

GSJ: Volume 12, Issue 7, July 2024, Online: ISSN 2320-9186

www.globalscientificjournal.com

UNIFAST SUPPORT: FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT RETENTION

By:

**Dr. Alex L. Señara, Dr. Kharen Jane S. Ungab, Desiree B. Balgoa, LPT, MBA
Jacqueline L. Segundo**

Abstract:

In recent years, higher education enrolment has surged due to increased accessibility to scholarships and financial aid programs. Tagoloan Community College (TCC) exemplifies this trend, benefiting from the Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UNIFAST) to support students pursuing tertiary education. Despite such support, TCC faces challenges in retaining its 3rd-year Business Administration (BSBA) students. Understanding the complexities of student retention is crucial for academic institutions striving for excellence. This study explores BSBA 3rd-year student retention at TCC within the UNIFAST framework, employing quantitative methodology.

The findings reveal promising trends in student retention influenced by free tuition and subsidy programs. However, the impact of the UNIFAST Scholarship varies. While positively affecting instructional quality, it correlates negatively with extracurricular involvement, suggesting reduced participation among recipients. Recommendations include implementing additional academic support services, fostering a sense of belonging, increasing extracurricular engagement, enhancing teaching quality, empowering students, conducting regular assessments, and improving communication.

Furthermore, the study investigates the significant relationship between the UNIFAST Scholarship and student retention. While negatively correlated with extracurricular involvement, no significant correlation is found with teacher competency. However, a positive correlation emerges with instructional quality. Overall, the study sheds light on the intricate dynamics influencing BSBA 3rd-year student retention at TCC, offering insights for tailored interventions to enhance student outcomes and institutional effectiveness.

Keywords: UNIFAST Scholarship, Free Tuition, Extracurricular Activities, Teacher Competency, Quality of Instruction

Introduction

Student retention is a significant challenge faced by higher education institutions worldwide. It refers to the ability of colleges and universities to keep students enrolled until they complete their academic programs. High retention rates indicate a supportive and effective educational environment, while low retention rates often highlight underlying issues that need to be addressed. In the Philippines, the Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UNIFAST) was created to provide financial aid to students, thereby increasing their chances of persisting and succeeding in their studies. This initiative aims to reduce financial barriers that frequently lead to student dropouts and to enhance overall educational outcomes.

However, financial support is only one aspect of the issue. Numerous factors influence student retention, including academic performance, institutional support, student engagement, and personal circumstances. Understanding how these factors interact with financial assistance programs like UNIFAST is essential for developing comprehensive strategies to improve retention rates. This paper investigates the role of UNIFAST support in student retention, examining both its direct impact and the interplay of various other factors that influence a student's decision to continue their education. By analyzing these dynamics, we aim to provide insights that can inform policy decisions and institutional practices, ultimately fostering a more supportive educational environment for all students.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Vincent Tinto's Student Retention Theory, which emphasizes the importance of academic and social integration in student retention. According to Tinto, students are more likely to persist when they feel connected to their academic environment through meaningful interactions with faculty and peers (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's theory provides a solid foundation for understanding the

dynamics of student persistence in higher education, arguing that student retention is influenced by the interplay of academic and social factors within the college environment.

Student retention is a critical indicator of institutional success and student achievement. At Tagoloan Community College, like many educational institutions, fostering an environment conducive to student persistence is paramount. By applying Tinto's theory, this study aims to explore how academic and social integration, influenced by factors such as financial aid and institutional support, affect the retention of 3rd-year Business Administration students. Understanding these dynamics can help develop strategies to enhance student retention and overall educational outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

The pursuit of higher education is a transformative journey marked by learning, growth, and opportunities. However, for many aspiring students, financial barriers pose significant obstacles on this path. In response to this challenge, scholarship programs like UNIFAST provide a beacon of hope, offering vital support to those who aspire to pursue their academic ambitions. This study delves into the multifaceted landscape of UNIFAST scholarship retention among Business Administration students at Tagoloan Community College (TCC) during the academic year 2022-2023.

Through a comprehensive conceptual framework, this study aims to uncover the profound impact of UNIFAST scholarships on academic performance, retention rates, and student satisfaction within this academic domain. By examining a range of dependent and independent variables, this framework provides a structured approach to understanding how financial support influences student outcomes. Key variables include academic performance, institutional support, student engagement, and personal circumstances. The goal is to identify the extent to which UNIFAST scholarships contribute to student retention and to explore the interactions between financial aid and other critical factors affecting student success at TCC.

Teachers' Competency

Teachers' competency, augmented by the support of initiatives like the UNIFAST Scholarship, stands as the cornerstone of the service quality experienced by students within educational institutions. A proficient teacher, backed by this financial aid program, embodies a different approach to learning and teaching, encompassing deep professional knowledge, pedagogical expertise, effective interpersonal interactions, exemplary character, and mature personal qualities. Recognizing that knowledge dissemination lies at the heart of educational endeavors, the caliber of subject expertise and the quality of lecturers, further bolstered by UNIFAST scholarships, play crucial roles in shaping students' satisfaction with the services provided by their institutions (Latip, Newaz, & Ramasamy, 2020).

Thus, it becomes imperative for lecturers, supported by initiatives such as the UNIFAST Scholarship, to continually enhance their professional competency, recognizing it as a fundamental aspect of the holistic learning process. This enhancement extends beyond the mere acquisition of subject knowledge to include the cultivation of emotional intelligence, enabling educators to adeptly address students' diverse needs and navigate the challenges of a demanding and stressful working environment.

In essence, the proficiency of teachers, complemented by the support of programs like the UNIFAST Scholarship, serves as a linchpin in fostering an enriching educational experience, wherein students feel supported, inspired, and empowered to achieve their academic aspirations. By prioritizing the ongoing development of their professional competence and leveraging resources like UNIFAST scholarships, lecturers not only elevate the quality of instruction but also nurture a culture of learning and growth that resonates throughout the educational ecosystem.

Student Retention

Student retention is a critical measure in evaluating the effectiveness and vitality of educational institutions. It serves as a barometer of the institution's capacity to nurture and guide students towards the

attainment of their educational aspirations. Robust student retention not only signifies the institution's commitment to fostering a conducive learning environment but also yields a cascade of positive outcomes, including elevated graduation rates, heightened levels of student satisfaction, and bolstered institutional prestige and reputation within academic and broader communities. In essence, student retention serves as a cornerstone of institutional success, reflecting not only the quality of instruction provided but also the institution's dedication to facilitating meaningful student experiences and enduring academic accomplishments (Scott, Shah, Grebennikov, & Singh, 2008).

Student retention is a critical concern for institutions of higher education, including community colleges. This case study delves into the efforts of Tagoloan Community College (TCC) to improve student retention rates. By examining the college's strategies, challenges encountered, and outcomes achieved, valuable insights can be gained to inform retention initiatives in similar institutions.

Education stands as the cornerstone of societal advancement, serving as the bedrock upon which the future of humanity is built. It is through education that minds are nurtured, knowledge is cultivated, and individuals are empowered to contribute meaningfully to the social and economic fabric of society. A well-rounded education not only equips individuals with the skills and competencies needed to thrive in an ever-evolving world but also instills values of ethics, responsibility, and social consciousness (Nihalani, 2011).

In today's knowledge-driven economy, the quality of instruction emerges as a linchpin for sustainable growth and development. By harnessing the power of knowledge, societies can chart a course towards prosperity, innovation, and inclusive progress. Indeed, the effective management of the knowledge economy hinges on the provision of high-quality education that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. At the heart of this endeavor lies higher education, which serves as a catalyst for individual and collective advancement. However, the impact of higher education extends beyond the confines of academia; it reverberates throughout society, shaping the trajectory of nations and influencing the future of generations to come. Therefore, it is imperative that the foundation laid by primary and secondary education instills values of leadership, integrity, and civic responsibility, laying the groundwork for informed and engaged citizens who can navigate the complexities of the modern world.

Involvement in Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities represent a diverse array of structured and organized pursuits beyond the confines of traditional academic coursework. These encompass a broad spectrum of engagements, including sports, clubs, arts, community service, leadership programs, and more. While commonly regarded as enriching experiences conducive to holistic student development, their precise impact on academic performance has been subject to ongoing debate and scrutiny. This literature review delves into the empirical evidence surrounding this intricate relationship, probing the ways in which participation in extracurricular activities may shape students' academic achievement. By dissecting the intricacies of this connection, the review endeavors to uncover underlying mechanisms and shed light on the nuanced interplay between extracurricular engagement and scholastic success (Seow & Pan, 2014).

Extracurricular activities present a multifaceted platform not only for student engagement but also for the implementation of targeted retention programs and support services tailored to the unique needs of Business Administration students. Within this framework, these activities extend beyond mere recreational pursuits to encompass purposeful initiatives designed to bolster student success and cultivate a supportive campus environment conducive to retention. Such initiatives may include peer mentoring programs, specialized academic workshops, leadership development initiatives, and community service projects. These endeavors are strategically crafted to address various facets of student needs, providing avenues for academic support, personal development, and social integration. By harnessing the potential of extracurricular activities in this manner, educational institutions can create an environment where students feel valued, supported, and empowered to persist in their academic pursuits.

Free Tuition

Embarking on the journey of education is one of life's most enriching experiences. It's a path where students immerse themselves in learning, honing their skills, and gaining invaluable experiences that shape their future. However, this path is not always accessible to everyone. Many aspiring learners face barriers, particularly financial constraints that hinder their ability to pursue higher education. This is where scholarships and subsidies play a transformative role. By providing financial assistance, scholarships and subsidies open doors for those who dream of completing their college education but lack the means to do so independently. These resources not only alleviate the burden of educational expenses but also empower individuals to realize their academic aspirations and unlock their full potential (Capinig, Godoy, Guinoo, Dela Cruz, & Tus, 2023).

The availability of free tuition represents a transformative intervention in the landscape of higher education, effectively dismantling one of the most formidable obstacles faced by aspiring scholars: financial constraints. Specifically tailored for Business Administration students at Tagoloan Community College (TCC), the UNIFAST Scholarship program emerges as a beacon of opportunity, affording individuals the means to pursue their academic ambitions unencumbered by the weight of tuition fees. In eradicating the financial burdens that often loom large over students' educational pursuits, free tuition delivers a profound sense of financial security and stability. This newfound financial freedom not only liberates students from the specter of economic hardship but also cultivates an environment conducive to sustained academic engagement and success. By mitigating the adverse effects of financial stressors, free tuition emerges as a powerful tool in the arsenal of retention strategies, fortifying students' resolve and resilience on their educational journey at TCC.

TES (Tertiary Education Subsidy)

In recent years, numerous students have grappled with financial hardships, particularly regarding their educational expenses. The financial strain has not only impacted students' wallets but has also taken a toll on their emotional well-being and overall welfare. Recognizing these challenges, the government has implemented programs aimed at alleviating students' financial burdens, notably through the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) administered by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). The primary objective of this study is to delve into the lived experiences of TES Grantees, shedding light on the challenges they face and the coping mechanisms they employ in navigating the complexities of financing their education (Capinig, Guinoo, Godoy, & Tus, 2023).

Embarking on the journey of education is undeniably one of life's most enriching experiences, offering students a transformative path towards growth, enlightenment, and self-discovery. The classroom becomes a canvas where individuals can paint their aspirations, refine their talents, and broaden their horizons, each lesson and task serving as a brushstroke in the masterpiece of their learning journey. However, amidst the promise of academic enlightenment, the reality remains stark for many aspiring learners—financial barriers stand as formidable obstacles on the path to higher education. For these individuals, the dream of attending college may seem tantalizingly out of reach, thwarted by the harsh realities of economic hardship.

The TES program assumes a significant role in bolstering student retention efforts. By offering financial support to Business Administration students at Tagoloan Community College (TCC), the TES program mitigates the risk of attrition due to economic hardships. Students who benefit from the TES program are better equipped to meet their educational expenses, thus reducing financial stressors that may otherwise jeopardize their academic pursuits.

Moreover, the TES program contributes to fostering a supportive and conducive learning environment at TCC. By alleviating financial burdens, the program allows students to focus more on their studies and engage more actively in academic and extracurricular activities. This increased engagement not only enhances the overall student experience but also promotes a sense of belonging and connectedness to the institution, factors that are closely associated with higher retention rates.

Methods

This section outlines the process detailing the research design, research locale, respondents, and sampling procedure. Additionally, it elaborates on the research instrument, data gathering procedures, and the reliability and validity of the instruments. Furthermore, the chapter discusses scoring guidelines, statistical treatment and procedures, and ethical considerations, providing a comprehensive overview of the methodological framework utilized in the research.

Research Design

The research design for this study adopts a descriptive method with a quantitative approach. This method allowed for the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data, enabling researchers to investigate the factors affecting the retention of third-year Business Administration students at Tagoloan Community College despite UNIFAST support.

Structured surveys or questionnaires were administered to gather numerical data on variables such as free tuition, Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES), involvement in extracurricular activities, quality of instruction, and teacher competency. Statistical techniques, such as regression analysis and correlation analysis, were employed to analyze the relationships between these variables and derive meaningful insights. The results from this quantitative analysis provided valuable insights into the dynamics of these variables, contributing to a deeper understanding of the study's objectives.

By quantifying the relationships between UNIFAST scholarship support and student retention, this research design facilitated the identification of trends, patterns, and associations that may inform future strategies, interventions, or policies aimed at enhancing student experiences and outcomes. This approach not only highlighted the impact of financial aid on retention but also explored how various factors interplay to affect students' academic journeys.

Research Locale

The research will be conducted at Tagoloan Community College, specifically within the Business Administration Department located at Del Pilar Street, Baluarte, Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental. This department was chosen for its relevance to the study's objectives. The target demographic comprises third-year Business Administration students actively participating in the UNIFAST Scholarship program, as their engagement may significantly influence student retention. This selection aligns closely with the study's focus and ensures that the findings will directly benefit this academic cohort.

Therefore, the research aims to investigate factors affecting the retention of third-year Business Administration students at Tagoloan Community College despite their participation in the UNIFAST support program. By addressing the enrollment challenges faced by this specific group, the study seeks to provide insights that can enhance retention strategies and support mechanisms tailored to their needs.

Research Respondents

The research participants consist of 208 third-year students currently enrolled in the Business Administration Department at Tagoloan Community College. This sample size was determined using the Raosoft calculator, reflecting 48% of the total BSBA student population. These respondents were selected to provide a representative cross-section of the department, ensuring a diverse range of experiences and perspectives relevant to the study's objectives.

Their active engagement within the department positions them as key stakeholders in understanding the factors influencing student retention despite UNIFAST support. By including this sizable and

representative sample, the study aims to offer comprehensive insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by BSBA third-year students at Tagoloan Community College. This approach enhances the study's ability to derive meaningful conclusions and recommendations for improving retention strategies tailored to this specific academic cohort.

Table 1: Number of respondents

Year Level and Section	Number of Students	Number of respondents in each section	Percentage of respondents in each section
BSBA 3-A	44	20	9.62%
BSBA 3-B	41	21	10.09
BSBA 3-C	54	22	10.58
BSBA 3-D	41	21	10.09
BSBA 3-E	44	21	10.09
BSBA 3-F	40	20	9.62
BSBA 3-G	40	21	10.09
BSBA 3-H	40	20	9.62
BSBA 3-I	45	20	9.62
BSBA 3-J	45	22	10.58
Total	434	208	100%

Table 1. It illustrates the distribution of respondents from each section among third-year BSBA students; the table alone indicates the respondents participated in the study.

Sampling Procedure

To ensure the validity and representativeness of the study's findings, a meticulous stratified random sampling approach was employed. This method involved categorizing the population of Business Administration students at Tagoloan Community College into distinct subgroups, or strata, based on relevant characteristics such as academic year level and UNIFAST Scholarship status. By dividing the population into these homogeneous strata, the sampling process was designed to accurately capture the diversity within the student body.

Subsequently, random samples were selected from each stratum to ensure adequate representation of participants from various groups in the study cohort. This stratified random sampling technique facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the factors affecting BSBA third-year student retention. It allows for the exploration of diverse perspectives within the student population, aligning closely with the study's objectives to provide comprehensive insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by this specific academic cohort (Hayes, 2024).

Data Gathering Procedures

The research teacher and adviser at Tagoloan Community College played a pivotal role in refining the questionnaire through their comprehensive assessment and valuable feedback. Their insightful comments were meticulously integrated into the finalized questionnaire, enhancing its clarity, coherence, and effectiveness as a survey tool tailored specifically to the study's objectives.

The distribution of survey questionnaires to selected participants was executed with precision and methodical organization. Each participant received detailed instructions on how to complete the survey, ensuring consistency and accuracy in data collection. Researchers remained readily available throughout the process to address any queries or uncertainties, fostering a supportive and conducive environment for participation.

To streamline the data gathering process, a Google Form was utilized as the primary platform for survey administration. This choice capitalized on the platform's user-friendly

interface, enabling participants to navigate and complete the survey with ease. The utilization of Google Forms ensured efficiency and accessibility in data collection, aligning with the study's commitment to leveraging technology for streamlined research methodologies.

Research Instrument

In this study, questionnaires served as the foundational research instrument meticulously designed to efficiently gather data aligned with the study's objectives. Chosen for their superior efficiency, questionnaires surpassed alternative data collection methods in terms of speed and convenience. The questionnaire items were intricately crafted around key variables identified from prior research and theoretical frameworks, specifically the UNIFAST Scholarship (including Free Tuition and Tertiary Education Subsidy), Student Retention, Involvement in Extracurricular Activities, Quality of Instruction, and Teacher Competency.

These measures were strategically organized into three main sections: "Impact of UNIFAST Scholarship," "Relevance of Academic Environment," and "Assessment of Educational Experience." Each section encompassed factors believed to directly or indirectly influence student retention and academic success.

Structured with a total of fifty (50) statements, the questionnaire included ten (10) statements tailored to each focus area within the sections. Its primary goal was to comprehensively assess respondents' experiences across critical domains related to the impact of the UNIFAST Scholarship, academic environment relevance, and educational experience assessment.

Participants were asked to rate each statement on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from "Highly effective," "Effective," "Less effective," to "Not effective." This nuanced scale enabled participants to express their perceptions and experiences regarding various aspects of the educational environment and support services provided by the UNIFAST Scholarship, facilitating a quantitative measurement of satisfaction and effectiveness.

Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

Prior to commencing the primary data collection phase, a rigorous pilot test was conducted with a carefully selected group of students, distinct from the final study sample. This crucial initial step aimed to identify any potential ambiguities or concerns in the survey questions. Subsequently, based on the valuable feedback received during the pilot test, essential adjustments and refinements were meticulously incorporated to enhance the reliability and validity of the survey instrument.

The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the reliability analysis of all items related to the impact of Free Tuition was 0.917. The subscale measuring involvement in extracurricular activities, consisting of 10 items, achieved an alpha of 0.806. Additionally, the Teacher's Competency subscale demonstrated high reliability with an alpha of 0.922, while the Quality of Instruction subscale showed even greater reliability with an alpha of 0.930. These results affirm that the questionnaire developed by the researchers was highly reliable and valid for assessing the intended variables. The meticulous attention to pilot testing and the robust reliability coefficients ensure the integrity and accuracy of the data collected for this study.

Scoring Table
Table 2.

Scale	Range	Description	Interpretation
4	3.41 – 4.20	Highly Effective	Signifying an exceptionally strong impact or outcome.
3	2.61 – 3.40	Effective	Indicating a notable but moderate impact or outcome.
2	1.81 – 2.60	Less Effective	Suggesting a minimal impact or outcome.
1	1.0 – 1.80	Not Effective	Reflecting a lack of impact or outcome.

Each response option on the Likert scale signifies a distinct level of effectiveness or impact, providing respondents with a range of choices to articulate their perceptions or attitudes comprehensively. These options are meticulously designed to capture nuanced variations in respondents' opinions, facilitating thorough data analysis and interpretation. For instance, respondents can choose the "Highly effective" option (rated as 5) to indicate a significant positive impact, while selecting the "Not effective" option (rated as 1) denotes minimal impact or a negative outcome. The numerical values assigned to each response option establish clear distinctions, enabling researchers to quantitatively analyze and compare ratings across different variables or groups.

This structured approach to data collection significantly enhances the reliability and validity of the study findings. It empowers researchers to derive meaningful conclusions and insights from the gathered data, ensuring robust and comprehensive research outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent: Prior to the commencement of the study, all participants, including BSBA third-year students and relevant stakeholders, will receive comprehensive information about the research objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Informed consent will be obtained from each participant, ensuring their voluntary participation and understanding of their rights within the study.

Confidentiality: Participants' data confidentiality will be strictly maintained throughout the study. All collected information will be anonymized, and participants' identities will be kept confidential. Only authorized researchers will have access to the data, which will be securely stored to prevent unauthorized access.

Respect for Participant Autonomy: Participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences. Their decisions will be respected, and they will not be coerced or pressured into participating against their will.

Protection of Vulnerable Participants: Special care will be taken to protect the rights and well-being of vulnerable participants, such as those facing academic challenges or personal difficulties. Potential risks to participants will be minimized, and appropriate support services will be available if needed.

Transparency and Integrity: The research will be conducted with transparency, honesty, and integrity. Any conflicts of interest or biases will be disclosed, and the research findings will be reported accurately, regardless of whether they support the initial hypotheses.

Ethical Approval: Ethical approval will be sought from the relevant institutional review board (IRB) or ethics committee before data collection begins. The study will adhere to ethical guidelines and regulations, ensuring compliance with all applicable laws and standards.

Reporting of Findings: The study findings will be reported objectively and without bias. Researchers will present results clearly and understandably, avoiding misrepresentation or manipulation of data. By adhering to these ethical considerations, the study will uphold the rights and well-being of all participants and contribute valuable insights into factors affecting BSBA third-year student retention at Tagoloan Community College despite UNIFAST support.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis, interpretation of gathered data, and implications of the findings, structured around the study's objectives. The research investigates factors influencing student retention among third-year Business Administration students at Tagoloan Community College.

Influence of the UNIFAST Scholarship on Student Retention Rates: The first part examines how the UNIFAST Scholarship impacts student retention rates among third-year Business Administration students. It analyzes variables such as involvement in extracurricular activities, quality of instruction, and teacher competency. The findings indicate that the UNIFAST Scholarship positively influences academic performance and instructional quality but may vary in its impact on extracurricular engagement. This underscores the need for tailored strategies to enhance overall student engagement and retention.

Impact of Free Tuition and Tertiary Education Subsidy on Student Retention: The second part evaluates the effects of free tuition and tertiary education subsidy on student retention among third-year Business Administration students. It underscores how these financial supports alleviate economic barriers, contributing to higher retention rates. The study highlights the critical role of financial aid in fostering a supportive educational environment conducive to student persistence and success.

Relationship Between UNIFAST Scholarship and Student Retention: Lastly, the study explores the significant relationship between the UNIFAST Scholarship and student retention among third-year Business Administration students. It identifies clear correlations between scholarship support and improved retention outcomes, particularly in terms of academic achievement and overall student satisfaction. These insights underscore the importance of targeted financial assistance programs in bolstering student retention efforts at Tagoloan Community College.

By examining these aspects comprehensively, this study provides insights into the complex dynamics of student retention within the context of Business Administration education. It offers implications for policy development and institutional practices aimed at enhancing educational outcomes and fostering a supportive environment for student success.

To what extent does student retention thrive among the Business Administration third-year students from Tagoloan Community College?

Table 3
 The Extent of Student Retention in terms of Free Tuition

Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
3.32	0.900	Agree	Implemented
3.26	0.718	Agree	Implemented
3.05	0.951	Agree	Implemented
3.03	0.955	Agree	Implemented
3.06	0.899	Agree	Implemented
3.23	0.761	Agree	Implemented
3.09	0.948	Agree	Implemented
3.07	0.836	Agree	Implemented
3.11	0.921	Agree	Implemented
3.37	0.807	Agree	Implemented
3.16	0.87	Agree	Implemented

Table 3 presents an analysis of student retention trends among third-year Business Administration students at TCC, focusing on the impact of free tuition. The data reveals that the average mean of student retention, as measured by free tuition, is 3.37 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.81, indicating a generally positive trend (Ablian et al., 2023).

The highest-rated item regarding student retention, measured by free tuition, is "I am motivated to complete my college program because of the free tuition," with a mean of 3.26 and SD of 0.79 (Lomer & Lim, 2022). This suggests strong support for initiatives emphasizing the motivational benefits of free tuition in student persistence.

Conversely, the lowest-rated item, "My academic performance has significantly improved due to the free tuition program," has a mean of 3.03 and SD of 0.96 (Lopez et al., 2023). This indicates that while some students perceive a positive impact on academic performance, the overall effect is relatively modest compared to other factors.

This finding is consistent with previous studies highlighting the effectiveness of free tuition policies in enhancing enrollment rates and expanding access to quality tertiary education, particularly among financially disadvantaged students (Ortiz et al., 2019).

Table 4
 The Extent of Student Retention in terms of
 Tertiary Education Subsidy

Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
3.31	0.90	Agree	Implemented
3.22	0.76	Agree	Implemented
3.13	0.84	Agree	Implemented
3.09	0.95	Agree	Implemented
3.25	0.93	Agree	Implemented
3.04	0.84	Agree	Implemented
3.19	0.99	Agree	Implemented
3.17	0.82	Agree	Implemented
3.23	0.84	Agree	Implemented
3.37	0.89	Agree	Implemented
3.20	0.88	Agree	Implemented

Table 4 presents an analysis of student retention among third-year Business Administration students at TCC, focusing on the impact of the tertiary education subsidy (TES). The data reveals that the average mean score for student retention, as measured by TES, is 3.20 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.88 ("Implemented"), indicating effective integration and significant contribution to student retention efforts (Ortiz et al., 2019). Continuous monitoring and refinement of the subsidy program are recommended to ensure its ongoing effectiveness in promoting student retention and success in the Business Administration program.

The highest-rated item related to student retention, measured by TES, is "I feel calm and comfortable studying because of TES," with a mean of 3.37 and SD of 0.89 ("Implemented") (Capinig et al., 2023). This suggests strong support for enhancing the support provided through the TES program to maintain students' sense of calm and comfort while studying.

Conversely, the lowest-rated item, "TES has positively influenced my sense of belonging at the college," has a mean of 3.04 and SD of 0.84 ("Implemented") (Licayan et al., 2021). This indicates that while some students perceive a positive impact on their sense of belonging due to the TES program, the overall effect is relatively modest compared to other factors.

This finding aligns with studies highlighting the TES's effectiveness in supporting students' educational pursuits and alleviating financial burdens (Maga-ao, Cea, & Gonzales, 2020).

Table 5
 The Extent of the UNIFAST Scholarship Influences to Student Retention Rates in terms of Involvement on Extracurricular Activities

Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
3.64	0.52	Strongly Agree	Highly Implemented
3.43	0.75	Strongly Agree	Highly Implemented
3.41	0.74	Strongly Agree	Highly Implemented
3.31	0.81	Agree	Implemented
2.97	1.05	Agree	Implemented
3.33	0.86	Agree	Implemented
3.16	0.91	Agree	Implemented
2.91	1.05	Agree	Implemented
3.00	0.99	Agree	Implemented
3.39	0.80	Agree	Implemented
3.26	0.85	Agree	Implemented

Table 5 illustrates the impact of the UNIFAST Scholarship on student retention rates among third-year Business Administration students at TCC, with a specific focus on their involvement in extracurricular activities. The average mean score of 3.26 (SD 0.85) suggests that the scholarship program contributes to student retention by encouraging participation in extracurriculars, with opportunities for further enhancement.

The highest-rated item, "Participating in extracurricular activities increases my confidence at school," scored 3.64 (SD 0.63), highlighting its significant positive influence on student confidence. To maximize this impact, expanding the range of extracurricular offerings, allocating additional resources, and integrating extracurricular involvement more closely with personal growth and academic success could be beneficial (Banayo et al., 2023).

Conversely, the lowest-rated item, "When I encounter topics in my subjects that I don't understand, I am confident in asking fellow students for clarification," scored 2.91 (SD 1.05), indicating a lack of confidence among students in seeking academic clarification from peers. Addressing this could involve implementing peer tutoring programs, organizing workshops to enhance communication and collaboration skills, and fostering a supportive academic community (Cano et al., 2023).

Overall, while the UNIFAST Scholarship shows positive effects on extracurricular participation and student confidence, there is room for improvement in supporting academic peer interactions and maximizing the impact of extracurricular activities on student retention. These findings suggest opportunities for TCC to strengthen student support mechanisms and enhance the scholarship program's effectiveness in fostering student engagement and academic success.

Table 6
 The Extent of the UNIFAST Scholarship Influences to Student Retention Rates in terms of Involvement on Quality of Instruction

Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
3.05	1.09	Agree	Implemented
2.71	1.07	Agree	Implemented
2.63	1.10	Agree	Implemented
2.78	1.09	Agree	Implemented
2.97	0.93	Agree	Implemented
2.81	1.08	Agree	Implemented
2.39	1.08	Disagree	Less Implemented
2.35	1.08	Disagree	Less Implemented
2.37	1.16	Disagree	Less Implemented
3.21	0.88	Agree	Implemented
2.73	1.05	Agree	Implemented

Table 6 presents an analysis of the UNIFAST Scholarship's influence on student retention rates among third-year Business Administration students at TCC, specifically in terms of the quality of instruction. The data reveals that the average mean score for the influence of the UNIFAST Scholarship on student retention rates, in terms of quality of instruction, is 2.73 with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.05 ("Implemented"). This indicates that while the UNIFAST Scholarship program is integrated into the educational framework, its effectiveness in enhancing instructional quality and subsequently improving retention rates may vary among students (Verdote, 2019).

The highest-rated item regarding the influence of the UNIFAST Scholarship on student retention rates, in terms of quality of instruction, is "I willingly exerted more effort than anticipated to meet an instructor's standards or expectations," with a mean of 3.21 and SD of 0.88 ("Implemented"). This suggests that students perceive a significant positive impact of the UNIFAST Scholarship on their motivation to meet academic expectations and standards set by instructors (Tullao & Ruiz, 2022).

Conversely, the lowest-rated item, "I have engaged in projects that require the integration of ideas or information from various sources," has a mean of 2.35 and SD of 1.08 ("Less Implemented"). This indicates that students perceive a relatively weaker impact of the UNIFAST Scholarship on their involvement in projects requiring the integration of ideas or information from different sources (Marquez & Bandoy, 2020). This finding underscores the importance of enhancing opportunities for students to engage in interdisciplinary projects and collaborative learning experiences.

Furthermore, these results align with studies emphasizing that a supportive academic environment characterized by high-quality instruction fosters a deeper connection to learning and promotes active academic engagement among students (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2020).

Table 7
 The Extent of the UNIFAST Scholarship Influences to Student Retention Rates in terms of Involvement on Teacher Competency

Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
3.33	0.86	Agree	Implemented
3.32	0.79	Agree	Implemented
3.17	0.89	Agree	Implemented
3.10	0.95	Agree	Implemented
2.87	1.02	Agree	Implemented
3.07	1.01	Agree	Implemented
2.68	1.11	Agree	Implemented
2.60	1.09	Disagree	Less Implemented
2.70	1.13	Agree	Implemented
3.23	0.86	Agree	Implemented
3.01	0.97	Agree	Implemented

Table 7 presents an analysis of the UNIFAST Scholarship's impact on student retention rates among third-year Business Administration students at TCC, focusing on teacher competency. The data reveals that the average mean score for the influence of the UNIFAST Scholarship on student retention rates, in terms of teacher competency, is 3.01 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.97 ("Implemented"). This suggests that the institution should actively seek feedback from students regarding their experiences with instructors to identify areas for improvement and support (Cerado & Naanep, 2023).

The highest-rated item regarding the influence of the UNIFAST Scholarship on student retention rates, in terms of teacher competency, is "I am content with the teaching quality at our institution," with a mean of 3.33 and SD of 0.86 ("Implemented"). This indicates that students generally perceive a high level of satisfaction with the teaching quality influenced by the UNIFAST Scholarship program (Bautista, Paqueo, & Orbeta, 2023).

Conversely, the lowest-rated item, "Our teachers empower students to organize and distribute some of the assignments for the course," has a mean of 2.60 and SD of 1.09 ("Less Implemented"). This suggests that students perceive a relatively weaker impact of the UNIFAST Scholarship on empowering students to take on responsibilities related to organizing and distributing course assignments (Mamba, Tamayao, & Vecaldo, 2020). This finding underscores the importance of enhancing opportunities for student empowerment and autonomy in academic settings.

Furthermore, these results align with studies emphasizing that effective teaching significantly contributes to student engagement and retention rates (Mah, 2020). It highlights the importance of ongoing professional development and support for instructors to enhance their teaching practices and foster a conducive learning environment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both the free tuition and tertiary education subsidy programs at Tagoloan Community College (TCC) significantly contribute to promoting student retention among third-year Business Administration students. The free tuition program, with an average retention rate of 3.37, motivates students to complete their college program, although its impact on academic performance appears moderate. Similarly, the tertiary education subsidy program, with an average rate of 3.20, fosters a calm and comfortable studying environment, yet its influence on students' sense of belonging is relatively modest.

On the other hand, the UNIFAST Scholarship program shows varied impacts on student retention across different dimensions. While it positively influences involvement in extracurricular activities, scholarship recipients may exhibit reduced participation. Moreover, the scholarship is perceived to positively impact the quality of instruction, suggesting potential for further enhancing teaching quality. However, efforts are needed to address factors contributing to reduced extracurricular participation and to empower students in assignment-related responsibilities.

Overall, these findings underscore the crucial role of these programs in supporting student retention at TCC. They also highlight specific areas for improvement to enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives in promoting student success.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, Tagoloan Community College (TCC) should implement a series of strategic initiatives to enhance student support and engagement: Firstly, TCC should enhance academic support services by introducing tailored programs like tutoring and study groups specifically designed for students enrolled in the free tuition program. These initiatives aim to provide personalized assistance, helping students excel academically and overcome challenges. Secondly, fostering a stronger sense of belonging among students benefiting from the tertiary education subsidy program is crucial. TCC should implement robust mentorship programs, establish peer support networks, and organize campus events that cultivate a sense of community. These efforts are designed to enhance students' overall campus experience and improve retention rates. Thirdly, addressing the issue of reduced participation in extracurricular activities among scholarship recipients is essential. TCC can achieve this by diversifying extracurricular offerings, ensuring activities align with student interests, and involving them in the planning and execution process. This approach promotes holistic student development and increases overall campus engagement. Additionally, investing in comprehensive professional development programs for instructors is necessary to enhance teaching practices and instructional quality across all courses. Providing ongoing training and mentorship opportunities empowers educators to create impactful learning experiences that benefit students. Moreover, empowering students to take on leadership roles in campus activities, participate in decision-making processes, and contribute to organizing course assignments fosters leadership skills and accountability. This initiative strengthens students' commitment to their academic journey and overall engagement. Furthermore, conducting regular assessments and evaluations of program effectiveness enables TCC to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. This data-driven approach guides strategic decisions on resource allocation, ensuring programs better meet student needs and enhance overall outcomes. Lastly, enhancing communication strategies to effectively convey program benefits and opportunities is crucial. Clear and accessible information empowers students to make informed decisions and actively engage with available resources, thereby enhancing their academic success at TCC. By implementing these recommendations, TCC can establish a supportive and inclusive learning environment that promotes student retention, academic success, and personal development. Regular evaluation and adaptation of these initiatives will ensure ongoing improvement, aligning with the evolving needs of the student body.

REFERENCES

1. De Vera, J. A. (2019). *Free Tuition Policy in Philippine Higher Education: Student Financial Assistance Programs and Enrollment in SUCs and LUCs*. Philippine Institute for Development Studies.
2. Orbeta, A. (2018). *Student Financial Assistance Programs in the Philippines: Issues and Challenges*. Philippine Institute for Development Studies.
3. Tullao Jr., T., & Asuncion, E. (2018). *The Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST) in the Philippines: A Policy Paper*. University of Asia and the Pacific.
4. Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125.
5. Bean, J. P. (1980). Dropouts and Turnover: The Synthesis and Test of a Causal Model of Student Attrition. *Research in Higher Education*, 12(2), 155-187.
6. Braxton, J. M., Milem, J. F., & Sullivan, A. S. (2000). The Influence of Active Learning on the College Student Departure Process: Toward a Revision of Tinto's Theory. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71(5), 569-590.
7. Cabrera, A. F., & La Nasa, S. M. (2000). Understanding the College-Choice Process. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2000(107), 5-22.
8. Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C. (2006). *What Matters to Student Success: A Review of the Literature*. Commissioned Report for the National

Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success: Spearheading a Dialog on Student Success.

9. Hausmann, L. R., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education*, 48(7), 803-839.
10. Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C. (2006). What matters to student success: A review of the literature. *Commissioned Report for the National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success: Spearheading a Dialog on Student Success*.
11. Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125.
12. Tobolowsky, B. F., & Associates. (2008). *Reframing the retention debate: Insights from research on high-performing urban high schools*. Teachers College Press.
13. Wang, X. (2009). First-generation college students: A literature review. *Research in Higher Education*, 50(6), 531-548.
14. Perna, L. W. (2005). The benefits of higher education: Sex, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic group differences. *Review of Higher Education*, 29(1), 23-52.
15. Perna, L. W., & Titus, M. A. (2005). The relationship between parental involvement as social capital and college enrollment: An examination of racial/ethnic group differences. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76(5), 485-518.
16. St. John, E. P. (2005). Refinancing the college dream: Access, equal opportunity, and justice for taxpayers. *Harvard Education Press*.
17. St. John, E. P., & Starkey, J. B. (2011). Refinancing the college dream: Access, equal opportunity, and justice for taxpayers. *Harvard Education Press*.
18. Titus, M. A., Perna, L. W., & Corwin, Z. B. (2006). Pre-college outreach programs: Characteristics of programs serving historically underrepresented groups of students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(2), 217-236.
19. Doyle, W. R. (2009). Impact of state-level student financial aid on college enrollment: A focus on merit aid. *Journal of Higher Education*, 80(2), 109-140.
20. Dynarski, S. M., & Scott-Clayton, J. (2013). Financial aid policy: Lessons from research. *The Future of Children*, 23(1), 67-91.
21. Kane, T. J., & Dynarski, S. M. (2011). The impact of postsecondary remediation using a regression discontinuity approach: Addressing endogenous sorting and noncompliance. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 126(2), 931-975.
22. Long, B. T. (2008). Do community colleges provide a viable pathway to a baccalaureate degree? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 30(1), 30-53.
23. Scott-Clayton, J. (2011). On money and motivation: A quasi-experimental analysis of financial incentives for college achievement. *Journal of Human Resources*, 46(3), 614-646.