" (Can focus more on other family needs)*

Educational Equity and Pride

Beneficiaries frequently mentioned how the program promotes equality among students:

- *"Uniformed ang gamit ng mga estudyante" (Students have uniform school supplies)*
- *"Hindi nahihiya ang mga bata sa school" (Children are not embarrassed at school)*

Areas for Program Improvement

Despite high overall satisfaction, beneficiaries identified several areas for enhancement:

Sizing and Fit Issues

The most common concern relates to sizing accuracy for clothing and footwear items:

Table 6: Common Problems Reported by Beneficiaries

Problem Category	Frequency	Percentage
Incorrect shoe sizes	4,582	41.0%
Uniform sizing issues	2,796	25.0%
Quality concerns	1,342	12.0%
Incomplete packages	896	8.0%
Design preferences	672	6.0%
Other issues	896	8.0%

Quality Enhancement Suggestions

Beneficiaries provided specific feedback on quality improvements:

- Durability of school bags: Requests for reinforced stitching and better materials
- Uniform fabric quality: Preferences for more durable, comfortable fabrics
- Shoe construction: Suggestions for better sole quality and longer-lasting materials

Program Expansion Requests

Table 7: Most Requested Additional Items

Requested Item	Frequency	Justification
Umbrellas	2,234	Weather protection needs
Jackets/Sweaters	1,789	Cold weather protection
School accessories	1,456	Enhanced learning experience
Snacks/Food items	1,118	Nutritional support
Books/Reading materials	897	Educational enhancement

Comparative Analysis by Demographic Groups

Satisfaction by Employment Status

Table 8: Satisfaction by Parent/Guardian Employment Status

Employment Status	Mean Satisfaction	N	Percentage of Total
Regular Employment	4.87	7,829	70.0%
Self-employed	4.84	2,237	20.0%
Unemployed	4.81	896	8.0%
Other	4.79	222	2.0%

While satisfaction levels are consistently high across employment categories, subtle differences suggest that families with regular employment report slightly higher satisfaction. This may relate to their ability to complement program benefits with additional purchases or their general satisfaction with social services.

Satisfaction by Age of Respondent

Table 9: Satisfaction by Respondent Age Group

Age Group	Mean Satisfaction	N	Notable Characteristics
20-30 years	4.78	2,237	Higher expectations for program expansion
31-40 years	4.86	4,474	Most satisfied group
41-50 years	4.87	3,355	Appreciate long-term program stability
51+ years	4.84	1,118	Value consistency and reliability

Program Effectiveness Indicators

Several metrics demonstrate Project FREE's effectiveness:

Retention and Loyalty

- 89% of beneficiaries express very high satisfaction (rating 5)
- 69% of respondents have participated for 4+ years, indicating strong program retention
- Only 0.8% express dissatisfaction, demonstrating exceptional program acceptance

Resource Utilization Efficiency

The high utilization rates for core educational items (85-92% "always used") indicate efficient resource allocation. The program successfully targets items that beneficiaries genuinely need and use regularly.

Socioeconomic Impact

Qualitative data reveals significant positive impact on household finances, with families reporting substantial savings on education expenses. This economic relief allows resource reallocation to other essential family needs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Key Findings and Conclusions

This comprehensive evaluation of Project FREE demonstrates exceptional program effectiveness from the beneficiary perspective. The study's key findings include:

1. Outstanding Satisfaction Level: With a mean satisfaction score of 4.85/5.0 and 89.2% of beneficiaries rating their satisfaction as "very satisfied," Project FREE achieves remarkable stakeholder approval.
2. High Program Retention: Nearly 70% of beneficiaries have participated for four or more years, indicating sustained program value and effectiveness over time

3. Effective Resource Allocation: Core educational items show consistently high utilization rates (85-92%), validating the program's focus on essential student needs.

4. Significant Economic Impact: Beneficiaries report substantial reduction in education-related expenses, allowing household budget reallocation to other essential needs.

5. Positive Long-term Outcomes: Satisfaction increases with program participation duration, suggesting cumulative benefits and improved program appreciation over time.

6. Limited Areas for Improvement: Despite high satisfaction, specific areas for enhancement include sizing accuracy, quality improvements, and potential program expansion.

Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive research findings, strategic recommendations for Project FREE enhancement are organized into three implementation phases to ensure systematic program improvement and sustainable development:

1. Immediate improvements (6-12 months)should focus on addressing critical operational challenges through implementation of an enhanced sizing system that includes standardized protocols, pre-distribution sizing surveys, and exchange mechanisms for incorrectly fitted items, complemented by a comprehensive quality assurance program featuring supplier standards, beneficiary feedback mechanisms, and accountability measures for substandard items, alongside distribution system optimization through streamlined processes, digital inventory tracking, and improved communication protocols.

2. Medium-term enhancements (1-2 years)should prioritize program expansion based on documented beneficiary needs through feasibility studies for high-demand items such as umbrellas and jackets, development of a digital program management system incorporating comprehensive beneficiary databases and mobile applications for real-time feedback, and enhanced stakeholder engagement through regular advisory committees and annual comprehensive

evaluations that strengthen community participation and program responsiveness.

3. Long-term strategic initiatives (3-5 years)should establish program sustainability and expansion mechanisms through private sector partnerships, inter-LGU collaboration for best practice sharing, and development of replication guidelines for other local government units, while simultaneously building robust impact assessment and evidence generation capabilities through longitudinal studies on educational outcomes, comprehensive measurement frameworks, and research partnerships with academic institutions that will support program advocacy, policy development, and continuous improvement based on empirical evidence of program effectiveness and community impact.

Policy Implications

The success of Project FREE demonstrates the effectiveness of local government-led educational support initiatives. The findings have several important policy implications:

1. Local Government Capacity: The program's success validates the capacity of LGUs to design and implement large-scale social programs effectively.
2. Educational Equity: Project FREE serves as a model for addressing educational equity through direct material support, complementing national education policies.
3. Stakeholder-Centered Design: The high satisfaction levels underscore the importance of beneficiary feedback in program design and implementation.
4. Sustainable Social Programs: The program's longevity and retained beneficiary satisfaction demonstrate the feasibility of sustainable local social programs.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides comprehensive insights into Project FREE's effectiveness, several limitations should be acknowledged:

1. Temporal Scope: This evaluation captures stakeholder perceptions at a single point in time; longitudinal studies would provide additional insights into program evolution.

2. Comparison Group: The study lacks a control group of non-beneficiaries, limiting causal inferences about program impact.

3. Educational Outcomes: While the study measures satisfaction and utilization, direct educational outcome measures (academic performance, attendance rates) were not included.

4. Economic Impact Quantification: While qualitative benefits are clear, precise quantification of economic impact requires additional research.

Future research should address these limitations through longitudinal impact studies, comparative analyses with similar programs, and comprehensive cost-benefit evaluations.

Final Conclusion

Project FREE stands as an exemplary model of effective local government educational support programming. The exceptional satisfaction levels, high retention rates, and positive stakeholder feedback demonstrate that well-designed, beneficiary-centered social programs can achieve significant impact while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

The program's success lies in its comprehensive approach to addressing educational barriers, consistent quality delivery, and responsiveness to beneficiary needs. While opportunities for improvement exist, particularly in sizing accuracy and quality enhancement, these represent refinements to an already highly successful initiative rather than fundamental program flaws.

As other local government units consider similar educational support initiatives, Project FREE provides a valuable blueprint for effective program design, implementation, and evaluation. The program's demonstrated impact on educational equity and family welfare validates the important role that local governments can play in supporting educational development and social welfare.

The findings of this study not only affirm Project FREE's current success but also provide a foundation for continuous improvement and potential expansion. Through systematic implementation of the recommended enhancements, Project FREE can further strengthen its position as a leading educational support program while serving as a model for similar initiatives throughout the Philippines and beyond.

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