

**Accountability, Affordability and Accessibility of Higher Education in a Local University:  
A Local Government Initiative toward Socio-Economic Development and Sustainability**

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**Abstract**

Perhaps, education is the most vital public service needed to sustain the socio – economic stability of the individual in the society. However, there is a widespread concern over the rising costs of higher education which threaten every student desiring to enter college and pre-empted them to discontinue their studies. This renders higher education unaffordable for many students and their families. This phenomenon if not properly addressed may hamper the growth and development of the society. Therefore, state involvement and support is central to promoting college education affordability.

This study examines the city government’s initiative in establishing a local higher educational institution as an answer to the concern of rising cost of tertiary education. It was a scheme designed to manifest the city government’s sincere effort in assuming its accountability as guardian of social services for the people. Further, the study also included the accessibility dimension by examining the socio – economic status of students’ parents who are admitted to enroll in the local university. The tuition fee subsidy and related assistance to the local university and its constituencies are likewise included in the discussion of this paper.

**Keywords:** *accountability, accessibility, affordability, higher education, stability, socio – economic development, local university, local government initiative*

It is a universally accepted and highly regarded expectation that all societies particularly in the developing countries should provide the necessary social services for the welfare of its citizens. One basic social service that a government of the state, country, or nation should undertake is the provision of quality education. Quality education is essential for creating a sustainable human resource base upon which to build the development of any country (Lohani,2012).

However, the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century poses insecurities and instabilities to every society anywhere in the world, due to a growing need of skilled workforce in all fields of disciplines. This perspective is re-affirmed by the thoughts of Devesh (2008) as cited by Tham (2011) that this increasing demand for higher education across the globe particularly from the youth population of the developing countries is an important pathway for greater social mobility. The preceding argument is loaded with challenge. But to enable the country to compete and survive the raging tides of the accelerating change in the current era, dynamic and serious effort to address the social expectations is needed. This changing social landscape requires new thinking and updated practices (Lohani, 2012). One appropriate response identified is investing more in education.

Filipinos have deep regard for education. As such, education occupies a central place in Philippine political, economic, social, and cultural life. It has always been strongly viewed as a pillar of national development and a primary avenue for social and economic mobility.

According to the United Nations (2008) report, a clear evidence of the Filipino value placed on education is the proportion of the national government budget going to the sector. The Department of Education (DepEd), known as the Philippines' biggest bureaucracy is given the highest budget allocation among government agencies each year as mandated by the 1987 Philippine Constitution (Article XIV, Sec.5 paragraph 5). Likewise, the same Philippine Constitution guarantees the right to education of every Filipino. It provided that 'The State

shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make education accessible to all.’

Corollary to the Constitutional provision on the right of every Filipino to quality basic education, it was further reiterated and emphasized in Republic Act No. 9155 known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001. Together with the said law, Republic Act No. 6655 or the Free Secondary Education Act, these laws re-affirm the policy of the State to protect and promote the rights of all Filipinos by providing children free and compulsory education in the elementary and secondary levels. This refers to 6 years of free tuition fees for children aged 6 – 11 years old, and free four years of secondary schooling for those aged 12 to 15 years old.

Amidst these assurances provided by law, the higher education sector felt a widespread concern over the rising costs of higher education making college education unaffordable for many students and their families. Government support is central to promoting college education affordability, but the persistent state budget constraints have limited funding for public colleges. The reality is state funding for all public colleges decreased, while tuition fee rises. To help cover the cost of attending college, the state provided assistance to students through loans, grants, and work study programs. This strategy enables the state play a key role in promoting affordability in higher education in that they provide a significant amount of financial support to public colleges and universities.

Concurrent to the issue of affordability is the provision for improving access and enhancing equity. Accordingly, since the Philippines has committed to pursue the targets embodied in the Millennium Declaration being one of the signatory – countries, the Philippine government might as well support in the implementation of the programs that will hasten the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. With the adoption of the Declaration, the Philippines affirmed its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) geared towards reducing poverty, hunger, diseases, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women. These goals have been mainstreamed in the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan (2004 – 2010) including policies and plans related to children, access to primary education and gender equality.

Despite the preceding legal mechanisms, budget prioritization and increased access, Philippine education has been dogged with issues. All the more, government effort to provide affordable tertiary education is seen as lagging behind. In an effort to curtail the rising cost of tertiary education, local institutions are constantly making conscious effort to establish tertiary education accessible to its constituents. Education must be recognized as a public responsibility, not an opportunity for entrepreneurs to gain profitability. Just as the government is responsible for public safety and for protecting the air and water, it is responsible for assuring a sound education for all children. Governments must provide, protect and adequately fund public education, while working to improve the lives of families and reduce poverty. There is no other way to assure equity for children and societies.

This very issue inspired the researchers to venture on this study to ascertain that the efforts of the city government of Marikina to create a local university is a well – meant strategy in providing affordable and accessible tertiary educational service to its constituencies as a token of assuming its public accountability. .

Following the concepts provided by Usher and Medow (2010), access to higher education is the ability of people from all backgrounds to access higher education on a reasonably equal basis. This is in fact the issue that confronts all governments throughout the world. These are important goals but unfortunately, the same issues are rarely studied systematically or rigorously. In pursuing the systematic task to prove the affordability and accessibility of tertiary education offered at one City University in Marikina City, the affordability indicators guided the researchers to examine the case of this local university.

The primary objective of this inquiry is to estimate affordability and accessibility of higher education offered in the City University for students and their families. This seeks to provide more objective information for both policy- makers and other stakeholders. Likewise, the analysis enables us to better understand the impact of student assistance policies for increased enrolment. Specifically, this study attempted to answer the following question: 1.) What affordability indicator/s can be used to define the affordability and accessibility level of higher education offered by the City University?; 2.) what is the cost of higher education offered at the City University? ; and 3.). What other strategies can be adopted by the city government to enhance the affordability and accessibility of higher education in the City University?

This analysis is the first attempt to study the affordability of tertiary education in this City University. Review of related literature undertaking similar studies are all comparative and looks at how much governments and countries invest in tertiary education(UNESCO and OECD, 2002; Holm – Nielsen et al, 2005; Ulsher and Cervenán, 2005; UNESCO, 2006; Ulsher and Medow, 2010). This study is but a case study taking into account the direct costs of education inclusive of the tuition fees and other related costs. Financial aid to students is likewise considered.

### **Methodology**

To examine the affordability and accessibility of higher education in this local university in Marikina City, an acceptable range of indicators as identified by Usher and Medow (2010) was used. According to these authors, there are four possible types of indicators that can be used to determine the affordability of education, namely: 1.) Costs as a fraction of ability to pay (ATP). These are relatively easy to measure. It encompasses tuition including all mandatory fees, education costs (tuition plus books and materials), Living expenses (room and board), and total costs (education costs, plus living expenses). All these can be expressed as a function of an ATP measure. 2.) Support/ATP are various forms of government support should be included in any calculation of affordability. One way of doing so is measuring Grants, Loans, and Tax expenditures per student; all of which can all be expressed as a fraction of ATP; 3.) Support/Costs is another way to achieve affordability by measuring government support as a fraction of the costs student face; and 4.) Cost minus support/ATP – a final way of measuring affordability is to calculate various forms of net costs (cost minus subsidies) or out – of – pocket costs (cost minus all government assistance) as a fraction of ATP. Any of these measures are reasonable potential measures of affordability and choosing between them is necessarily normative exercise.

All costs were based in local currency terms rather than in US dollars because the exchange rates of Philippine peso are very unstable.

### **Results and Discussion**

The basic unit of analysis for measuring affordability of higher education is the costs of education as defined by Usher and Medow (2010). Costs of education here are taken as a fraction of the ability to pay (ATP). It encompasses tuition including all mandatory fees, education costs

(tuition plus books and materials), Living expenses (room and board), and total costs (education costs, plus living expenses). All these can be expressed as a function of an ATP measure. This cost includes tuition fee and any additional mandatory ancillary fees and the cost of books and study materials.

Table 1 next page is a schedule of the costs of education provided by the City University representing student’s total payments, but living expenses which is also a part of cost of education is not reflected. This is so because, students from the City University are not entitled to living expenses because all of them are living with their families within the city. Therefore, the total costs of their expenses for the school fees entail the tuition and miscellaneous fees only. Books and other related school needs are subsidized by the city government officials under the so – called College Educational Assistance Program (CEAP), Marikina Congressmen Financial Assistance, all former government officials from the barangay level up to the Congressional level (as defined in the Local Government Code), and other government agencies like the Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE), under the Special Program for the Education of Students (SPES) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) for the indigent families . As shown below, the first year of operation of the City University assessed the tuition and miscellaneous fees at the cost of only Php 2,750.00.

**Table 1**  
**Total Cost of College Education at the Marikina City University**

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Total Cost of Education</b>	<b>Books, uniforms and other school needs</b>
2003 - 2004	Php 2,750.00	Subsidized by City Government officials and other government agencies
2004 – 2005	- do -	- do -
2005 - 2006	- do -	-do-
2006 - 2007	Php 3,250.00	-do -
2007 – 2008	- do -	-do -
2008 – 2009	- do -	-do -
2009 – 2010	- do -	- do -

2010 – 2011	- do -	- do -
2011 – 2012	- do -	- do-
2012 – 2013	- do -	- do
2013 – 2014	Php 4, 250.00	-do
2014 – 2015	- do -	- do
2015 – 2016	- do -	-do-

Later, in School Year 2006 – 2007 there is a slight increase of five hundred pesos (Php500.00) in the costs of education. This is brought about by the adjustment since the foreign exchange rate of Philippine peso against dollar rendered the peso weak. Further, it can be seen in the table that it took seven years more before another adjustment was made. This time the incremental amount to the costs of education rose to one thousand pesos (Php1, 000.00).

Despite the preceding increase in the costs of education in the City University, the city government remain steadfast in sustaining the higher education support to assist the families in their expenses of sending daughter/son to college.

The following data taken from the University Accounting Office reported the costs of education subsidy in the form of financial assistance are the following:

**Table 2**  
**Data on Financial Assistance per Government Agency**

<b>Government Agency/Program</b>	<b>Number of Recipients</b>	<b>Amount of Subsidy</b>
College Education Assistance Program	800 students	Php2,500.00/student
Marikina Congressional Financial Assistance (District 1)	800 students	Php2,000.00/student
Marikina Congressional Financial Assistance (District 2)	800 students	Php2,000.00/student
DOLE Special Program for the Education of Students	160 students	100% Tuition fee subsidy
Department of Social Welfare and Development	Number of recipients vary according to indigence	Php1,000.00 – 2,000.00/family
Former Government Officials	1 student/government official	100% Tuition fee subsidy

Table 2 above summarizes the financial assistance provided by the City Government to sustain the affordability of higher education in the City University. Added to the financial

assistance are the various scholarship awarded to deserving students based on their academic performance

As regard the accessibility of education in the City University, Usher and Medow (2010) provided four indicator/s used to define the accessibility level of higher education offered by the City University. These are participation rates, attainment rates, the educational equity index (EEI), and gender parity index.

Using the four indicators, first the participation rate being the fraction of young people engaged in higher education studies, it can be observed that some 65% of the youths in Marikina City seek admission to college education offered by the City University. The 35% of those students who graduated from same secondary schools and year of graduation decided to enrol in other higher education institutions in the National Capital Region. The decision of the majority of youths in the city to enrol in the City University is its practicality. Its distance from the residence of the majority of the students is reachable with one jitney or tricycle ride, the mainstream form of transportation in the city.

As regard attainment rate, data from the University Registrar supports that the attainment rate of students in this City University is between 55% - 60%. It can be observed that dropout rate in this City University is very low and majority of the students finished their degree program on time as prescribed by the City University policy, stipulated in the policy of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). Majority of the students usually finish their program of study in four years as prescribed by the Commission on Higher Education.

On issue of Educational Equity Index (EEI), the socio – economic background of 80% of parents whose son/daughter is attending City University are those belonging to the working class such as construction workers, tricycle drivers, taxi drivers, jitney drivers, vendors, helpers (domestic), manicurists, sales clerks, and some with some unfinished college degree. The composition of the student body as a whole is dominated by children from the working class.

On the issue of Gender Parity Index (GPI), it showed that there is a slight difference between the male and female student – attendees. Female students are slightly higher in numbers than their male counter parts.



The over-all accessibility level of the higher education in the City University can be described as highly accessible as shown by the preceding discussion.

It can be concluded further that higher education provided by the City University is affordable and accessible to all constituents of the city.

Based on the discussion presented in the previous pages, the following strategies maybe adopted by the City Government to enhance the affordability and accessibility of higher education in the City University.

1. Student loans program for students who belong to the poorest of the poor is highly recommended to enhance the financial assistance schemes of the City University.
2. There should be a financial assistance program to encourage students to enroll in courses that are in- demand or with board exams.
3. Work Study program is also a viable strategy for alleviating the condition of the poor students in the City.

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