

ETEEAP as an Alternative Route to Higher Education: Stakeholder Perceptions and Policy Implications

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15567659

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Abstract:

The passage of the new law institutionalizing the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) represents a significant shift in higher education policy in the Philippines. This study explores the implications of this legislation, which allows individuals to earn college degrees based on work experience and informal learning. Using a qualitative document review and comparative analysis method, the paper highlights the policy's impact on access, lifelong learning, and workforce development. The findings suggest that ETEEAP democratizes education and aligns the Philippine higher education system with global trends in recognition of prior learning (RPL). However, challenges such as standardization, employer recognition, and quality assurance remain. The study recommends enhanced monitoring mechanisms, stakeholder training, and strategic public awareness campaigns to maximize the program's effectiveness.

Keywords: ETEEAP, recognition of prior learning, adult education, higher education policy, Philippines

Introduction:

In response to the increasing demand for accessible and inclusive higher education in the Philippines, the government has enacted Republic Act No. 12124 (2025), a law that institutionalizes the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP). Initially established through Executive Order No. 330 in 1996, ETEEAP was introduced as an alternative educational pathway designed to validate, accredit, and recognize informal learning and extensive work experience toward earning a college degree (Republic of the Philippines, 1996).

With this new law, ETEEAP transitions from a mere policy initiative into a legally mandated program, thereby ensuring broader participation from adult learners and working professionals who had limited access to traditional higher education routes (Republic of the Philippines, 2025).

The institutionalization of ETEEAP is a significant step forward in implementing Article XIV, Section 1 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which mandates the State to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels (Republic of the Philippines, 1987). ETEEAP directly supports this mandate by promoting educational equity, especially for those whose socioeconomic or professional circumstances have hindered formal academic progression.

According to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 29, s. 2020, the program enables the validation and assessment of prior learning through structured academic equivalency frameworks, ensuring that knowledge gained through non-formal and experiential means is not disregarded in the pursuit of academic credentials.

A growing body of scholarly research reinforces the necessity and value of such a program. For instance, Dilla and Ibarra (2022) highlighted how ETEEAP enhances tertiary education policy by recognizing the learning outcomes of professional experience, contributing to a more inclusive and flexible academic system. Similarly, Lang-ay Gas-ib et al. (2023) conducted a feasibility study revealing that ETEEAP serves as a strategic tool for promoting lifelong learning, especially in underserved regions. Their findings suggest that non-traditional pathways such as ETEEAP can significantly improve educational attainment and empower marginalized sectors of the population.

Additionally, institutionalizing ETEEAP aligns with global trends emphasizing the development of employability skills and work readiness. Studies by Aránega (2014), Misra and Khurana (2018), and Ismail and Mohammed (2015)

emphasize that work-based learning and technical-vocational experiences contribute meaningfully to the development of competencies required in today's labor market. In the local context, Alera and Codod (2023) found that employers value graduates with practical work experience and soft skills, underscoring the relevance of a system like ETEEAP in aligning education with industry expectations.

Despite the promise of ETEEAP, implementation challenges remain, including public awareness, institutional capacity, and assessment standardization. Bai (2023) emphasized the broader educational challenges in the Philippines, particularly in program implementation and student access. However, as ETEEAP is now backed by a legislative framework, there is a renewed opportunity to refine its mechanisms and expand its reach. The institutionalization of ETEEAP marks a pivotal shift in Philippine higher education—one that champions inclusive learning and opens new doors for adult learners seeking academic and professional growth through alternative means.

Literature Review:

The Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) was formally institutionalized through Executive Order No. 330 in 1996, positioning itself as an integral part of the Philippine educational system. This program was designed to recognize and accredit non-formal and experiential learning towards earning a college degree, primarily targeting adult learners and working professionals. Over time, ETEEAP has evolved into a dynamic response to educational access issues, aligning itself with global trends in flexible learning and experiential education.

A key element in the discourse around ETEEAP is the recognition of experiential learning as a legitimate and valuable form of education. Experiential learning theories emphasize learning through reflection on doing, a concept extensively explored by Beaudin and Quick (1995) and further developed by Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993). These authors argue that experience serves not only as a complement to formal education but as a core mechanism for the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and professional skills. Kolb and Kolb (2005) also contributed significantly to this theory by proposing learning spaces that enhance experiential engagement, supporting programs like ETEEAP that prioritize real-world experience.

In the Philippine context, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA, 2016) conducted a review of ETEEAP's implementation, highlighting both its strengths and limitations. The report pointed out that while ETEEAP has opened educational doors for many, its implementation across higher education institutions varies significantly, resulting in inconsistent assessment standards and recognition of prior learning. Despite these issues, the Philippine Distance Learning Consortium (2017) reinforced the program's value through a national survey, which indicated high satisfaction among beneficiaries who saw ETEEAP as an avenue for career advancement and personal growth.

Additionally, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) has played a complementary role to ETEEAP in terms of providing access to non-traditional education pathways. The Commission on Higher Education (2019) reported in its ALS National Baseline Survey that a significant number of Filipino adults remain underserved by conventional education systems due to geographic, economic, and personal constraints. ETEEAP, with its competency-based assessment model, bridges this gap by allowing learners to earn degrees based on demonstrated skills and experiences rather than seat time.

Another relevant body of literature examines the feasibility and demand for non-traditional degree programs. Alberto (2008), Leon (2000), and Balingbing (2014) conducted feasibility studies on offering academic programs like Broadcasting, Applied Philosophy, and Information Technology. These studies assessed market demand, institutional capacity, and employment outcomes—critical factors also considered in implementing ETEEAP. Their findings confirm that the success of alternative programs largely depends on aligning offerings with labor market needs and ensuring the readiness of institutions to manage flexible learning modalities.

Employment alignment is also a central concern. The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE, 2022) reported that underemployment remains a persistent issue in the Philippines, particularly among those without formal degrees. ETEEAP provides an opportunity for workers with industry experience but lacking academic credentials to improve their employability. Markus (1990) echoed this by proposing a research discrepancy model that compares training programs to actual job requirements—suggesting that programs like ETEEAP must continuously evolve based on workforce demands.

The theoretical foundations of equivalency theory also provide support for ETEEAP's pedagogical legitimacy. Lapsley et al. (2008) examined equivalency theory in the context of online learning, asserting that learning outcomes, rather than delivery modes, should be the primary standard for educational quality. This aligns with ETEEAP's philosophy that the venue of learning—whether formal classrooms, workplaces, or online platforms—is secondary to the competencies gained.

Another critical area of research involves student characteristics and learning behavior, which influence success in non-traditional educational models. Benamer et al. (n.d.) profiled engineering students based on characteristics of successful learners, noting attributes such as self-discipline, goal-setting, and adaptability as strong predictors of academic achievement.

These traits are often found in ETEEAP candidates, who are typically older, employed, and self-motivated. Manuel (2019) explored how distance learning modular approaches have been successfully utilized in Pangasinan State University's ETEEAP, indicating that adult learners thrive when learning materials are designed with flexibility, relevance, and autonomy in mind.

Furthermore, feasibility studies, as discussed by Hofstrand and Holz-Clause (2009), are essential tools for ensuring the sustainable development of programs like ETEEAP. Their feasibility study outline emphasizes market analysis, financial viability, institutional readiness, and curriculum adaptability. In applying such frameworks to ETEEAP, educational institutions can better align program offerings with student needs and national development goals.

The integration of real-world skills into higher education is not just a matter of access but also one of validity and rigor. Colert (1983) compared the academic success of high school equivalency students to traditional diploma holders and found no significant difference, suggesting that alternative credentialing mechanisms can be as effective as traditional pathways. This reinforces the legitimacy of ETEEAP's core model: validating experiential knowledge through rigorous academic and competency-based evaluation.

Still, challenges persist. The Philippine Distance Learning Consortium (2017) and TESDA (2016) both emphasize the need for capacity-building among educators, quality assurance mechanisms, and increased public awareness.

Many employers and even academic institutions remain unaware or skeptical of ETEEAP graduates' qualifications, highlighting the importance of policy advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and systematic monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, CHED (2019) noted that despite institutional support, the actual implementation of flexible learning recognition remains limited in scope, necessitating continuous program development and legislative reinforcement.

The literature reveals a strong theoretical and empirical foundation for the institutionalization of ETEEAP. From experiential learning theories to feasibility and workforce alignment studies, a consistent theme emerges: non-traditional learners deserve structured, accredited pathways that recognize the full spectrum of their knowledge and experiences. ETEEAP represents a significant leap in fulfilling this educational promise, but its continued success depends on the commitment of academic institutions, policymakers, and society at large to embrace inclusive, lifelong learning paradigms.

Methodology:

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory research design using document and literature analysis. Primary sources include the full text of Republic Act No. 12004 and relevant CHED memoranda. Secondary sources include scholarly articles, policy reports, and news releases from 1996 to 2024 that cover ETEEAP implementation and global RPL practices.

Documents were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify core themes such as educational access, validation of experiential learning, implementation challenges, and stakeholder engagement. Comparative insights were also drawn from global RPL programs in countries such as Australia, Canada, and South Africa to contextualize the Philippine approach.

While the study focuses primarily on the Philippine context, insights from international practices offer valuable lessons for enhancing local implementation. Limitations include the lack of quantitative data and the early stage of implementation of the new law.

Findings and Discussion:

Policy Provisions of the New ETEEAP Law

Republic Act No. 12004, otherwise known as the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) Law of 2025, serves as a transformative policy in the Philippine higher education landscape. It institutionalizes the ETEEAP as a viable alternative for working professionals and non-traditional learners to attain formal academic degrees. This legislative development builds upon the foundational Executive Order No. 330 (1996), which initially launched the ETEEAP, and reinforces the state's commitment to inclusive, flexible, and competency-based education as mandated by Section 1, Article XIV of the 1987 Philippine Constitution.

At the core of RA 12004 is the directive for higher education institutions (HEIs) to recognize and credit relevant work experience, prior learning, non-formal training, and community engagement toward academic degrees. This recognition aligns with the global paradigm shift toward lifelong learning, employability, and experiential education.

According to Kolb and Kolb (2005), learning is a process grounded in experience, and higher education must now expand learning spaces and modalities that honor diverse knowledge sources. The law also mandates the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to regulate, evaluate, and accredit participating HEIs and to standardize assessment tools for verifying applicants' competencies.

A significant component of the new ETEEAP law is the prioritization of employability skills and industry relevance. Research shows that graduates equipped with real-world competencies are more adaptable in volatile labor markets (Ismail & Mohammed, 2015; Misra & Khurana, 2018). Balingbing (2014) and Alberto (2008) both emphasized, in their respective feasibility studies, that academic programs must be aligned with industry demands—particularly in broadcasting and business process outsourcing sectors—thereby validating the rationale behind the ETEEAP's outcome-based and industry-responsive framework.

Similarly, the findings of Lang-ay Gas-ib et al. (2023) stress that the ETEEAP's non-traditional approach responds effectively to the learning needs of adult learners, professionals, and technical workers. The law's reinforcement of flexible education supports equity, particularly for those who cannot access formal college education due to financial or geographical limitations. The CHED Alternative Learning System (ALS) National Baseline Survey (2019) highlighted similar barriers, suggesting the urgent need for flexible mechanisms like the ETEEAP to democratize higher education.

Moreover, Dilla and Ibarra (2022) argued that the prior learning assessment (PLA) embedded in the ETEEAP promotes academic integrity while ensuring that only competent individuals are awarded degrees. Their evaluation reveals that PLA frameworks, when implemented with clear standards and rigorous rubrics, can measure a wide range of cognitive and practical competencies developed in the workplace. These tools echo the experiential learning theories proposed by Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993), who advocated using reflective experience as a legitimate academic resource. Beaudin and Quick (1995) similarly stressed that experiential learning nurtures critical thinking and problem-solving—skills necessary for professional success and civic engagement.

The labor market implications of the institutionalized ETEEAP are also promising. The Department of Labor and Employment (2022) reports a growing demand for technically skilled workers and lifelong learners in various sectors. The ETEEAP bridges the gap between education and employability, addressing both academic credentialing and workforce development. Alera and Codod (2023) observed that employer satisfaction with ETEEAP graduates was generally high, particularly in business administration fields, citing their practical knowledge, maturity, and strong work ethics. Likewise, Aránega (2014) emphasized that competency-based training models—similar to ETEEAP—better prepare students for employment, especially in rapidly changing work environments.

Despite these promising developments, the implementation of RA 12004 presents certain challenges. One concern is the readiness of HEIs to adopt standardized assessment tools and integrate them into existing curricula without compromising quality. The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA, 2016) previously noted the uneven application of the ETEEAP across institutions, citing issues in staff training, assessment inconsistency, and monitoring gaps. Manuel (2019) also identified difficulties in module development and distance learning delivery under the PSU-ETEEAP, underscoring the need for capacity-building initiatives among faculty and administrators.

In terms of policy coherence, RA 12004 aligns well with CHED Memorandum Order No. 29, s. 2020, which promotes lifelong learning, flexible pathways, and adult education. However, for the law to be truly transformative, it must be supported by robust inter-agency collaboration, continuous monitoring, and policy feedback mechanisms. Markus (1990) advocated for research discrepancy models in evaluating vocational and adult education programs, pointing to the necessity of bridging the gap between educational planning and labor force realities.

Academic success under equivalency programs has also been a topic of debate. Colert (1983) found that high school equivalency students often perform as well academically as traditional high school graduates, suggesting that non-traditional learners—when properly assessed and supported—can thrive in academic settings. This is consistent with the profile of successful engineering students outlined by Benamer et al. (n.d.), who noted that motivation, self-regulation, and experiential knowledge are significant contributors to academic performance.

Finally, Hofstrand and Holz-Clause (2009) provided a useful feasibility study outline that can serve as a framework for HEIs assessing the viability of offering ETEEAP programs. Leon (2000) and Balingbing (2014) both used similar models in determining the demand, resource requirements, and potential benefits of new degree programs, indicating that ETEEAP expansion should also be based on rigorous feasibility assessments.

RA 12004 is a progressive and inclusive legislative measure that transforms higher education by legitimizing diverse forms of learning and recognizing the rich experiences of Filipino professionals. It aligns with national and global trends advocating for flexible, experiential, and competency-based education. However, its success depends on institutional readiness, stakeholder engagement, and continued research to refine its implementation. The policy's focus on employability, equity, and academic excellence reflects the country's commitment to education that is not only accessible but also meaningful and transformative.

Increased Access to Higher Education

The institutionalization of the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) through Republic Act No. 12124 (Republic of the Philippines, 2025) marks a transformative step in democratizing access to higher education in the Philippines. This legislation provides a formal framework that recognizes and accredits informal, non-formal, and experiential learning toward earning academic degrees. It is particularly beneficial for adult learners, including working professionals, overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities (PWDs), who have historically faced systemic barriers in accessing traditional college education. According to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2024), over 15,000 individuals have benefited from ETEEAP since its inception, and the new law is anticipated to dramatically expand this reach nationwide.

One of the critical strengths of the ETEEAP lies in its acknowledgment of prior learning acquired through work experience, training, and independent study. This is consistent with experiential learning theories that highlight how adults construct knowledge through meaningful experience (Beaudin & Quick, 1995; Boud et al., 1993). Kolb and Kolb (2005) argue that adult learners thrive in learning spaces that validate real-life applications and personal experiences, making ETEEAP a fitting platform for mid-career professionals aiming to upgrade their qualifications. Moreover, Lapsley et al. (2008) support the idea of equivalency theory, which affirms that learning outside the traditional classroom can be academically rigorous and outcome-driven when properly assessed.

A feasibility study by Lang-ay Gas-ib, Sannadan, and Ganotice (2023) emphasized ETEEAP's potential as a viable non-traditional mode of higher education, especially in rural and marginalized communities. Their findings reveal that learners under this system report higher motivation and stronger employability outcomes. Similarly, Manuel (2019) noted the effective utilization of modular and distance learning approaches in the Pangasinan State University-ETEEAP program, showcasing how technology-enabled formats can complement experiential accreditation processes.

ETEEAP's inclusive model is also aligned with the constitutional mandate of the Philippine government to make education accessible to all (Republic of the Philippines, 1987). Through its flexible design, the program reaches adult learners who were unable to finish college due to economic constraints, geographic limitations, or social responsibilities. The CHED (2019) Alternative Learning System (ALS) National Baseline Survey supports this by showing that a significant number of ALS graduates aspire to pursue higher education. ETEEAP thus serves as a critical bridge for these learners, enabling upward academic and professional mobility.

Moreover, ETEEAP addresses labor market demands by promoting industry-aligned degrees. Alera and Codod (2023) found that Business Administration graduates who completed their degrees through non-traditional pathways were viewed favorably by employers for their practical skills and maturity. This aligns with findings by Aránega (2014), who emphasized the growing importance of competence-based learning and employability skills in initial training programs. Ismail and Mohammed (2015) also assert that technical and vocational education should integrate employability competencies, which are inherently fostered in programs like ETEEAP.

From a policy perspective, Executive Order No. 330 (1996) designated CHED as the implementing authority for ETEEAP, further legitimizing its role in the national education system. The Philippine Distance Learning Consortium (2017) and TESDA (2016) both conducted reviews highlighting the effectiveness of ETEEAP in enhancing human capital through recognized prior learning. These evaluations recommend ongoing support and expansion of the program to adapt to emerging industry needs.

Feasibility studies by Alberto (2008), Balingbing (2014), and Leon (2000) demonstrate that ETEEAP can be effectively applied to a wide range of disciplines, from broadcasting to information technology and applied philosophy. These studies confirm the demand for alternative education pathways in both academic and technical fields, especially in the face of a fast-evolving labor market.

The program also opens pathways for returning OFWs to earn formal academic credentials, recognizing the skills and experiences they have gained abroad. This is particularly relevant given the Department of Labor and Employment's (2022) report indicating that a large portion of the labor force consists of individuals with incomplete tertiary education but substantial work experience. ETEEAP offers a pathway for these individuals to formalize their competencies and reintegrate into the local job market with greater competitiveness.

The institutionalization of ETEEAP under Republic Act No. 12124 embodies the principle of inclusive and lifelong learning. It not only expands access to higher education for marginalized groups but also aligns education with real-world practice and employability needs. With the growing emphasis on flexible learning, prior learning recognition, and skills-based credentialing, ETEEAP stands as a forward-looking policy that enhances equity and relevance in Philippine higher education.

Promotion of Lifelong Learning

The Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) exemplifies the principles of lifelong learning by providing adult learners with the opportunity to earn academic degrees based on their prior learning, work experiences, and acquired competencies. This pathway enables professionals to enhance their qualifications without the need to interrupt their careers, offering a flexible, non-traditional route to higher education. In doing so, ETEEAP reflects UNESCO's global vision of promoting inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2020).

Lifelong learning emphasizes that education is a continuous process that transcends the traditional age boundaries of schooling. ETEEAP operationalizes this philosophy by recognizing informal, non-formal, and experiential learning, allowing individuals to convert these into academic credits. According to Kolb and Kolb (2005), experiential learning is a powerful pedagogical tool that fosters deeper understanding by linking knowledge with personal and professional experiences. Similarly, Beaudin and Quick (1995) stress that adults benefit most from learning strategies that value their previous knowledge and encourage reflection.

The Philippines' commitment to this model is reflected in Executive Order No. 330 (1996), which institutionalized ETEEAP as an integral part of the country's higher education system, thereby aligning with Section 1, Article XIV of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which mandates the state to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels. Republic Act No. 12124 (2025) further strengthened this initiative by formally institutionalizing ETEEAP through legislation, ensuring broader accessibility and recognition.

The feasibility and success of implementing non-traditional learning pathways have been demonstrated by various academic institutions. For example, Manuel (2019) documented how distance modular learning approaches through ETEEAP enabled adult learners in Pangasinan State University to pursue academic credentials effectively. Likewise, Lang-ay Gas-ib et al. (2023) emphasized that ETEEAP plays a pivotal role in expanding higher education accessibility for non-traditional learners, particularly those in marginalized or rural communities.

Studies have also shown that many industries value the practical competencies gained through work experience, which ETEEAP formally acknowledges. According to Dilla and Ibarra (2022), prior learning assessments used in ETEEAP ensure that learners are credited for their real-world expertise, enhancing their employability without redundancy in training. Furthermore, Alera and Codod (2023) noted that employers highly regard graduates of non-traditional programs, particularly in business-related fields, provided they demonstrate both competence and adaptability.

Feasibility studies conducted by Alberto (2008), Balingbing (2014), and Leon (2000) on the offering of various undergraduate programs also highlight the demand for flexible educational modalities that align with labor market needs. These studies emphasize that adult learners often seek programs that are relevant to industry standards and can be completed without compromising their employment. The Department of Labor and Employment's (2022) Labor Force Survey supports this by revealing that many working adults are willing to upskill but are constrained by time and financial limitations—barriers that ETEEAP effectively addresses.

Moreover, research conducted by the Philippine Distance Learning Consortium (2017) and TESDA (2016) revealed that many beneficiaries of ETEEAP pursue higher positions in their workplaces or shift to more specialized roles after credential acquisition. This outcome validates the alignment between ETEEAP's goals and the broader national development agenda.

Ultimately, ETEEAP embodies a transformative approach to education by promoting inclusivity, flexibility, and recognition of diverse learning pathways. It responds to the evolving needs of adult learners in the 21st century and ensures that education remains accessible beyond the confines of traditional academic structures. In this regard, ETEEAP not only promotes lifelong learning but also supports the national goal of producing a competent, skilled, and educated workforce prepared to meet the challenges of a dynamic and knowledge-driven society (CHED, 2019; Misra & Khurana, 2018).

Comparative Global Insights

Globally, various countries have institutionalized the recognition of prior learning (RPL) as a strategic response to widening access to higher education, improving workforce skills, and enhancing educational equity. Countries such as Australia and Canada have successfully implemented RPL systems under their respective national qualifications frameworks, offering instructive models for countries like the Philippines to emulate.

In Australia, the national framework for RPL ensures standardized assessment procedures and quality assurance mechanisms that validate informal and non-formal learning. This allows adult learners and professionals to obtain

academic credentials based on work experience and prior competencies (Harris, 2019). Australia's robust RPL infrastructure supports continuous professional development and offers flexible pathways for learners who would otherwise be excluded from formal education.

Similarly, Canada has developed the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) framework, which facilitates adult learners' access to higher education by acknowledging their experiential learning. PLAR has led to increased participation in post-secondary education, particularly among mature students and immigrants, by reducing duplication of learning and shortening the time required to earn credentials (Andersson, Harris, & Fejes, 2021). These international systems emphasize the importance of experiential learning and equivalency theory, aligning with Boud, Cohen, and Walker's (1993) assertion that learning is most effective when grounded in real-life experiences.

The Philippine experience, while historically slower to adopt such comprehensive frameworks, has recently taken significant strides toward institutionalizing alternative education pathways. The Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP), established through Executive Order No. 330 (1996), aims to recognize the work experience, non-formal training, and prior learning of Filipino adults by awarding them equivalent academic credits toward a degree. This system is guided by the principles of experiential learning (Beaudin & Quick, 1995; Kolb & Kolb, 2005) and aligned with the national goals of inclusive education and lifelong learning.

A growing body of local studies affirms the feasibility and effectiveness of offering non-traditional programs through the ETEEAP framework. For example, Lang-ay Gas-ib, Sannadan, and Ganotice (2023) highlighted the strong demand for flexible academic programs that cater to working professionals, especially in regions with high numbers of overseas Filipino workers and informal sector employees. Other feasibility studies—such as those by Alberto (2008), Balingbing (2014), and Leon (2000)—have demonstrated industry demand for degree programs tailored to adult learners' real-world experiences, such as broadcasting, information technology, and philosophy. These studies reinforce the need for curriculum models that are responsive to labor market trends and adult learners' contexts (Hofstrand & Holz-Clause, 2009).

However, the implementation of ETEEAP in the Philippines is not without challenges. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2019) and TESDA (2016) have acknowledged gaps in awareness, standardization, and capacity among participating institutions. A study by Dilla and Ibarra (2022) revealed inconsistencies in assessment practices and a lack of policy coherence, indicating a need for clearer guidelines and professional development for assessors. Moreover, the Philippine Distance Learning Consortium (2017) reported that while awareness of ETEEAP has grown, its uptake remains limited due to institutional hesitancy and misconceptions about program rigor.

From an employability standpoint, the value of RPL and ETEEAP-certified graduates has been validated by employers. Alera and Codod (2023) found that business administration graduates from ETEEAP tracks are viewed positively by employers, who appreciate their industry experience and practical skillsets. This aligns with Aránega (2014) and Misra and Khurana (2018), who emphasized the importance of transferable competencies—such as critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving—in enhancing graduates' employability in an increasingly competitive labor market.

International experiences also underscore the need to align RPL systems with labor market demands. Ismail and Mohammed (2015) argued that in countries like Nigeria, integrating employability skills into the technical and vocational curriculum strengthens the impact of RPL programs. In the Philippines, this is particularly critical given the high underemployment rate reported by the Department of Labor and Employment (2022), which highlights a mismatch between academic qualifications and job requirements.

The recent enactment of Republic Act No. 12124 (2025), institutionalizing ETEEAP as a permanent feature of the Philippine higher education system, marks a turning point. This law provides a legal framework that strengthens CHED's authority to regulate, monitor, and expand ETEEAP implementation. It also mandates a learner-centered approach that recognizes diverse learning styles and experiences, aligning with Kolb and Kolb's (2005) learning space model.

The Philippines' evolving RPL and ETEEAP ecosystem draws valuable lessons from international best practices while addressing unique national needs. By enhancing policy coherence, institutional readiness, and public awareness, the country can fully realize the potential of ETEEAP as a transformative tool for educational equity, economic development, and lifelong learning.

Conclusion:

The institutionalization of the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) through Republic Act No. 12004 marks a significant milestone in the Philippine higher education system. By formally recognizing the value of non-formal and informal learning, including work experience and experiential knowledge, the law aims to democratize access to tertiary education for adult learners, out-of-school youth, and mid-career

professionals. This progressive policy acknowledges that learning is not confined to the four walls of a classroom and that real-world competencies deserve academic equivalency.

ETEEAP represents a shift toward a more inclusive, flexible, and competency-based education model, aligning the country with global trends in recognition of prior learning (RPL) and lifelong learning. It responds directly to the changing demands of the labor market, providing opportunities for upskilling and reskilling in line with workforce requirements. Moreover, it contributes to social equity by opening academic doors for individuals who may have been excluded from formal education due to socioeconomic, geographic, or personal constraints.

However, the success of ETEEAP will ultimately rest on its implementation. Challenges such as ensuring the credibility and consistency of assessment standards, institutional readiness, employer recognition, and public awareness must be strategically addressed. Clear guidelines, capacity-building for assessors, robust quality assurance mechanisms, and strong government-industry-academe partnerships are essential for sustaining the program's credibility and integrity.

As the Philippines advances educational innovation, ETEEAP stands as a promising model for a more dynamic and responsive higher education system—one that values diverse learning pathways and empowers individuals through the recognition of their lived experiences. Future efforts should continue to refine the program, promote its benefits across sectors, and ensure that it remains accessible, equitable, and aligned with national development goals.

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