YES TO SPES? The Special Program for the Employment of Students (SPES) Through the Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau

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Abstract: *The Special Program for the Employment of Students (SPES) is a nationwide government project in the Philippines that aims to encourage students to pursue their education by securing jobs and compensation. In the case of the City of Manila, the MYDWB or the Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau is the one handling the applications and the implementation of the SPES.*

This paper analyzes the importance and the effectiveness of the program using Anthony Giddens' Theory of Structuration (1979) and Deepa Narayan's Empowerment Framework (2005). Structuration was used here to identify how the structure of the program allows and or hinders the efficiency of the program as viewed by Giddens as both enabling and disabling. Through this, we will be able to know how the beneficiaries of the program were enabled by the structure of the program. The Empowerment framework on the other hand was utilized to analyze how the program empowers the beneficiaries and at the same time how it changes their capabilities and exercising their agency.

The conclusion of this paper will fall on the assessment of the effectiveness of the program in terms of empowering the beneficiaries and at the same time provide insights on how the government could improve the structure of the program.

I.   Introduction

This paper aims to examine the effectiveness of the Special Program for the Employment of Students (SPES) and how it encourages the youth to take part in nation-building and how the program helps the youth move out of poverty in the City of Manila. Most of the poverty alleviation and program evaluation literatures in the Philippines are focused on the conditional cash transfers and the models of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). Thus, I would like to delve on the unexplored lens of helping students find jobs in order for them to continue their education. We can compare the responses from those who have already benefited from the SPES--these are those who already finished the program; and those who are currently benefitting from it.

Hence, the results from the data gathered will allow us to formulate suggestions for the betterment and the development of the program using the ideas, experiences, and the perspectives of the beneficiaries. Also, we will be able to analyze whether the program is responsive to the needs of the beneficiaries: in the case of the youth of the City of Manila, faithful to its mandate, and its relevance to the needs of the youth in general.

Towards the end, this paper will describe the Special Program for the Employment of Students in the case of the City of Manila and analyze its impacts towards its beneficiaries. It also aims to (1) understand the experiences of the current and graduate beneficiaries of the program and (2) clarify how the program encourages the youth and gives them capacity to equip themselves.

Specifically, the paper aims to answer the following questions: (1) Where and how did the beneficiaries come to know about the program? (2) What are the motivations of the beneficiaries upon joining the program? (3) How did the program help the beneficiaries and their families? (4) What are the over-all perception of the beneficiaries towards the program and their suggestions for the betterment of the program? (5) How did the program empower the beneficiaries and the youth in general?

The Role of the Youth in Nation-Building

The Philippines' declaration of state policies and principles as stated in 1987 Constitution recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building. Art. II, Sec. 13 declares that: "The State recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and shall promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being. It shall inculcate in the youth patriotism and nationalism, and encourage their involvement in public and civic affairs." Hector De Leon (2008) noted that the declaration is related to the following provisions: (1) today's youth, more knowledgeable and intelligent: due to the availability and easier access to information are

well-informed, articulate and politically conscious because of the internet and other forms of technology; (2) it is the duty of the state: the youth sector is a reservoir of manpower and are potential community leaders; and (3) Today's youth, tomorrow's leaders: by harnessing their enterprising spirit and progressive idealism, the youth can become effective actors in our collective effort to build a modern and developed Philippines.In turn, the youth is seen as a marketable resource and pool of manpower that makes it necessary for the government to nurture, train and protect it for the future of our country.

There are a number of legislations that would show how the government gives importance to the potentials of the youth and ensuring their welfare. (1) R.A. 7160 otherwise known as The Local Government Code declares December 7 to 11 of every year as "Youth Week" as stipulated in Chapter 10, Sec. 439, to give importance to the significant role that the young people play in nation-building. And also, (2) R.A. 8044 otherwise known as "Youth in Nation-Building Act" that established the National Youth Commission (NYC) that is mandated to create proposals and programs for the specific purpose of developing the Filipino youth. These states the importance of the role of the youth in nation-building and at the same time shows the optimism of the government towards the youth in general and harnessing talents and new and innovative ideas for the development of the country.

The Special Education for the Employment of Students

The Special Program for the Employment of Students (SPES) is a nationwide program of the Department of Labor and Employment as mandated under Republic Act No. 7323 otherwise known as "An Act To Help Poor But Deserving Students Pursue Their Education By Encouraging Their Employment During Summer and/or Christmas Vacations, Through Incentives Granted to Employers, Allowing Them to Pay Only Sixty Per Centum of Their Salaries or Wages and The Forty Per Centum Through Education Vouchers To Be Paid By The Government, Prohibiting and Penalizing the Filing of Fraudulent and Fictitious, and For Other Purposes." Under this law, the Secretary of the Department of Labor and Employment is designated as the program director of the special program for the employment of students (DOLE 2015).

Republic Act No. 7323 was signed into law by President Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino on March 30, 1992. The law originated in the Upper House of Congress—the Senate and was finally passed by the Bicameral Congress on February 6, 1992 by the Senate and February 3, 1992 by the House of the Representatives, respectively. The law encourages the youth to make their free time productive at the same time become dynamic members of the community and the country. It also encourages students most especially the poor to utilize their time during summer and Christmas vacations and to prepare and earn money that would somehow aid them in their education.

However, due to the changes in the government, the congress passed on April 1, 2009, the amendment on R.A. 7323, and now the Special Program for the Employment of Students is operating under Republic Act No. 9547 otherwise known as "An Act Strengthening and Expanding the Coverage of the Special Program for the Employment of Students Amending For the Purpose Provisions of R.A. No. 7323 Otherwise Known As The Special Program for The Employment of Students." The amended version of the Special Program for the Employment of Students stipulated the conditions that expanded the program. The students that are in the secondary level must only be employed during summer and Christmas vacations, in turn; those who are enrolled in the tertiary, vocational and technical education may be employed at any time of the year.

Under R.A. 9647, the student may be employed in both private and public sectors. Section 1 provides that any person or entity employing at least 10 persons may employ poor but deserving students and pay them a salary or wage not lower than the minimum wage for private employer and the applicable hiring rate for the national and local government agencies; however, Section 2 provides that the sixty per centum, of the said salary or wage shall be paid by the employer and the remaining forty per centumshall be paid by the government in the form a educational vouchers that can be used for the payment of tuition fee. The period of employment shall be from twenty to fifty-two working days only except during Christmas vacation where employment must only be from ten to 15 working days only.Their employment in the company or agency during the Special Program for Employment of Students may be counted as part of the student's probationary period should the student chooses to apply in the office after graduation and that students who were fortunate to be employed in jobs related to their course may earn equivalent academic credits as to their On-The-Job Training as may be determined by the appropriate government agency. Hence, may be considered useful not only in terms of being productive in the summer vacation and in earning money, but it may also serve as substitute subjects and may earn equivalent units in reference to the academic setting.

The applicants for the Special Program for the Employment of Student must be: (1) fifteen to twenty-five years old, (2) poor but deserving students refer to those whose parents combined income together with their own if any does not exceed the annual regional poverty threshold level for a family of six for the preceding year as may be determined by the National Economic Development Authority or NEDA. In the City of Manila, the Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau is the local government office that facilitates the program

instead of the Public Employment Service Office.The MYDWB is tasked by the local government to facilitate all programs and formulate activities specifically for the Manila's youth. On the part of the MYDWB, applicants for the Special Program for the Employment of Students should pass the following documents: (1) Resume, (2) Birth Certificate, (3) Accomplished Application Form, (4) Cedula, (5) Income Tax Return of Parents, (6) Copy of the Tuition Fee of the past semester, and (7) a proof of residence—to ensure that the applicant is from the City of Manila (MYDWB 2015).

The Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau conduct entrance and application examinations for the applicants and after through screening that started in 2013. Purposively, the examination is done as a mechanism to instill exclusivity of the program and to allow the applicant think that being part of the program is a privilege and that they need to be good and work hard during their employment. The examination requirement is an innovation due to the lessons from past SPES graduates and facilitators.

II. Statement Of The Problem

This paper aims to describe the Special Program for the Employment of Students in the case of the City of Manila and analyze its impacts towards its beneficiaries through interviews and narratives that explain their experiences during the program. Specifically, the paper aims to (1) understand the experiences of the current and graduate beneficiaries of the program and (2) clarify on how the program encourages the youth and give them capacity to equip themselves.

In order to achieve the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated:
1. Where and how did the beneficiaries come to know about the program?
2. What are the motivations of the beneficiaries upon joining the program?
3. How did the program help the beneficiaries and their families?
4. What are the over-all perception of the beneficiaries towards the program and their suggestions for the betterment of the program?
5. How did the program empower the beneficiaries and the youth in general?

III. Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative approach and a descriptive method. These are used to search for straightforward answers to questions of special relevance to practitioners and policy makers (Sandelowski 2000). The methods are used in the study as it aims to understand and describe the experiences of the beneficiaries of the program and allow the respondents to share their valuable experiences about the program and utilize these responses to answer the objectives. In this study, in-depth interview was used to get the responses from six respondents in lieu of the first proposed focus group discussions that were not pushed through due to the unavailability of the respondents having conflicts with their jobs and other personal matters.

The study was conducted in the City of Manila and most of the interviews were done near the schools and the workplace of the respondents especially the two respondents that are now currently working as McDonald's service crew under the Special Program for the Employment of Students to put into consideration their personal schedules and financial constraints that is maybe caused by transportation expenses. Purposive sampling was used as the respondents are chosen based on their background of being a graduate and or a current beneficiary of the program. A key-informant interview was conducted with Mr. Robin Carlo Reyes, the head of student affairs of the Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau and a former desk officer for District 4 prior to his current position. Reyes is also a SPES graduate during the incumbency of former city Mayor Alfredo Lim. This information coming from the in-depth and key-informant interviews are used as primary data for post-data analysis.

An interview guide was constructed to facilitate the interview with beneficiaries and the key-informant. This research paper uses narrative and phenomenology as research designs, in order to gather significant experiences from the respondents and derive meaning as to how they explain the phenomenon or the program. The data gathered were compared and contrast in search for commonality and trending in answers. Below is the demographic of the respondents that includes their self-rated family socio-economic class, the school where they finished schooling or are currently enrolled, their family size, and the year where they benefited from the program. Also, the names presented in the table below are not the real names of the respondents to ensure their privacy and safety most especially in this study that revolves around a political program that is executed by the government. However, the name of the key-informant was not changed.

RESPONDENT	SELF-RATED FAMILY SOCIO-ECONOMICLASS	SCHOOL	SPES YEAR	FAMILY SIZE
Robby	Middle Class	Colegio de San Juan de Letran	2010	3
Shiela	Middle Class	Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila	2010	4
Angelo	Poor	Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila	2013	4
Alfred	Poor	Polytechnic University of the Philippines	2011	4
Dan	Poor	Universidad de Manila	2014	6
Mark	Poor	Universidad de Manila	2012 - 2014	5

Table 1.0 Respondent Information

The post-data analysis and key informant interviews were used to answer the objectives. In the analysis of the data gathered, this paper utilizes Anthony Gidden's Structuration Theory and Deepa Narayan's Empowerment Framework: Opportunity Structure and Agency (2005).

Structuration Theory

Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) asserts that human agents produce, reproduce, or modify social structure through their actions (Guevara 2007). Giddens (1976, 1993:169) said that "to enquire into the structuration of social practices is to seek to explain how it comes about that structure is constituted through action, and reciprocally how actions is constituted structurally." Structuration argues that structure and agency are a duality that cannot be conceived of apart from one another and that human practices are recursive-that is, through their activities, individuals create both their consciousness and the structural conditions that make their activities possible (Giddens 1993). This makes the structure to be viewed as enabling and disabling human actions. In this case, we will try to identify how the structure affected the beneficiaries and identify the aspects of their agency that were assumed to be enabled or disabled by the structures.

Empowerment Framework

Deepa Narayan's empowerment framework is used to analyze how the program empowers the beneficiaries and at the same time how it changes their capabilities and exercising their agency. The framework is informed by concepts of social exclusion, which is directly focused on the "nature and causes of deprivation, in a way that takes context dependence as one of its key starting points (de Haan and Dubey 2004; Narayan, 2005:12-18).

In Narayan's Empowerment Framework (2005) the left side box dwells on the opportunity structure that involves dominant institutional climate and dominant social structures. This framework shows that opportunities for poor people to express and realize their interests can spur out in the presence of incentives placed to their access to information, their political inclusion, their ability to hold their leaders accountable, and their capacity for local organizing (2005:13). The lower box however, focuses on dominant social structures and gives importance to openness, competition and conflict. Examinations of social structures are explicitly concerned with "the deliberate actions and inaction" of more powerful groups (Moncrieffe 2004:9; Narayan 2005:14). Formal and informal rules and institutions, or "institutional blueprints," give structure to organizational life, but they do not necessarily control it (Portes 2006:241; Narayan 2005:23), and in this case, the rules are being created by the institution who created the Special Program for the Employment of Students, and that is the government. Alongside with the creation of the program, the scope of beneficiaries was also delineated to identify specific groups or age group that would benefit from the program. The Special Program for the Employment of Students was created to cater the poor but deserving youth to be employed during summer and Christmas vacations for those enrolled in the secondary level and in any time of the year for those who are enrolled in the tertiary level. This delineated scope of the program and the program itself forms the structure. In turn, the possibility of the program of enhancing the skills and empowering the youth is the opportunity that is available upon the creation of the program.
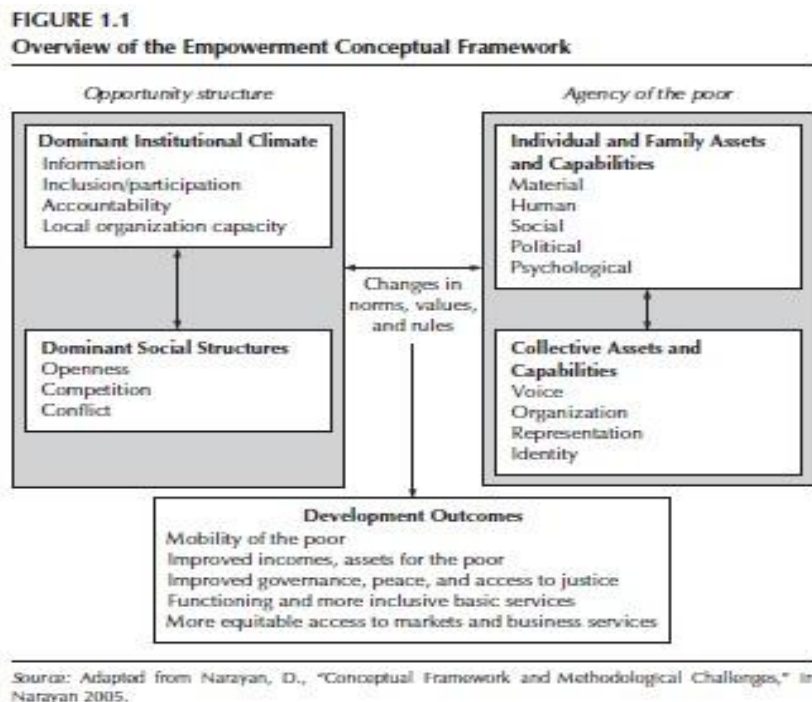
FIGURE 1.1
Overview of the Empowerment Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Empowerment Framework by Deepa Narayan (2005:15)

The right side box revolves around the poor people's agency. It refers to the people's ability to act individually or collectively to further their own interests (Narayan 2005:15). This involves the capacity of the poor to move-out of poverty and to utilize all the opportunities that are useful to aid their alleviation from poverty. In this paper, we will use four out of the five dimensions mentioned in the framework in the Individual and Family Assets and Capabilities box, namely: (1) Human dimension: good health, education, skills; (2) Social dimension: social belonging, leadership, relations of trust, a sense of identity, a belief in values that bring meaning to life, and the capacity to organize; (3) Political dimension: capacity to pursue rights, represent oneself or others, make claims, access information, form associations, and participate in the political life of a community or country; and (4) Psychological dimension: self-esteem, self-confidence, and ability to imaging and aspire to a better future (2005:16). In turn, the right box located at the lower part of the agency of the poor in the framework shows the Collective Assets and Capabilities of the poor and this includes their voice, a recognized organization, a representation, and their identity. However, all these will be utilized in the context of the youth and the poor but deserving youth that is the primary target of the program. In the analysis, these dimensions will be used in understanding the themes and to conclude whether any of the effects of the program falls under these dimensions.

On the other hand, Edralin et.al (2015) also used these dimensions to analyze how actions researches and programs are reflective to the needs of the people. They used four dimensions of empowerment namely: (1) Psychological dimension: self-confidence, self-esteem, creating space, and acquiring knowledge; (2) Economic dimension: income security, entrepreneurial skills, and ownership of productive assets; (3) Social dimension: community action, action for rights, social inclusion, and literacy; and (4) Cultural dimension: redefining cultural rules and norms, and recreating cultural practices.In comparing Narayan's Empowerment framework and Flintan's Dimensions of Empowerment framework, the framework used by Edralin et.al (2015), we can see that the former is basically focused on the role and the relationship of the structure and agents as compared to the latter that is only focused on the dimensions of empowerment. This paper is operating in the assumption of the relationship between structure and agency, in which the structure refers to the Special Program for the Employment of Students and the beneficiaries (graduates and current) are the people with their individual aspect of agency.

This paper will use the empowerment framework as a tool to analyze how the program empowers the youth based on the objectives of the program and the outcome of the program based on the experiences of the beneficiaries. In turn, we will be able to know whether the program is effective or not in the aspect of empowering the youth by using the different dimensions utilized in the framework and at the same time identify the dominant institutional climate and structures that are present in the implementation of the program and in the perception of the graduate and current beneficiaries of the Special Program for the Employment of Students.

Empowerment

Empowerment is defined as a process, by which individuals become proactive in addressing their situation in a way that they are able to gain control and improve access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values, and attitudes (Kar, Pascual & Chickering 1999; Edralin, Tibon & Tugas 2015). This refers to the developed desire within the individual to become productive members of the society and creates solidarity among the members of the community. It also strives to achieve social change, both personally and politically, to meet human needs and elevate issues not readily addressed (Gutierrez, Parsons & Cox 1998; Luluquisen, Trinidad & Ghosh 2006:57). Empowerment then allows the individual to feel capable of changing the circumstances that surrounds him.

On the other hand, the psychological dimensions in empowermide are one of the least studied areas (Narayan, 2005:16), at present however; it already received great attention as it has already been noted of the importance of agency to the aspirations and beliefs in one's own efficacy and power. Youth empowerment has received attention from psychologists and practitioners because of its practical applications in social justice work (Kohfeldt, Chhun, Grace & Langhout 2011:28). Psychological empowerment or interpersonal and intrapersonal empowerment experiences should be possible and vital in the adolescence stage, and should be the basis for the felt empowerment of the youth; this empowerment is affectual and is based on individual's perceptions (Russel & Muraco 2009:894). In this paper, empowerment plays a vital role in understanding the effects of the program towards the beneficiaries.

Youth Development

Poverty may not be the sole reason and cause of many problematic youth outcomes but is frequently cited as a risk factor or "a marker for a host of risk processes" that heighten their vulnerability especially when they lack assets that are essential for growth in their development (Small & Memmo 2004; Edralin, D.M. et.al. 2011:111). Maslang (2005) discussed how the Philippine Medium-Term Youth Development Plan 2005-2010 envisions the Filipino Youth. According to plan, the Filipino youth are: (1) Empowered and enlightened youth; (2) Actively participation in governance and decision making; (3) Recognized as agents of change; (4) Globally competitive, productive, and well-informed; (5) Patriotic, with a strong love for country and culture; and Physically, mentally and spiritually (Maslang 2005:9, 2011:112) . These are also similar to the results of Lerner, Almengi, Theokas, and Lerner (2005) of their 5Cs (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring) as identified by their study made on positive youth development (2011:112). Also, this was noted by Bradshaw (2008) and identified five competencies of a healthy youth and these include: (1) positive sense of self, (2) self-control, (3) decision-making skills, (4) a moral system of belief, and (5) pro-social connectedness (Lerner et al. 2005). Hence, as literatures suggest, youth development is a direct result of skills training and forming the youth in a way that they will feel capable and equipped.

Youth development refers to the holistic formation of the youth to become dynamic builders and leaders of communities. Youth development programs aims to intensify the youth's participation in all aspects of government and organization, most especially in the decision making and nation-building. The development of the youth is one of the important tasks of the government and the agencies as highlighted in the 1987 constitution that acknowledges the role of the youth in nation-building. This paper will examine youth development in the case of the beneficiaries of the Special Program for the Employment of Students in the City of Manila. Youth development in this paper will operate in the notion of forming the youth and making them equipped.Thus, in a way, youth development is placed here as an aspect of agency and is based on the feelings and perception of the beneficiaries.

IV. Results And Discussions

Special Program for the Employment of Students

The Special Program for the Employment of Students is a nationwide program under the Department of Labor and Employment that is mandated under Republic Act No. 7323 as amended by Republic Act No. 9547 that aims to employ poor but deserving students to pursue their education by allowing them to work during summer and Christmas vacation. However, due to the amendments stipulated under Republic Act No. 9547 the program was expanded so that it will make a distinction on beneficiaries that are currently enrolled in secondary and tertiary levels. According to the amendment, beneficiaries that are currently enrolled in secondary level are only allowed to be employed during summer vacations and Christmas breaks. While those enrolled in the tertiary level are allowed to be employed anytime of the year. The Special Program for the Employment of Students is under the Public Employment Services Office (PESO) and thus those who would like to become part of the program and be one of the beneficiaries are required to submit their application to the office. The results and discussions are divided into two parts: the first one describes the Special Education for the Employment of Students in the case of the City of Manila, and the second part revolves around the experiences of the graduate and current beneficiaries of the program.

I. Special Program for the Employment of Student in the City of Manila

In the City of Manila, the Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau is assigned by the local government to facilitate and employ and screen applications for the program. The office is also assigned to distribute qualified beneficiaries to local agencies and offices who are requesting additional manpower in their offices under the program. According to Mr. Robin Carlo Reyes, the head of student affairs of the Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau, there are a total of 1,000 slots under the SPES for one whole year that needs to be filled and be distributed to local offices and agencies. The beneficiary will serve the office or agency that they are assigned for 20 days.

Entering the Program

In order to become part of the Special Program for the Employment of Students, the Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau requires all applicants to submit the following requirements: (1) fully accomplished SPES application form, (2) resume, (3) Barangay certificate, (4) cedula, and the (5) income tax return of parents or guardian. Two of the requirements such as the cedula and the Barangay certificate are required to ensure that the applicants are residents of the city and that the 1000 limited slots per year will be utilized by the young people in the City of Manila.

Robin Reyes the head of the student affairs of the Bureau explains how the application process works in the City of Manila in the term of Mayor Joseph Estrada. Also a SPES graduate, Reyes tried to compare how the application system changed from his time as a SPES beneficiary up to now that he already has a position in the Bureau.

"*Unang-una* (First and foremost) if you're an interested applicant you must submit your resume that's the first and a Barangay certificate. We also have our own application form… cedula, *yun muna para sa* (that's all for the) initial application. Then *papabalikin ka sa* (then you will be asked to return to the) office for the initial interview. *Titignan yung* (We will look at the) income *ng* (of) parents, *magkano ang* (the amount of the) tuition fee, that's the initial. Then…after that *i-tetext ka ulit* (we will text you again) or *iinform kayo na* (we will inform that) you have to go back to take the examination. *Ang examination naman na ito* (this examination however) is not academic, just to give them the feeling *na* (that) you have to work for this. *Hindi porke mahirap ka eh kailangan isubo sayo lahat* (Not because you are poor means we need to spoon feed you everything). You have to work for it because, *kasi iba yung feeling kapag nakita mo dun sa bulletin board namin na pasado ka dun sa exam… so yun, ginagawa lang siya* (there is a different feeling when you see our bulletin board and learned that you have passed the examination… so it is only being done) just to have the realization *na* (that) this is something to be worked for. Knowing our director now is from the academe..*mabibilang mo sa daliri yung bumabagsak* (we can even count the number of those who failed using our fingers). During the previous term *walang ganito-ganito* (there is no similar process)."

Learning from his past experiences as a SPES graduate, Reyes along with the current Bureau director added the examination requirement to give a certain feeling and sense of entitlement towards the beneficiaries and to form an idea that they have worked for the benefit of becoming part of the program. He also noted that during the previous administrations, there are no such process that would form a sense of ownership of the position and the benefit among the beneficiaries. This is also a mechanism to stop the "*palakasan*" system that was also noted by other respondents—that will be discussed on the latter part of the paper. Reyes shared:

"*Kasi* (Because) even if you are endorsed by a councilor, you will still undergo the same process and *ang* (the only) marching order *lang ng* (by the) director…even if the endorsement comes from *Pangulong-Mayor* (President-Mayor) ERAP, it is not automatically *tanggap* (accepted)."

Hence, before becoming part of the program, you must be qualified and must be deemed as an indigent based on your parents income and the amount of your tuition fee. You will also need to take an examination and pass all the requirements to become part of the program. In turn, Reyes stressed that the reason behind these requirements lies in the importance of forming in the minds of the beneficiaries that this program is something to be worked for.

Assignment of Offices

The beneficiaries are assigned to an office that requested for additional manpower under the Special Program for the Employment of Students. In the Manila City Hall and other local government agencies in the city of Manila, the Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau is being contacted by the agency or the agency is being asked by the Bureau if they would like to ask or request for an additional manpower under the SPES.

"…for example *may* (there are) 200 SPES. *Ang mga* (the) government offices *ng* (of the) city hall *nagrerequest sa amin* (sends their requests to us) or if they don't request, we ask them *kung kailangan* (if they need) and how many they need."

The Bureau is being tapped or taps other offices if they would like to get individuals from the beneficiaries of the program. Hence, the assignment of offices is basically determined by the availability of slots in the office and or the number of beneficiaries requested by the local office.

Salary of the Beneficiaries and Contract with the Government
The salary of the beneficiaries according to Republic Act No. 7323 will be paid by the office where they are employed and by the Department of Labor and Employment. Hence, the sixty per centum of the salary of those who are employed in the offices and agencies under the City of Manila are being paid by the local government, while the remaining forty per centum are paid by the national government through educational vouchers. However, according to Reyes, due to the presence of city-run colleges and universities such as the *Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila* or PLM (University of the City of Manila), Eulogio Amang Rodriguez Institute of Science and Technology or EARIST and the *Universidad de Manila* or UDM (University of Manila), the payment and the usage of education vouchers has not become an issue in terms of paying tuition fees. On the other hand, Reyes also noted a particular reason that a delay in the salary of the beneficiaries may happen. He said:

"In terms of accepting applications, it is the sole discretion of the office but in terms of *yung* (the) payment, *yung aming* (our) counterpart *na* DOLE *doon na sila* (that is when-they get involved). *Doon nila tinitignan kung kumpleto ba yung* requirements, *yun lang ang part na kapag hindi kumpleto ang* (That is when they check the requirement are complete and when they notice that they are not complete) requirements then you will not get *yung* (the) DOLE part of your salary."

Reyes said that the Department of Labor and Employment is stricter as compared to their local counterpart especially in the requirements and in issuing the educational vouchers to the beneficiaries. On the other hand, according to him in the city government level, he said that they are somehow *maluwag* (lenient). However, he also mentioned that absenteeism and tardiness is also an issue to some of the beneficiaries. And when asked "*so pag umabsent may bawas din?* (so they will receive deduction in case they are absent?)", Reyes answered that "No, *nagmemakeup* (they need to make up) *sa absent nilang oras* (the hours that they were absent). So we try to make sure *na kumpleto yung binibigay dun sa,* well *siguro, may* exception *lang siguro kung talagang halimbawa sa buong program eh sampung araw lang ang pinasok nya eh talagang yun lang ang seswelduhin nya* (that their salary is complete with exception to those who, for example the beneficiary was only present for ten days during the duration of the program then that will reflect on his salary). He also reiterated that as the program runs for twenty days only, especially to those who are employed in local government and agencies, the beneficiaries should religiously enter their respective offices punctually as their attendance are being monitored by the bureau through the heads and staffs of the department where they are in. The attendance is being checked daily by their own department and by the Bureau at least once a week.
The beneficiaries are also subject to a contract that they need to sign before starting in the program. This also gives the Bureau and the DOLE to terminate beneficiaries that are not functioning well in the program or those who have habitual absences in the course of the 20-day program. However, Reyes explained that the Bureau tries to give considerations to the beneficiaries especially those who miss some working hours. He said:

"*Kasi may kontrata yan eh actually according dun sa kontrata pwede i-terminate pag* (There is a contract and according to the contract, we can terminate them when they) habitually absent, *merong kalokohang ginagawa pwede i-terminate, pero syempre kami naman medyo nagbibigay ng consideration so yung mga hindi masyadong pala absent at tyaka may reasons* (if they are doing something wrong, we can terminate them. But of course, we give consideration to those who are not habitually absent and those who have reasons), valid reasons to be absent, *binibigyan namin ng* (we give them the) chance to make-up with the lacking number of days or hours."

In the statements of Robin Reyes, he highlighted how the Bureau gives consideration to the beneficiaries and as noted above, the Bureau tries to makes sure that the salary that paid to the beneficiaries are complete and with no deductions.

Expansion of the SPES program, innovations, and success stories

Today the Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau is partnering with fast-food chains and various private firms such as: McDonald's, Krispy Kreme, Jollibee, Chowking, Max's Restaurant, etc. to fully expand the scope of the Special Program for the Employment of Students. In partnering with private agencies and firms, the Special Program for the Employment of Students in the City of Manila is not bounded to be limited to 1000 slots that are available every year coming from the Department of Labor and Employment. Today, in cooperation with the DOLE, the City of Manila through the Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau caters more beneficiaries under the SPES program and helps more poor but deserving students to pursue their education by becoming working-students and productive members of the community. It is also in this expanded program that we will be able to take note as one of the most concrete evidence of the efficiency of SPESas Reyes noted,

"*…makikita mo na talagang* (here you can see the)…concrete products, *yung mga na absorb ng mga* (those who are absorbed by) businesses…*at talagang makikita mo na, uy, ito* (and indeed you could see that, this one is from) SPES *na absorb* (that was absorbed) right after the program, *pati sa* (even in the) city government *may mga naabsorb* (there are those who are absorbed) after the program."

The Special Program for the Employment of Students as evident here, does not only help the students with their schooling, but also in establishing connections and social capital. Hence, this expansion allows more opportunities not only for students but the youth sector in general. On the other hand, Reyes noted a very significant reason behind the expansion,

"*…dati ang pila dito noon parang* (before the line here is similar to the) PBB (Pinoy Big Brother) *ang application from fifth floor umaabot ng ground floor ang pila… kasi nga one time big time lahat ng slots, halimbawa* (the line for the application starts from the fifth floor down to the ground floor..this is due to the "one time bigtime" allocation of slots, for example) *1000 slots ng Maynila, sa summer 1000 na agad ang ibibigay kaya nakapila lahat. Kaya ginawa naming* (of Manila, the 1000 will all be given during the summer, and that the reason why everyone is already securing their slot. That is why we did it by) batches, *ayaw naming ng ganun kasi hindi siya magandang* (we do not want that kind of process because it sends bad) image. *Di ba* (Isn't that shows) inefficiency *yun di ba sa* (on the) image *ng* (of the) city hall *so yun yung isa sa mga pagbabago* (that's one of the changes)…"

The changes and the innovation in the implementation of the Special Program for the Employment of Students in the City of Manila are primarily based on the experiences of the facilitators who have also undergone the program. In turn, using their experiences, they were able to change and modify some parts of the application process and of the program, in general, for the betterment of its implementation. Thus, as the program is expanded at least in the level of the local government in the case of the City of Manila, opportunities are also expanded and broadened. This show how important is the modification and the maintenance of the structure to ensure that the program is being implemented well and to check on other opportunities of expanding the program for the benefit of those who are relying and are optimistic to become part of the program.

II. The Experiences of the Beneficiaries

The second part of the discussion will focus on the experience sought by those who are currently benefitting and those who already benefitted from the Special Program of the Employment of Students. In organizing the themes in this discussion, the sequence of the presentation of the research questions will be followed. This part will present the "voices" of the respondents as they share and voice out their experiences.

Knowing the Special Program for the Employment of Students

The Special Program for the Employment of Students as a nationwide program is well-known today due to the presence of beneficiaries who are most of the time wearing their SPES uniforms in their respective workplaces. I for once have known the SPES while having a meal at McDonald's after seeing some service crew wearing the SPES uniform. On the other hand, the reasons on how the beneficiaries come to know the program vary. The respondents were asked with the question: "where did you come to know about the Special Program for the Employment of Students? Here are some reasons on how beneficiaries are informed about the Special Program on the Employment of Students:

"*Nalaman ko po yung SPES, high school pa lang po ako gusto ko na po mag-SPES. Pero hindi po ako nagkakaron ng time for that. Nung first year college ako, dahil po sa friend ko na nag-SPES din po siya dati, kaya napasama po ako. Magkaklase po kami* (I have learned about the SPES when I was in high school and was

very much interested in joining SPES. However, I was not able to have time for that. Then, during my first year in college, because of my friend who have already finished SPES, I was able to join. We were classmates).”

“*Nalaman ko yung SPES dahil sa* (I have learned about SPES through our) Barangay Chairman.”

“*Nabalitaan ko sa TV na merong ganun and summer parang gusto ko itry so kinausap ko yung friend ko from ano sya* (I have seen in the television that there is something for summer so I talked to my friend), he is the staff of one of our councilors *eh since kapit-bahay din namin siya so* (he was our neighbor) he accompanied me to apply.”

“*Nagoffer yung treasurer namin sa Barangay na yung councilor ng 3ʳᵈ district meron syang three slots so yung 3 slots na yun isa ako dun* (Our Barangay Treasurer offered that there are three slots under the councilor of the 3ʳᵈ district, so in the three slots, I am one of them).”

The beneficiaries of the Special Program for the Employment of Student come to know the program via three ways: (1) through word of mouth from previous and present beneficiaries, (2) from advertisement materials in the news, and (3) through politicians that offer the SPES to their constituents.

The Motivations of the Beneficiaries
There are a number of motivations on why the beneficiaries participated in the Special Program for the Employment of Students. These vary according to their desires and their expected outcomes upon entering the program. The respondents are asked with the question: what motivated you to join the program? Below are the responses of the beneficiaries and their motivations in joining the program:

“Honestly, *nung time namin siyempre summer medyo* (during my time, of course summer and it's somehow) boring. Second, *may sweldo. Di ba? Tapos siyempre ang* (there's a salary. And of course my) course *ko nun* is (during that time is) political science so *medyo gusto kong magkaroon ng* (somehow I got a) first-hand government service.”

“…*yung pera po.*Pero (the money. But) aside from that, *gusto ko pong makakilala ng bagong* (I want to meet new) friends. *Tapos* (Then), experience. *Gusto ko pong magkaroon ng* (I want to have an) experience.”

“...*syempre student palang makakapagtrabaho ka na, yun yung nagmotivate sa akin* (…of course, you are still a student and you are already working, that motivated me).

The responses coming from the beneficiaries show that most of their motivations revolve around the idea of being empowered by having experiences and earning money. It also includes making their vacations and breaks worthwhile by earning money and meeting new friends.

The Benefits of the Special Program for the Employment of Students
The Special Program for the Employment of Students, a 20-day program involves different activities that aim for the development of students. On the other hand, the significant experiences and benefits that the beneficiaries cherish according to their own values and at some point an aspect or activity where the program was able to develop themselves as productive members of the community. The respondents are asked to share the benefits that they were able to receive upon joining the program. Here are their responses:

“….as a youth, *yung mga* (the) youth *na hindi nakaranas ng* (who did not experienced) SPES, *hindi pa nila talaga nakikita kung ano talaga yung dapat mong maging* (they are still unable to see their potentials) as a human being. *Hindi mo pa talaga nakikita yung 50% ng buhay mo. Yung* (You still haven't seen the 50% of your life. The) bigger picture. *Na kung ano talaga yung pangyayari sa* (the idea of what will happened in the) future. But this, *yung* (the) SPES *po, tumutulong po siya para malaman mo kung ano talaga yung nangyayari sa* (it helps you understand the things that are happening in the) professional world. *Para kailangan mong maging matapang, kailangan mong maging responsible, kailangan mo gawin lahat* (You need to be brave and you need to be responsible, you need to do everything) just to please and *kailangan mong maging ikaw, kasi hindi para maging angat sa iba, pero kailangan mong maging ikaw* (you need to be you, not to surpass other people, but you need to be you) for your own benefit…empowerment is *yung kapag nabago po ang mga pananaw mo sa buhay. Kapag nagkaroon kang pananaw na hindi mo naisip dati. Kapag nagiging mas matapang ka, mas nagkakaroon ka ng mga ideas, na sasagot yung mga ideas na dati hindi mo masagot sa isang tao* (when you have change your perspective in life. It's when you have gained ideas that you have thought of before. It is when

you become brave, you are able to produce more ideas, and being capable of answering ideas that you used not to know).

"*Malaki yung naitulong niya kasi, unang-una sa lahat, pagkatapos mismo ng nag-SPES ako, syempre may sahod na makukuha, pero malaki din yung naitulong nito sa akin as a person kasi nadevelop yung personality ko, and then sa family ko, na share ko yung mga seminar na naattenan ko. Pagkadating naman sa sahod, syempre, nakatulong din sa pag-aaral ko, pambaon-baon nung nag-aral ako sa* (The program helped me a lot. First and foremost, right after the SPES, of course you will get a salary, however it was it also helped me a lot as a person because it developed my personality, and then in my family, I was able to share the seminar that I have attended. In terms of the salary, it helped me in my studies, it served as my pocket money when I was studying at the) Universidad de Manila"

"*…siguro dahil nga may idea ka na* (maybe because you have that idea) as [ano eh] a public servant *kahit twenty days lang siya na kasalamuha mo ang iba-ibang klase ng tao* (even if it is limited to twenty days you were able to encounter different kinds of people) especially that I was assigned at the Department of Social Welfare so *yung mga humihingi ng tulong doon, so iba-iba ang nakakaharap mo* (I always encounter different kinds of people asking help, you have) senior citizen, single parents, *yung mga bata pa may anak na so iba-iba kinakaharap mo, kaya talagang masshape yung personality at yung views mo* (those young people who at the early age are already parents, and that will shape your personality and views)."

"*… naging confident ako humarap sa ibang tao na makipag-communicate with other people lalo na sa mga matatanda sa mga senior… kasi usually senior yung mga andun eh, sa* (I became confident especially in facing other people and in communicating with them especially with the older ones … because usually senior [citizens] can be seen in the office at the) Office of Senior Citizen Affairs."

"*…yung nagkaroon ako ng friends sa iba't-ibang distrito kasi nga ano, hinuhubog yung ano, yung pagkatao mo doon. Kasi nga sa bawat seminar na pinuntahan namin, for example, yung doon kami sa Intramuros, nagkaroon kami ng Amazing Race, iba-iba kaming distrito. Hindi kami magkakilala pero nagkaroon kami ng unity. Yun yung pinaka-memorable experience ko* (when you were able to meet new friends from different districts, and that molds our personality. In all seminars that we attended, for example, when we had an Amazing Race in Intramuros that was participated by beneficiaries from different districts. We are not familiar with one another but we were able to form unity. That is my most memorable experience)."

The benefits mentioned by the beneficiaries vary according to the following aspects: (1) personality development, (2) meeting new friends, (3) gaining new experiences, (4) earning money for the next school year or to pursue schooling, and (5) having asense of belongingness in the society and in the community of youth. Hence, the benefits that are received by the beneficiaries of the program are not only limited to the monetary assistance but also covers different aspects such as training and enhancement of individual personality and personal capacity. These benefits are important in the analysis of the program as we would relate these benefits to the dimensions of empowerment as presented in the empowerment framework by Deepa Narayan (2005).

Over-all Perceptions on SPES and Suggestions for Improvement
The evaluation on whether the program is effective and receptive towards the needs and the expectations of the beneficiaries lies in the perception of the beneficiaries themselves. In answering these questions, the respondents were asked to share their over-all perceptions about the program and to solicit any suggestions for the betterment of the program. Below are their responses:

"*…it is good…maganda sana siya kaso ahh* (it's a good program, however) I think 20 days is a very limited time to expose the students to government service…however, 8,500 is a big money *di ba* (isn't?) But in terms of training, *medyo kapos. Kapos sya* (it is not enough. It is insufficient)."

"*…before ah, before talaga di ako satisfied… kasi hindi organized usually yung program nila yung mga schedules nila ganun kasi yung iba magrerequest na mapunta sa DSWD tapos pinapayagan parang merong favoritism…at saka four days kami sa office every week tapos yung apat na Fridays puro kami seminar…tapos parang paulit-ulit lang na seminar hindi talaga organized* (I was really not satisfied…because their programs and their schedules are not organized and some are given the privilege to choose the office that they want, there's favoritism…and then for four days we are in the office and every Friday we have seminars, the seminars however are repetitive, it goes over and over again)."

"Masaya, kaso nadisappoint ako kasi yung ipinangako nga na trabaho sa amin, ang sabi nga ay sa office daw kami. Then, maganda naman kasi puro seminar nga naman. Kasi makakatulong nga naman sa personality mo as a person (I am happy with the program, however, I got disappointed because they promised us that we will work in the office. However, it is still good because we have seminars that help us improve our personality as individuals).*"*

The Special Program for the Employment of Students as program that caters poor but deserving students to secure employment aims to encourage the youth to become dynamic members of the society by using their time during summer vacation and Christmas break into productive spare times that would allow them to earn money during the breaks. This in turn, would allow the beneficiaries to pursue their education through academic vouchers that they will use to pay for their tuition fee.

However, based on the responses, the Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau should make new ways on how to make the program more responsive to the developmental needs of the youth and making their seminars more participatory and interactive. On the other hand, the Bureau should also make a modification in the program so that the beneficiaries will feel that the training is adequate for them to feel the sense on how public service is really like especially to those who are assigned in the City Hall.

V.   Analysis

Using Anthony Giddens' structuration, we can see how the practice of agency and the effects of the structure as disabling and enabling are evident in this phenomenon. The structure is created and revolves around the Special Program of the Employment of Students and the government that implements and manages it. On the other hand, the agency would refer to the capacity of the youth to utilize the structure for personal gain and or to assert their individual aspect of agency. Here it is noted that the structure is both constraining and enabling due to the different factors that affects the program and the beneficiaries. The program is enabling as it widens the opportunities of the youth to become dynamic members of the community and to utilize their time in a productive way. In turn, the structure also constrains the youth in unleashing their potential by irregularities in the structure and rooms for improvement that also allows the youth to realize the training they have received is lack and inadequate from what they have expected in the program. However, the individual's aspect of agency is also evident in the participation of the youth in the program as motivated by their personal goals and aims.

In turn, in using Deepa Narayan's Empowerment Conceptual Framework, we could notice that the program served as a dominant institutional climate that allows inclusion or participation in the program and the spreading of valuable information through seminars that was deemed useful and relevant to the needs of the beneficiaries. As seen in the results, the program allowed the beneficiaries to learn different things from governance, management, up to personality development that aims to develop the beneficiaries in a holistic way. The opportunity that was presented through the program revolves around the empowering of individuals by raising their assets, such as their symbolic and social capitals. Hence, the program has given the youth a door to share their talents and at the same time enhance their skills and their personality: intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.

On the other hand, the program also enhanced the agency of the youth by empowering them in the human, social, political, and psychological dimensions of empowerment. The results were related based on the dimensions of empowerment and these are as follows: (1) in the human dimension of empowerment, the encouragement by the program to poor but deserving students allowed them to pursuit their education by rendering service and earning money from the program. (2) Social dimension of development was reflected on the enhanced capacity of the beneficiaries to interact with people, and in enhancing their communication skills through their interactions while being part of the program. (3) The political dimension of development on the other hand can be seen in the capacity of the youth being opened by the program to participate in the affairs of the government and opening the youth to the processes in government agencies and in the government in general. Lastly, (4) the psychological dimension of empowerment can be seen in the shared feeling of belongingness and expanded social capital caused by their participation and interaction with other beneficiaries in the program. Hence, it can be seen and analyzed that the program was indeed able to enhance the youth's dimensions of empowerment by focusing on the goal of the program to provide a way to encourage the youth to work and earn to pursue their education. On the other hand, the program was also able to form collective assets and capabilities through the constant interaction among the beneficiaries of the program from different districts that in turn created a single voice, an organization that would represent their goals and a distinct identify of being SPES beneficiaries: both current and graduates.

VI. Conclusion

The Special Program for the Employment of Students is able to empower the students by encouraging them to pursue their education by making their vacations and breaks, worthwhile as they earn money. It was also able to enhance their social capital and skills that would allow them to have greater opportunities during and after the program. Hence, the program was able to help the beneficiaries and encourage them to become productive members of the society by rendering service and by continuing their education.

This study was able to reflect on the effects of the program towards the beneficiaries by utilizing Deepa Narayan's empowerment framework and was able to analyze how the program was able to empower the youth in four dimensions, namely: human dimension, social dimension, political dimension, and psychological dimension. On the other hand, the study is limited to the case of the City of Manila and is also limited to a small sample of respondents--that maybe argued as not representative of the beneficiaries as a whole.

Hence, I would like to recommend a cross-city analysis of the program so that the governance and leadership dimensions will be touched. Also, a larger sample size is recommended to future researchers of the program. In turn, I do believe that the evaluation of the program varies from city to city and as to how the local government implements this nationwide program. However, it can be noted in this study that the program is receptive to the needs of the youth in enhancing their aspects of agency and by using the empowerment framework. Thus, the program is still open for improvements that would be more reflective to the needs and the aspirations of the beneficiaries and most especially the youth.

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