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# **Implementation, Challenges, and Opportunities of the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) in a First-Class Province in Central Philippines: A Mixed Method Sequential Inquiry**

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**Abstract.** This study evaluated the implementation of the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) by Public Employment Service Offices (PESOs) in selected local government units (LGUs) within a first-class province. Focusing on youth employment, the research aimed to empower students, bridge the education-employment gap, and foster economic mobility. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative data. Phase 1 involved quantitative analysis of survey responses. Phase 2 utilized semi-structured interviews based on quantitative findings, with results integrated and presented through joint themes from the qualitative phase. Respondents included 15 purposively sampled implementers and 238 SPES beneficiaries from the 2021-2022 school year, selected via stratified random sampling. Research instruments, based on RA 10917, underwent validity and reliability testing. Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics, following normality testing. The quantitative phase revealed a "very great" extent of SPES implementation by PESOs in the province. Both respondent types rated it "very great," and most LGUs with more than 50 beneficiaries also rated it "very great" based on income class and beneficiary count. The qualitative phase corroborated these findings, enriched by beneficiaries' experiences, leading to central themes and sub-themes supported by testimonies. This integration resulted in meta-inferences confirming PESOs' instrumental role in SPES implementation and the program's positive economic and social benefits for beneficiaries and their families. Significant differences in implementation were attributed to LGU income classification and beneficiary numbers. Challenges remain, but substantial opportunities exist for SPES enhancement in LGUs.

**Keywords.** Implementation, challenges, and opportunities, SPES, livelihood, explanatory sequential mixed method, first-class province, Philippines

## **1. Introduction**

The informal sector including out of school youth and students has all the potential to contribute to employment generation. The role of employment in economic growth is necessary to facilitate developing countries in safeguarding the decent work, productive employment, and inclusive growth agenda in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8 (Sultana et al., 2022). While education as an important component of the SDG (Agbedahin, 2019) is intended to

ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and encourage lifelong learning opportunities (Ferguson et al., 2018). Worldwide, nations are engaged in making education better and available to everyone as providing education is removing the barriers of poverty and unemployment (de Villiers et al., 2021).

Youth unemployment due to lack of education is a key barrier to economic growth in the ASEAN region (Beam & Quimbo, 2023) thus the region faces skills and labor market challenges (Barr & Attrey, 2017) hence government must enact policies for employment (Karr et al., 2020). In fact, ASEAN countries maintain regulatory approaches that restrict private employment agencies from cross-border recruitment (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2018). However, there remain high levels of unemployment of the youth due to lack of experience and skills required by the labor market (Fogg et al., 2016).

In the Philippines, responding to the call for the implementation of the SDGs, RA 10691 amending RA 8759, mandated the creation of the Public Employment Service Office (PESO) in local government units to work with the national government agencies to promote employment and provide employment opportunities for all (Bachita & Bayoneta, 2021). Youth employment through the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) links low-income in-school youth to formal work opportunities. The Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) is a program of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) who collaborates with the Public Employment Services Office (PESO) in provincial, city and municipal local government units in the implementation of the program. DOLE also assist public and private employers with a 40% wage subsidy (Beam et al., 2018).

The Department of Labor and Employment-Negros Occidental Field Office (DOLE-NOFO) has been implementing pro-active initiatives to ensure the effective implementation of the various programs and services to ensure employability and competitiveness of workers aligned to the decent work agenda of the Sustainable Development Goal (DOLE, 2019). However, there was massive unemployment and displacement of workers in both the labor and business sectors even after the pandemic (Nicavera, 2021) and a low placement turn-out of employment services until 2020 (PESO, Kabankalan City, 2021). Although a study conducted in 2021 revealed very high level of implementation of local employment services, but challenges encountered by local and overseas jobseekers reflected the inadequacy of some services attributed to significant institutional weaknesses that lead to duplication of some programs (Bachita & Bayoneta, 2021).

Several studies were conducted over the years on implementation of SPES in other provinces. Martin (2019) in Ilocos Norte; Oliver (2021) in Naga City; Codera (2015) in the City of Manila; Orbeta Jr. et al. (2021) on being not in employment, education, or training in the country. In other parts of the globe, Schwartz et al. (2021), and Atwell et al. (2020) on the impact of youth employment during summer; Beam (2017) evaluated SPES in the Philippines. Other studies include Loewenberg (2020) on youth unemployment. While Scarpetta et al. (2020) and the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2020) on employment opportunities offered by public employment offices. So far, studies using a mixed method sequential inquiry on the implementation, challenges, and opportunities of SPES in a first-class province is rare, hence a gap in the literature.

The study determined the extent of implementation and opportunities of the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) as practiced by the Public Employment Service Office (PESO) in a first- class province in terms of the mechanisms of the program for the period 2021-2022. Results of this study were used as foundation of a proposed strategic plan

for the PESO to strengthen implementation of SPES in cities and municipalities of a first-class province.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

**2.1 Public employment services.** Productive employment was acknowledged as the best way to solve widespread poverty. Facilitating employment opportunities is a mandate of the Public Employment Service Office (PESO), a non-fee charging office in local government units (LGUs) working in coordination with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and is the prime mover of facilitating employment. Its purpose is to ensure effective, efficient, and prompt delivery of facilitating employment services, also provides updated information on the labor market and programs of the DOLE. There are three major thrusts of the Public Employment Service Office in local government units: referral and placement, labor market information, employment coaching and career counseling. A rapid assessment of the SPES was realizing the importance of the issue that education and training are core factors in enhancing workers' productivity, hence recognizing the relationship between education and employment. The study revealed the following effects of the SPES: income augmentation and enhanced employability, however, issues in implementation were discovered as: delay in the payment of salaries/wages, inconsistency with other laws, prone to political patronage, difficulties in targeting of students, working days are not maximized, low participation of the private sector, mismatching of job skills, lack of monitoring and PESOs are not institutionalized in local government units.

**2.2 Implementation of Special Program for Employment of Students.** SPES aims to help poor but deserving students, out-of-school youth, and dependents of displaced or would-be displaced workers finish their education by providing employment during breaks and/or long holidays as mandated by Department Order No. 175-17 Series of 2015 of the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act no. 10917 amending for the purpose Republic Act 9547 and 7323. Programs in Europe such as the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), make a difference in the lives of youth and help them make connections to positive institutional agents, learn workplace dynamics and dialogue, and provide them with an entrance into areas of the workforce that have historically been preserved for the higher- level working class and middle class. SYEP are believed to have the potential to improve the behavioral, economic, and academic outcomes of the populations they serve, particularly for inner city, low-income, and non-white youth. It is advocated that work experience can be gained from internships. affirmed the positive correlation between internships and employment. Authors stressed the importance of internships because of the career connections and networking opportunities. These experiences enhance the application of the concepts learned and networks helped students secure jobs as well as switch jobs for better prospects and career progression.

**2.3 Administration of SPES.** The Special Program for the employment of students (SPES) is administered by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) as mandated under RA 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 such as allowing them to Pay Only 60% of the Salaries and wages and the 40% through Education Vouchers to be paid by the Government, Prohibiting and penalizing the filing of fraudulent and fictitious, and for other purposes" The Secretary of the DOLE is designated as the program director of the SPES. While the PESO in

local government units implements the program and provides services such as matching qualifications, helping, quick referral and placement processing, and ensuring that requirements are complete before deployment. Labor market information was also highly evident meaning providing timely information on the labor movement, easy access to updated information, and provides detailed labor market information. As to employment coaching and career counselling, the same is also highly evident with high ratings on providing coaching and mentoring, checking on deployed workers from time to time, mechanisms on job mismatch, providing guidance, and adequate coaching and counselling. In terms of job fairs program, all activities were also highly evident. While in Cleveland, the program is known as Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) offers 25 hours per week of employment for 6 weeks throughout summer. It adopted a community partner affiliation to augment the summer work experience of youth with adult mentors to provide stability and remove barriers. Government partners with community agencies provided intervention such as weekly center meeting but everybody undergo an evaluation to join the program. The City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) in New York City administers the program and contracts with CBOs to conduct enrolments, provide training, and supervise job placement and develop the careers and skills of the students in addition to their earning income during vacation.

**2.4 Coverage of SPES.** Under RA 9647 SPES covers employment of students not only in the high school level, but already includes tertiary, vocational and technical education. Students in the secondary level may be employed during summer and Christmas vacations while those in the tertiary, vocational and technical are allowed employment at any time of the year. Students are employed from twenty to fifty- two working days only while on Christmas vacation for ten to 15 working days. Employment of students in the company or government agency may be considered as part of the probationary period when employed in the same agency after graduation.

**2.5 Procedures and Processes of SPES.** In Metro Manila, Philippines, employment under the SPES program demands for requirements which include accomplished SPES application form, curriculum vitae, certification of residency in the barangay, and income tax return of parents or guardian. The Manila Youth Development and Welfare Bureau. While in New York, the program is known as (SYEP) or Summer Youth Employment Program. The students submit their application online or through a paper application and select a CBO service provider. The applications are processed, and students are assigned to service providers by matching the social security number and name of the applicant. The students are chosen by lottery in the computerized system. The system sees each application as anonymous and does not use any applicant information to determine their selection into the program, except for those who have self-identified as having a disability.

**2.6 Implementation of SPES in terms of levels of LGU.** In a study conducted it was found that there were fewer participating municipalities in the SPES. Very limited studies are conducted on implementation of SPES in the municipalities due to challenges in gaining the support and cooperation of the local chief executives because of the cost involved in sustaining the program. Researchers also experienced high levels of non-compliance with selection guidelines. While in a prior impact evaluation it was noted that innovations in the implementation of SPES varied by levels of local governments, that is, they implement their own program features to reflect their aims and the needs of the students. These innovations

include community service, life skills training, and employment skills training which were usually undertaken by cities.

**2.7 Implementation of SPES in terms of LGU income classification.** The study conducted in the implementation of SPES in a highly urbanized city discovered that the program was able to help and encourage the students to become productive members of society by rendering service and continuing their education. The program contributed to enhancing social capital and skills that allow students to have greater opportunities during and after the program. This was attributed to enough and sufficient budget provided to implementation of SPES. However, the authors recommended for an in-depth analysis of the program especially on the participation of government officials whether it redound to good governance and leadership for the students.

**2.8 Implementation of SPES in terms of LGU number of beneficiaries.** The implementation of SPES did not increase school enrolment overall, but the study in 2019 reported an increase enrolment for men by 6.2% percentage points. It was also found that with the implementation of the K-12 program, the addition of Grades 11 and 12 is a challenge and the author recommended to measure the impact of SPES on graduation and other education outcomes. SPES participation increased employability of students by 3.9% which is 70% higher without the program. It was highlighted that the higher the number of beneficiaries of the SPES, the higher is the enrolment of schools in the locality. It was revealed that very few beneficiaries worked the maximum of 52 days while SPES participation reduces summer work but only 18% of those not chosen.

**2.9 Challenges of SPES implementation.** It was noted in a study conducted that local government officials are highly involved in the selection process of SPES beneficiaries which is one of the top challenges faced in implementation. The other type of challenge encountered even in the evaluation of implementation of the SPES is the refusal of the PESO staff to accept an applicant because they have pre-selected list of participants especially during years immediately before local elections. However, it had increased enrolment for men who are more likely to drop out. That SPES did not impact life skills nor affect their wage expectation, overall, there was no evidence that SPES impact academic outcomes although it is true that SPES help the beneficiaries find employment.

**2.9.1 Challenges in administration of SPES.** The overall finding of a study in the province of the level of implementation of the local employment services of the PESO as a whole as very high implies that the services are regularly conducted, made available to job seekers, and benefited the local business establishments; however several challenges in the administration were also identified such as only highly- skilled vacancies are available; most of the vacancies are managerial positions, self-employment assistance is not always available, results of referrals conducted by the office are always late, training takes too long, students are not aware of non-government organizations livelihood programs, among others. On a favorable note, it was revealed that the administration of the SPES enhanced the agency of the youth by empowering them in terms of the human, social, political, and psychological dimensions of empowerment since the program was able to form collective assets and capabilities through the interaction among beneficiaries from different districts; wherein they were able to represent the voice of the youth for their distinct identity.

**2.9.2 Challenges in Coverage of SPES.** The coverage of SPES concerns terms and conditions of employment, guarantee of insurance coverage, periods of employment, on the job-training credits, processing of payments, and the SPES information system. The paper released by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, 2017) identified weaknesses of the SPES such as work is limited to Christmas and summer recess only, the students can only work from a maximum of seventy- eight (78) days, out-of-school youth are also included on the limitations of the number of work days. The same organization revealed that the objective of SPES was negatively affected by the delay in the release of salaries and wages of beneficiaries where they claimed that the Commission on Audit (COA) attributed the delay to the processing. While a local study reported that challenges encountered in connection with the SPES implementation in the area of coverage as expressed by jobseekers include the self-employment program of the DOLE is not always available, self-employment assistance is not always available; while overseas employment agencies observed that the seminar that provides reskilling or skills enhancement for career shift/change are seldom, it is hard to avail of employment assistance, job fairs are very rare, the pre-departure loan assistance is not widely disseminated, and recipients of the financial assistance are pre-identified, among others.

**2.9.3 Challenges in Processes and Procedures.** In terms of processes and procedures in implementation of SPES, it was noted local government officials are highly involved in the selection process of SPES beneficiaries which is one of the top challenges faced in implementation. The other type of challenge encountered even in the evaluation of implementation of the SPES is the refusal of the PESO because they have pre-selected list of participants especially during years immediately before local elections. Findings of previous study conducted enumerated the following: a range of processes and quality measures need a long period of time, many requirements are needed to avail of start-up business capital, the schedule for specialized training is not posted; and no information on requirements to apply to the program time of the huge number of claims, incomplete supporting documents, and incomplete payroll submissions by employers. Another challenge was there are no placement reports submitted by the PESO offices to DOLE, and payments in the form of cash cards or checks which are not provided for in COA guidelines.

**2.10 Opportunities for SPES Implementation.** There are opportunities for the improvement of SPES, based on the responses of the respondents on the survey in Metro Manila, the respondents recommended that the implementing agency should devise ways to make the program more responsive to the needs of the youth such as designing a seminar more participatory using adult learning approaches. Enhancing program implementation so that the beneficiaries will feel that the training is adequate for a public servant especially those assigned in the government.

An author suggested the following opportunities in the implementation of SPES: to establish a technical working group, strong coordination with coordinators in the province, region, and national counterparts, reliable administrative data, and importance of establishing and maintaining updated data bases of beneficiaries.

**2.10.1 Opportunities in administration of SPES.** The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) supported the replicability of the

SPES program as records revealed hundreds of thousands of students received quality education already. SPES provides income earning opportunities to assist financially in the education of students leading to eradication of poverty adding that as a school to work bridging program, SPES helps beneficiaries prepare for the world of work. It was recommended that it should be implemented all through the year not only during summer breaks.

*2.10.2 Opportunities in Coverage of SPES.* The study recommended for additional training components, broaden the recruitment and make application easier, extend the minimum duration of the program, and improve on the payment schemes. While UNESCAP suggested considering the employment of the out-of-school youth who are willing to work anytime of the year; for more flexibility in the financing scheme, that is, allowing beneficiaries to choose payment packages whether in cash or educational vouchers.

An author suggested improving the targeting system, that is adjusting screening criteria or developing guidelines and initiatives to reach the broader population through active publicity strategies and inclusion of the students availing of the Alternative Learning System (ALS). SPES should target those students who cannot afford the payment of fees but are willing to graduate, further that SPES should be expanded to lower-class municipalities where the target population is high. In addition, it was recommended to maximize the on-the-job learning or the apprenticeship of students.

*2.10.3 Opportunities in Processes and Procedures of SPES.* The study suggested that implementation of SPES should include programs more responsive to the developmental needs of the youth such as more interactive seminars and that DOLE should modify the program for adequate on the job training to cultivate their sense of public service. Also recommended for exploring ways to make work experience more meaningful such as assignment to communities as tutors, helping in the barangay health care centers, and providing soft skills training. The study provided opportunities for students joining the SPES to avail themselves of free: fee miscellaneous fees, free uniforms, and exposure of students in school competitions.

It was suggested that the DOLE must go beyond submission of reports by the PESO offices. It must evaluate ideals, beliefs, norms, and practices; to assess what It has to evaluate ideals, beliefs, norms, and practices; to assess what happens at the grassroots specifically to determine the competencies of the PESO and staff of the LGUs. Recommended for opportunities to improve or enhance program implementation include studies on organizational culture, leadership competencies, level of performance, and a proposal for a manual as guidelines for the officers and staff of the PESO in local government units.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This study utilized the explanatory sequential mixed method research design. A descriptive design was used for the quantitative phase to determine the extent of implementation and opportunities of the SPES in local government units. A mixed method design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study to understand a research problem. Two forms of data are integrated into the design procedure: data collection and analyses through merging, connecting, or embedding the data. These procedures were incorporated into a distinct mixed method design that also includes the timing of the data collection, concurrent or sequential, as well as the emphasis for each database. The purpose of mixed method research is to overcome the limitations of a single design. It is to explain and interpret, explore a phenomenon, develop and test a new instrument, serve a theoretical

perspective, complement the strengths of a single design, address a question at different levels, as well as theoretical perspective.

The quantitative data and their analyses improved and help explain confusing, unusual or contradictory survey responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Phase 2 is the qualitative stage using a semi-structured interview with an interview protocol. While the narrative inquiry approach was used in the qualitative phase to determine the opportunities in implementation of the SPES. For this explanatory-sequential approach, the quantitative data was integrated with the results of the qualitative inquiry which is an important characteristic of the mixed method design. The results of the quantitative phase were presented and analyzed first, followed by the presentation of themes from the qualitative phase. A joint presentation of the integration followed instrument, serve a theoretical perspective, complement the strengths of a single design, address a question at different levels, as well as theoretical perspective. The quantitative data and their analyses improved and helped explain confusing, unusual or contradictory survey responses.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Quantitative Results

#### 4.1.1 Extent of Implementation of the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) of the PESO

Table 1 presents the extent of implementation of the SPES by the PESO in the first-class province. The extent of implementation of the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) of the PESO in the first-class province (M=3.62, SD=0.31) is very great. Beneficiaries (M=3.74, SD=0.28), and implementers (M=3.62, SD=0.31) rated implementation very great.

**Table 1**  
*Extent of Implementation of the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) of the PESO*

Variable	Implementation			Administration			Coverage			Processes and Procedures		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Respondent												
Beneficiaries	3.7	0.2	V	3.7	0.2	V	3.6	0.3	V	3.8	0.3	V
Implementers	3.6	0.3	V	3.5	0.4	V	3.5	0.2	V	3.8	0.4	V
LGU Income Class												
1st Class Province	3.7	0.2	V	3.8	0.2	V	3.7	0.3	V	3.7	0.5	V
1st Class City	3.5	0.3	V	3.7	0.2	V	3.4	0.4	V	3.6	0.4	V
2nd Class City	3.9	0.0	V	3.8	0.2	V	3.9	0.1	V	4.0	0.0	V
3rd Class City	3.7	0.2	V	3.8	0.2	V	3.7	0.2	V	3.8	0.3	V
4th Class City	3.6	0.2	V	3.5	0.3	V	3.6	0.3	V	3.8	0.2	V
1st Class Municipality	3.9	0.0	V	3.9	0.0	V	3.9	0.1	V	4.0	0.0	V
LGU Level												
Province	3.7	0.2	V	3.8	0.2	V	3.7	0.3	V	3.7	0.5	V

City	3.6	0.3	V	3.7	0.3	V	3.6	0.3	V	3.8	0.3	V
	8	0	G	2	0	G	2	7	G	2	5	G
Municipality	3.9	0.0	V	3.9	0.0	V	3.9	0.1	V	4.0	0.0	V
	3	7	G	4	9	G	1	0	G	0	1	G
Number of Beneficiaries												
Not more than 20	3.6	0.3	V	3.7	0.2	V	3.6	0.4	V	3.7	0.3	V
	9	1	G	9	7	G	2	0	G	8	9	G
20 to 50	3.8	0.1	V	3.7	0.3	V	3.8	0.1	V	4.0	0.0	V
	3	3	G	0	1	G	2	3	G	0	0	G
More than 50	3.9	0.0	V	3.8	0.2	V	3.9	0.0	V	4.0	0.0	V
	2	6	G	3	0	G	3	7	G	0	0	G
<b>Whole</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>VG</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>VG</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>VG</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>VG</b>
	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	

Mean Range: 1.00-1.75=Very Poor (VP), 1.76-2.50=Poor (Po), 2.51-3.25=Great (Gr), 3.26-4.00=Very Great (VG)

This finding demonstrates that SPES as implemented by the PESOs complied with all provisions in terms of administration, coverage, processes and procedures as provided in RA 10917 which implies that local government units contributed to the promotion of employment and providing opportunities for all. Further, the findings of very great extent of implementation suggest that the SPES link low-income in-school youth to formal work opportunities; that the DOLE collaborated with the PESO in provincial, city, and municipal local government units in the implementation of the program. Furthermore, the very great extent of implementation suggests that policy makers understand that employment and education are driving forces behind economic growth toward eradication of poverty for all.

This finding finds support in the studies of the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2020), and Scarpetta et al. (2020) that productive employment is the best way to solve poverty; that the role of employment is necessary to achieve the sustainable development goals (Sultana, et al., 2022) that facilitating employment opportunities thru education (Agbedahin, 2019) encourage lifelong learning opportunities (Ferguson et.al. 2018) is a mandate of the PESO. Also, the study of Sanmocte (2020) affirmed the finding that the PESO in LGUs is working in coordination with the DOLE that ensures the effective, efficient, and prompt delivery of facilitating employment services as well as providing updated market information. It also aligns with Fogg et al. (2016) that early work experience in SPES help young workers go beyond entry level jobs and gain experience in different workplace settings and gain knowledge of specific occupational skills. Likewise, by the study of Macalintal and De Chavez (2020) that work immersion through SPES develop their life and career skills and prepare them to make decisions on employment.

*Administration.* The extent of implementation as a whole was very great (M=3.78: SD=0.29). Beneficiaries and implementers both rated “administration” very great.

The findings suggest that respondents (beneficiaries and implementers) agreed that SPES as implemented by the PESOs complied with all requisites of implementation as provided for under the law (RA 10691) such as operated by LGUs; linked to the provincial/regional office of the DOLE, manned by a PESO manager, assisted by the DOLE, and coordinate their activities with educational institutions, NGOs, and business establishments. Further, respondents acknowledged that SPES as implemented by the PESOs in LGUs facilitated their education by providing all the opportunities for them to participate in the program.

The result is supported by studies of Cortez (2023) that services implemented by the PESOs were rated by both clients and service providers as highly evident; concurred with Atwell et. al (2020) that government partnered with community agencies who provided intervention; and of Schwartz et al. (2021) that local governments provide training, supervise job placement and develops the career and skills of the students, that the youth employment program develops the careers and skills of the students in addition to their earning income during vacation, Further, the result is affirming the study of de Villiers et al. (2021) that worldwide, nations are engaged in making education available to everyone as it is the best way to remove the barriers of poverty.

*Procedures and Processes.* The findings revealed that the extent of implementation of SPES by local government units was very great ( $M=3.78$ :  $SD=0.39$ ); that both beneficiaries and implementers rated procedures and processes in implementation of SPE S very great.

The findings mean that the PESOs in local government units are compliant with the guidelines on filing of applications, processing of applications, matching, referral, placement, and commencement of employment. It further suggests that PESOs in LGUs are requesting for necessary requirements only and everybody is given the chance to participate in the program. It was demonstrated that the selection process used by LGUs is fair and reasonable.

This finding is consistent with Codera (2015) that employment under the SPES demands requirements that can be easily completed by the applicants; that the program is administered by local governments as well as of Schwartz et al. (2021) who explained that the system adopted sees each application as anonymous to determine their selection and entrance in the program. Some LGUs allow online application or using lottery in the computerized system and students are assigned to service providers or to the barangays subject to a contract of completion.

*Coverage.* The finding on extent of implementation as a whole is very great ( $M=3.62$ ;  $SD=0.39$ ) in terms of coverage as rated by both beneficiaries and implementers.

These findings illustrate that PESOs in LGUs are compliant with provisions of the law in so far as working conditions, period of employment, on the job training credits, and processing of payments, maintenance of the SPES information system, and provision of group personal accident insurance. The finding demonstrated that LGUs help young workers, the students, gain experience in different work settings and gain knowledge of occupational skills and that all delivers the SPES as provided by law.

The result is like study of Codera (2015) that students are employed in both the private and the government sector following the same procedures of employment such as during summer and Christmas vacations as well as on the number of working days. Employment of students in the company or government agency may be considered as part of the probationary period when employed in the same agency after graduation. The finding disagrees with Loewenberg (2020) that teens due to lack of soft skills are at the end of the hiring queue because regardless of skills students are hired for the purpose of providing employment to complete their education.

*When grouped as to type of respondents.* The implementation was very great with beneficiaries rating slightly higher ( $M=3.7$ : $SD=0.28$ ) than implementers ( $M=3.62$ : $SD=0.31$ ) both interpreted very great. The ratings provided by beneficiaries are consistently higher in all aspects than that of implementers.

This finding suggests that SPES beneficiaries appreciated and attested the benefits and assistance received from the PESO of local government units. Further, the finding revealed that

the youth as beneficiaries recognized that unemployment due to lack of education is a barrier to economic growth.

The result of the study affirmed the theory of Beam and Quimbo (2017) that youth unemployment is due to lack of education that leads to problems of government, while (Barr et al. 2017) and Karr et al. (2020) affirmed that government enact policies supporting and providing employment. Findings also affirmed the study of Bachita and Bayoneta (2021) that the creation of the PESO in LGUs will promote employment and provide employment opportunities as provided in RA 10691. The finding also validates the study of Quimbo et al. (2018) that DOLE collaborates with the PESOs in implementation of the program.

*When grouped as to LGU level.* The extent of implementation is higher in first class cities (M=3.93; SD=0.07) interpreted very great and the lowest is still on 2<sup>nd</sup> class cities (M=3.68; SD=0.30) although still very great.

The finding illustrates that LGUs implement their own program features to reflect their aims and objectives; that there is a relationship between the LGU's leadership with implementation. The finding exhibits the lack of accountability of local governments and the weak political will to implement policies and programs. This finding implies the role of politics in implementation. This finding aligned with the study of Beam (2019) that there were fewer municipalities participating due to the cost involved in sustaining the program and supports the study of Tumbagahan and Caelian (2021) that extent of implementation of programs and projects is not all financial resources that matters. The result validated the study of Carpio et al. (2018) that the adequacy of fiscal resources to finance the program is determined by level of government such as provincial, city, and/or municipal, however, factors such as lack of accountability for not participating in the program and political priorities influence the implementation of the SPES in local government units.

*When grouped as to LGU income class.* The implementation in 1<sup>st</sup> class municipality rated the highest (M=3.93; SD=0.07) interpreted very great. The lowest rating was from 1<sup>st</sup> class cities (M=3.56; SD=0.34) although still very great.

The finding implies that implementation does not depend entirely on financial resources, but several factors can contribute or necessary in project implementation. It further demonstrates that implementation of SPES can be impressive and significant even if financial resources are scarce. The finding suggested the importance of the role of politicians in the implementation of programs such as the SPES. This finding is substantiated in the studies of Gella and Caelian (2021) and Tumbagahan and Caelian (2021) that budget or financial resources of the LGU, are not the determining factor of a very great extent implementation. That the level of performance of offices when grouped according to income class, is not affected by the share in internal revenue allotment now national tax allocation but organizational culture influences performance. The finding disagrees with Codera (2015), Beam (2019), Cortez (2023) and Carpio (2018) who all found that the amount of budget of an LGU is the primary reason for success in implementation.

*In terms of number of beneficiaries.* The extent of implementation is higher for LGUs where beneficiaries are more than fifty (50).

Finding indicates that implementation of the SPES has a positive relationship with the number of beneficiaries granted the privilege to join the summer youth program. Although it also connotes that social protection system in the country such as provision of education and employment is characterized by fragmented, uncoordinated, and poorly targeted beneficiaries. This finding is partly in discord with that of Beam (2019) that the higher the number of beneficiaries in the SPES, the higher is the enrolment of schools in the locality and aligned with

Monsura (2021) the greater number of beneficiaries in government programs on free education expands the effects of reducing unemployment. However, it was recommended to undertake careful monitoring and evaluation of implementation.

#### **4.1.2 Difference in the Extent of Implementation of the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) of the PESO**

Kruskal Wallis was used to determine the significant difference in the extent of implementation of SPES when Local Governments are grouped as to number of SPES beneficiaries, LGU income class, and LGU level. There was significant difference in the extent of implementation of SPES when Local Governments are grouped as to Number of SPES Beneficiaries [ $\chi^2(2)=15.61$ ,  $p=0.000$ ], LGU Income Class [ $\chi^2(5)=58.034$ ,  $p=0.000$ ], and LGU Level [ $\chi^2(2)=32.461$ ,  $p=0.000$ ].

An in-depth analysis of the results of the differences in the extent of implementation of SPES by the PESO revealed the following:

Post hoc test revealed that in terms of number SPES beneficiaries, those who are in more than 50 beneficiaries rated significantly higher than other respondents.

*Difference in terms of Number of SPES Beneficiaries.* There was a significant difference in implementation in terms of the number of beneficiaries with those in the more than 50 beneficiaries rating significantly higher than other respondents.

The finding demonstrates that the impact and outcomes of SPES is more pronounced when there are more beneficiaries in the program in terms of increased employability; that the objectives of SPES is achieved much better with these number of beneficiaries than with the rest. Implementers and beneficiaries consider that the higher the number of students and out-of-school-youth participating in the SPES program contributes to the solution for unemployment and ultimately eradication of poverty in the families of the concerned beneficiaries. This finding implies that the higher the number of beneficiaries of the SPES, the higher is the enrolment of schools in the locality, resulting in reducing unemployment and more opportunities to eradicate poverty thus achieving the goals of sustainable development.

This is supported by the study of Beam (2019) that the outcome of SPES implementation is increased employability; and Monsura (2021) who claimed that SPES is one government program that builds human capital and that the investments of government in education gives opportunity to low-income households to take off from poverty. The finding also affirmed the study of Beam (2017) that the local governments' implementation of SPES has a positive relationship with the number of beneficiaries granted the privilege to avail themselves of the summer and vacation work program.

*In terms of LGU Income Class.* Findings revealed that the 1<sup>st</sup> class municipality and 2<sup>nd</sup> class city rated significantly higher than those in 1<sup>st</sup> class and 4<sup>th</sup> class cities.

This finding implies that although funding is a primary consideration in implementation of any government project or program depending on the national tax allocation by income classification, yet implementation of the SPES depends on the priorities of any government administration. This finding clearly reflects the mentality of officials of a local government unit but implies their priorities of service to their constituents. The finding further demonstrates that program implementation reflects the aims and objectives of any administration even if counterpart funding is provided by the national government.

The finding is supported by the studies of Tumbagahan et al. (2021) and Gella and Caelian (2021) who both discovered that in other sectors such as taxation and health services, programs can still be implemented successfully regardless of income classification. The study

of Cortez (2023) in fact recommended that the LGU in Laguna should share their best practices in SPES implementation since respondents were very satisfied as to efficiency of services rendered by SPES although it was noted that the amount of budget should be increased and addressed gender issues in implementation.

*In terms of LGU Level.* When measured in terms of LGU level [ $\chi^2(2)=32.461$ ,  $p=0.000$ ] those who are in municipality rated significantly higher than other respondents.

This finding implies that outcomes of SPES implementation is illustrated on the key players in local governments who are closer to their constituents considering smaller populations in municipalities compared to cities and the province. The finding that the extent of implementation of the SPES by the PESO is higher in municipalities points out the relationship between the officials and the residents, informing the public that because municipalities are smaller in coverage, local officials are well-informed of the needs of their constituents hence can focus on providing programs and projects that can help and assist the members of the communities.

The study of Tumbagahan et al. (2021) supported the finding that outcomes in performance are primarily dependent on the key players in local governments, which in this case are the officers and staff of the PESO. The study conducted by Beam (2019) found that there were fewer municipalities participating in the program aligned with the findings the reasons were that difficulties in gaining the support and cooperation of local chief executives due to cost in sustaining the program. Likewise, on the issue of non-compliance of selection guidelines.

**Table 2.** Difference in the Extent of Implementation of the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES) of the PESO

Variable	$\chi^2$	df	P
Number of SPES Beneficiaries	15.610*	2	0.000
LGU Income Class	58.034*	5	0.000
LGU Level	32.461*	2	0.000

Note: \*difference is significant when  $p \leq 0.05$

#### 4.1.3 Challenges in the Implementation of SPES

As shown on table 3, the highest rated challenges are political interference and failure of business establishments to provide updated list of vacancies occupying both as number one in the list. Next is still on need for cooperation of business/establishments, then no large-scale training and the next set is lack of funds at the LGU level and insufficient information to job seekers/students while the last are lack of interest of local officials on the program, many requirements to be qualified for the job and inadequate coordination between government and the private sector.

Of the list of challenges three (3) out of the nine (9) are beyond control and cannot be acted upon by the PESO officers and staff implying that there is so much room for enhancement of the services offered by the PESO in local government units considering that majority of the challenges aired by both implementers and beneficiaries are administrative in nature.

This finding is supported by the results of the study of Tumbagahan et al. (2021) that performance is dependent on the administrative capacity and leadership of the officers and staff of the Office. Although the highest rated challenge is political intervention which still is considered as leadership of the officials considering that the local chief executive and the members of the local legislative council are exercising their administrative functions.

**Table 3.** Challenges and Opportunities in the Implementation of SPES

Variable	f	%
Political Interference	8	80.0
Failure of business establishments to provide updated list of vacancies	8	80.0
Need for cooperation of business establishments	4	40.0
No large- scale training	3	30.0
Lack of funds at the LGU level for implementation	2	20.0
Insufficient information to job seekers/students	2	20.0
Lack of interest of local officials in the program	1	10.0
Many requirements to be qualified for the job	1	10.0
Inadequate coordination between government and the private sector	1	10.0

While in terms of the variable administration, it is political interference rated highest followed by inadequate coordination between the government and the private sector. The third highest challenge revealed by the respondents is weak monitoring and evaluation. Weak monitoring and evaluation justified the first two challenges, meaning there is inadequate information in the local government which can be attributed to lapses in the implementation by the national government. These challenges demonstrate the business climate in the local government unit which is being dictated by the relationship between government and the private sector. The third highest revealed by the respondents is weak monitoring and evaluation that justified the first two challenges, meaning there is inadequate information in the local government which can be attributed to lapses in the implementation by the national government.

This finding aligned with the results of the impact evaluation conducted by Beam et al. (2018) that the decentralization of program implementation and the strong influence of local chief executives make it difficult to ensure that SPES is carried out in accordance with the national implementing rules and guidelines and monitoring data is very limited.

**Table 4.** Challenges in the Implementation of SPES in terms of Administration

Variable	f	%
Political Interference	52	26.0
Inadequate coordination between the government and the private sector	32	16.0
Weak monitoring and evaluation	23	11.5
Local officials are not interested in the program	16	8.0
Inadequate coordination with educational institutions	4	2.0

As to coverage which includes working conditions, the highest rated indicator is all SPES beneficiaries are required to do the same tasks, followed by them are not entitled to premium pay on holidays and are violations of the guidelines provided by the DOLE. This finding demonstrates the weak linkage between the national and local government agencies that there is a need for training and close monitoring and evaluation of the PESO offices in the province. The finding is affirming the study of Monsura (2021) that the social protection system in the country is characterized by fragmented and is uncoordinated, hence careful monitoring and evaluation is needed.

**Table 5.** Challenges in the Implementation of SPES in terms of Working Conditions

Variable	f	%
All SPES beneficiaries are required to do the same tasks	67	33.5
SPES beneficiaries are not entitled to premium pay on holidays	24	12.0
SPES beneficiaries are not paid based on the minimum wage	23	11.5
SPES beneficiaries are required to work overtime	20	10.0
Delayed payment of wages	4	2.0

The other indicator of coverage is claim for insurance where beneficiaries mentioned that there is always delay and many requirements are needed to avail aggravated by insufficient information on how to do it other than there are always incomplete records in the GSIS for failure of the LGU to submit the same. The findings insinuate the inadequacies on the part of implementers which can be attributed to the lack of personnel in the office of the PESO in local government units.

**Table 6.** Challenges in the Implementation of SPES in terms of Claims for Insurance

Variable	f	%
Delay in the payment of claims for insurance	43	21.5
Many requirements to avail of insurance	27	13.5
Insufficient information on how to claim for insurance	25	12.5
No complete records in the GSIS	3	1.5

In terms of period of employment, RA 10917 provides that the periods of employment shall be from twenty (20) to seventy eight (78) working days except that during Christmas vacation, employment shall be from ten (10) to fifteen (15) days which may be counted as part of the probationary period should the student be hired in the same agency or company (Congress of the Republic of the Philippines, 2016). Results of the interviews revealed that the period of employment depends on the need of the employer; that there is inadequate guidance on when to avail of the program, and insufficient information on periods of employment which findings demonstrate that there is absence of coordination of LGUs with the DOLE implying institutional weaknesses.

These findings on challenges are supported by the study of Bachita and Bayoneta (2021) conducted in a local government unit in the province of Negros Occidental. The authors recommended for enactment of local laws to enhance employment facilitation by the local PESOs.

**Table 7.** Challenges in the Implementation of SPES in terms of Periods of Employment

Variable	f	%
Periods of employment depend on the needs of the employer	37	18.5
Inadequate guidance on when to avail of the program	27	13.5
Insufficient information on periods of employment	26	13.0
Insufficient number of days work	19	9.5
Periods of employment are not announced	17	8.5
Out of school youth are not guided accordingly	3	1.5

On the indicator of on the job training, findings revealed that students invited to the training are those who frequent the PESO office only was rated highest followed by on the job training conducted are not relevant to my line of work and the third challenges identified on this area are not aware when the on the job training will be conducted and no large scale training.

These findings are similar to that of Orbeta et al. (2021) on projects undertaken by TESDA enumerating the issues on training conducted and subscribe to Codera (2015) which recommended for designing a seminar more participatory in nature using adult learning approaches so that the beneficiaries will feel that the training is adequate for a public service especially those employed in the government sector.

**Table 8.** Challenges in the Implementation of SPES in terms of On-the-Job Training

Variable	f	%
Students invited to the training are those who frequent the PESO office	30	15.0
On the job training is not relevant to my line of work	24	12.0
No large- scale training	18.	9.0
Not aware when the on-the-job training will be conducted	18.	9.0
Need for more frequent job fairs	13	6.5.
We were not informed of the specific schedule for the training	9	4.5
SPES employments are not considered as training	3	1.5

On the indicator claims for salaries and wages, it was revealed by the respondents that payment of salaries and wages are always delayed followed by many requirements needed to claim salaries and wages and the last two of the same ratings are we were not informed where to draw our salaries and wages and we were not informed whether the salaries and wages are already available. These tasks are purely administrative in nature which requires information dissemination to the beneficiaries. Again, the most probable reason is the lack of staff to undertake these functions.

**Table 9.** Challenges in the Implementation of SPES in terms of processing of payments

Variable	f	%
Salaries and wages always delayed	52	26.0
Forms of payment of salaries and wages are not explained	7	3.5
We were not informed where to withdraw our salaries and wages	6	3.0
We were not informed that salaries and wages are already available	6	3.0
Many requirements to claim salaries and wages	6	3.0

On procedures and processes, indicators of which are filing of applications and processing of applications, challenges encountered include limited coverage of announcements, students are not aware of the starting date and deadline of applications, and insufficient information on the SPES program are the highly rated questions. These findings suggest that the PESO have pre-selected list of participants, especially during years immediately preceding local elections implying the interests of politicians in the selection process. This finding is elucidated in the study of Beam et al. (2018) and part of the findings of Orbeta et al. (2021).

**Table 10.** Challenges in the Implementation of SPES in terms of Filing and Processing of Applications

Variable	f	%
Limited coverage of announcements	24	12.0
We are not aware of the starting date and deadline of applications	22	11.0
Insufficient information on the SPES program	17	8.5
So many questions on the interview	11	5.5
Our applications were not acted upon	9	4.5
No instructions on what to submit when applying	4	2.0
Not aware of the interview schedule	4	2.0
So many steps for the filing and processing of applications	3	1.5

#### 4.1.4 Opportunities in the Implementation of SPES

Among the opportunities in the implementation of SPES, respondents recommended for part time flexible employment opportunities meaning SPES programs should be available all year round to allow many qualified students and out-of-school youth to avail as the highest. Another opportunity seen as responsive is large- scale and high- quality training to allow possible beneficiaries all over the community to participate, allowing them enough room for employment. Other opportunities which are highly recommended are to focus on the reintegration in the SPES

These findings mean that the programs and projects of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the local government units must be downloaded to academic institutions and the labor market which should be supported by active labor market policy, widening or providing rooms for participation of the apprenticeship model and guaranteeing part time jobs for a maximum of six (6) months. These recommendations for the opportunities in the implementation of SPES advocates and alludes ways to make the program more responsive to the needs of the participants

Findings supported the study of Codera (2015) and confirm that of Bachita and Bayoneta (2021) that creating opportunities for steady employment is one of the best ways for local governments to help in reducing unemployment thereby ensuring sustainable development through good governance and support system.

**Table 11.** Opportunities in the Implementation of SPES

Variable	f	%
Part time flexible employment opportunities	52	26.0
Large scale and high-quality training	51	25.5
Focus on reintegration in the SPES	36	18.0
Active labor market policy	31	15.5
Widen the apprenticeship model	24	12.0
Guarantee part time jobs for a maximum of 6 months	21	10.5
Maximize engagement of large corporations	20	10.0
Increase opportunities for training in the private sector	17	8.5
Develop better integration between the schools and the labor market	14	7.0
Better coordination between and among agencies, government and private	13	6.5
Sustained investment in research and development	11	5.5

Results of the study revealed a very great extent of implementation of the SPES by the PESOs which contributed to the objectives of the government of reducing unemployment by

providing free education to deserving students and other targeted beneficiaries. The experiences of the SPES babies demonstrated how the PESOs in local government units executed the program. Results also showed that regardless of levels of government, income classification, and number of SPES beneficiaries, overall results were generally very great. Although there were challenges met by the respondents' implementers and beneficiaries, but these were overcome, and great opportunities were recommended to enhance the implementation of the SPES. The findings of the study serve as baseline information in the preparation of a strategic plan to further enhance implementation of the SPES.

## **4.2 Qualitative Results**

### **4.2.1 Thematic Insights**

Central themes and sub themes were developed from the interviews. These were the following:

#### **Theme 1. PESO contributes to the implementation of SPES.**

- 1.1. Referral and placement
- 1.2. Providing labor market information
- 1.3. Employment coaching and counseling
- 1.4. Conduct of Jobfairs
- 1.5. Providing assistance to OFWs

#### **Theme 2. Benefits gained by the beneficiaries from the SPES.**

- 2.1. Permanent employment
- 2.2. Higher salaries and wages
- 2.3. Increase in family income

#### **Theme 3 Factor affecting the implementation of SPES.**

- 3.1. Level of government (national, provincial, city, municipal)
- 3.2. Income classification (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th)
- 3.3. Number of SPES beneficiaries (less than 20; less than 50, more than 50)

#### **Theme 4. Challenges encountered by the implementers in delivering SPES**

- 4.1. Political intervention in selecting qualified beneficiaries
- 4.2. Numerous pre-employment requirements for submission
- 4.3. Limited funding source
- 4.4. Inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the program
- 4.5. Limited information on the benefits of the program by business establishments

and other organizations

#### **Theme 5. The potential of the SPES despite challenges**

- 5.1. Better integration of SPES programs
- 5.2. Flexible employment opportunities
- 5.3. Active labor market policy

#### **Theme 1. PESO contributes to the implementation of SPES**

Productive employment is one of the best ways to solve widespread poverty. Facilitating employment opportunities is a mandate of the Public Employment Service Office. To accomplish this, PESOs must comply with mandated functions and follow guidelines. These core functions include referral and placement, providing updated labor market information, matching qualifications, coaching and mentoring, conduct of job-fairs, and providing assistance to OFWs.

**Referral and Placement.** The PESO staff match the qualifications of the applicants to the vacancies then refer the applicants to the participating employers, advise the applicant to sign an employment contract, advise the applicant and the employers when to start the employment and refer to other employers those who are not considered in the previous referral. SPES implementers choose beneficiaries based on qualifications as provided in the guidelines of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

**Providing labor market information.** Labor market information provides insights on the labor market including information about occupations, their location, wages, supply and demand, demographics etc. such that the PESO conducted research to update their labor information in the performance of their functions. In this study the provision of labor market information as a function of the PESO is very great.

**Conduct of Jobfairs.** This articulates the functions of the PESO and its general objectives which guarantee the job seekers within its locality that it will deliver updated information about employment and other DOLE programs. Concurrently, its specific objectives are to provide a venue for employment assistance in every locale and to serve as a referral or recruitment information center by providing job vacancy information. PESO is directed to follow up and monitor the status of the referred job seekers who have been employed by different stakeholders nationwide.

**Providing assistance to OFWs.** Among the programs implemented by PESO is the provision of assistance to OFWs. Other than this program, there are assistance programs facilitated in LGUs for the OFWs of their communities. In coordination with Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO), the PESO shall assist in providing re-integration assistance services to returning Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs).

## **Theme 2. Benefits gained by the beneficiaries from the SPES**

Despite of greater job opportunities offered to a wider market, access to these job opportunities for job placement remains low for most of the population as revealed on the report of the Philippine Statistic Authority (PSA). One of the best ways of doing this is simplifying the procedures and processes of entrance to the program. In addition, graduates of the SPES gained benefits that had helped themselves and their families that led to better and comfortable life. Testimonies of SPES beneficiaries revealed that SPES provided permanent employment, *Higher Salaries and Wages and increase in family income.*

## **Theme 3. Factors affecting the implementation of SPES**

The success of the implementation of SPES is attributed to enough and sufficient budget which is reflected on the income classification of local government units, meaning that a highly urbanized city, then first class cities have higher tax allocation than any other cities, higher than that allocated for municipalities (Codera, 2015; Beam, (2019); and in the related study of Carpio et al. (2018). However, studies of Gella and Caelian (2021) on healthcare implementation and of Tumbagahan et al. (2021) on performance of assessment offices revealed that the effective implementation of a program does not always depend on financial resources alone, but is influenced by administrative capacity of implementers, leadership and the political will of government leaders. Implementation of SPES was measured in terms of income classification and number of beneficiaries. Level of government (provincial, city, municipal) Income classification (1st class province, 1st class city, 2nd class city, 3rd class city, 4th class

city, 1st class municipality Number of SPES beneficiaries (less than 20, less than 50, more than 50).

#### **Theme 4. Challenges encountered by the implementers in delivering SPES**

Challenges in the implementation of SPES are measured in terms of management, supervision, organization and administrative tasks implying the participation of the different implementers and stakeholders. SPES is carried out in accordance with the rules and regulations and guidelines prescribed by the government through the DOLE because of the strong influence of local chief executives in most areas which contributed to the weak monitoring as very limited data is available. Political intervention for selecting qualified beneficiaries); Numerous pre-employment requirements for submission. Limited funding source Inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the program Limited information of the benefits of the programs by business establishments and other organizations.

#### **Theme 5: The potential of the SPES despite challenges**

Creating opportunities for steady employment through the PESO is one of the best ways of helping reduce unemployment. The UNESCAP (2017) supported the replicability of SPES program as hundreds of thousands of students received quality education through the SPES providing income opportunities to assist financially in the education of students leading to eradication of poverty as SPES helps beneficiaries prepare for the world of work, in fact it was recommended to implement throughout the year instead of during summer breaks only. Results of the interviews conducted revealed the following: Better integration of SPES programs; Flexible employment opportunities and Active labor market policy.

#### **4.2.2 Synthesis of the Qualitative Findings**

The themes and sub themes derived from the semi-structured interviews revealed the very great extent of implementation of the SPES in offices of the PESO in the province. The participants confirmed that the SPES implemented by the PESO facilitated employment for them through the services rendered in terms of referral and placement, providing labor market information, employment coaching and counseling, conduct of jobfairs, and providing assistance to OFWs where most PESO managers were praised by beneficiaries especially in the employment coaching and counseling services.

Likewise, SPES graduates narrated their experiences in three areas of administration, coverage, and processes and procedures and linked these with the contribution of the program to their jobs now thereby validating the very great extent of implementation. Although significant differences were revealed in terms of income classification and number of SPES beneficiaries. Overall, the implementation of SPES was still very great. Moreover, it was validated by respondents that the challenges encountered and the opportunities for the enhancement of the SPES by the implementers as found in the quantitative part of the study were happening in the actual practice.

*Joint Display of the Quantitative and Qualitative Results*

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Themes	Meta- inferences
Very great extent of implementation in terms of administration, coverage, procedures and processes	Theme 1. The PESO contributes to the implementation of SPES 1.1 Referral and placement 1.2 Providing LMI 1.3 Employment coaching and counseling 1.4 Conduct of job fairs 1.5 Providing assistance to OFWS	Integration of PESO core functions contribute to the effective implementation of SPES.
	Theme 2. Benefits gained by the beneficiaries from the SPES 2.1 Permanent employment 2.2 Higher salaries and wages 2.3 Increase in family income	Work experienced gain by the beneficiaries resulted to employment and advancement of family's economic status.
Very great extent of implementation when grouped as to LGU level, LGU income classification, LGU number of beneficiaires	Theme 3. Factor affecting the implementation of SPES; 3.1 Level of government provincial, city, municipality) 3.2 Income classification (1 <sup>st</sup> class province, 1 <sup>st</sup> class city, 2 <sup>nd</sup> class city, 3 <sup>rd</sup> class city, 4 <sup>th</sup> class city, and 1 <sup>st</sup> class municipality) 3.3 Number of SPES beneficiaries (less than 20, less than 50, more than 50)	Effective implementation varies from the income allocation of LGU and the impact of the program is based on the number of beneficiaries availed.
Rated high in the challenges of the implementation of SPES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political Interference</li> <li>• Lack of funds at the LGU level for implementation</li> <li>• Many requirements to be qualiffied for the job</li> <li>• Inadequate coordination between government and private sectors</li> <li>• Weak monitoring and evaluation</li> </ul>	Theme 4. Challenges encountered by the implementers in delivering the SPES 4.1 Political intervention in selecting qualified beneficiaries 4.2 Numerous pre-employment requirements for submission 4.3 Limited funding source 4.4 Inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the program 4.5 Limited information of the benefits of the program by business establishments and other organizations	Bureaucracy hampers the effectiveness of the implementation of the SPES.  Collaboration with stakeholders through awareness of the benefits of the program greatly affect its efficiency.
Rated high in the opportunities of the implementation of SPES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part time flexible employment opportunities</li> <li>• Large scale and high quality training</li> <li>• Focus on reintegration in the SPES</li> <li>• Active labor market policy</li> </ul>	Theme 5. The potential of the SPES despite challenges 5.1 Better integration of SPES programs 5.2 Flexible employment opportunities 5.3 Active labor market policy	The opportunities may result in the poverty reduction and increase employability.

## **5. Conclusion**

Finally, the integration of the findings of the quantitative and qualitative phases resulted in meta-inferences: The PESO is instrumental to the very great extent of implementation of the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES); The performance of the PESO generated accolades and approval of the SPES beneficiaries who are now enjoying the economic and social benefits of employment and are helping their family members. The results of the study are consistent with the framework adopted. The quantitative and qualitative findings are consistent. Although challenges were encountered in implementation but the opportunities for enhancement sound very favorable for the PESO in local government units. The services rendered by the PESOs in LGUs resulted in the achievement of the objectives of the law mandating the creation of PESOs

## **6. Limitations of the Findings**

The study acknowledges limitations. One that the survey instrument used was researcher made hence, may not be applicable in all cases of evaluating the program of SPES in all LGUs of the country because it is not a standard instrument and the number of participants-beneficiaries were chosen based on purposive sampling, hence not all beneficiaries were able to express their opinions and experiences in the journey of being a student under the SPES program. Not all areas of the functions delivered by the PESO were included and the study was conducted on one first-class province only, hence results from other provinces may not be the same.

## **7. Practical Value of the Paper**

The results of the study may provide useful insights for the implementing agencies, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) of sufficient and reliable information and the local government units with basis for enhancement of the program for greater and efficient delivery of tasks and functions geared towards employment generation and contributes to the sustainable development goals of decent work to improve the economic growth of the country as a whole. Further, the findings of the study are applicable to almost all LGUs in the first-class province because a representative sample of the SPES beneficiaries and implementers aired their views of the phases and most of the functions of the program.

## **8. Directions for Future Research**

Future researchers can utilize the findings of the study in the conduct of evaluation of the performance of local PESOs and may formulate standard instruments to be used in a wider coverage of participants. Future researchers can provide enhancement by integration of other livelihood programs at the local level and conduct tracer studies documenting success stories of SPES beneficiaries. The study can also be replicated by other provinces and cities in the country.

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