



A Phenomenological Exploration of ETEEAP Graduates' Personal, Academic, and Professional Transformation

DOI 10.5281/zenodo.13861413

Rodjhun B. Navarro, LPT, PhD

Vice-President for Research, Innovations, and Linkages, La Consolacion College Bacolod

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7889-5770> | rnavarro@lccbonline.edu.ph

Abstract:

This phenomenological study explores the transformative journey of adult students enrolled in the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP), addressing a significant gap in existing literature.

The research aims to understand how adult learners perceive the impact of ETEEAP on their personal, academic, and professional growth. Utilizing a phenomenological methodology, four participants from marginalized groups within a deputized college, following the guidelines outlined in CMO 29 series of 2021 were interviewed.

Four overarching themes emerged from the analysis: "Identity Evolution," depicting profound changes in participants' identities; "Enriching Experiences," highlighting the program's dynamic nature; "Transformed Perspectives," illustrating shifts in views on education and personal capabilities; and "Newfound Commitment to Learning," showcasing participants' dedication to continuous learning.

This study provides deep insights into the nuanced ways adult students experience ETEEAP's impact on their holistic development. The identified themes contribute valuable knowledge to the field of adult education and program administration. In conclusion, the research underscores ETEEAP's role in shaping individuals holistically, fostering a lifelong commitment to learning and self-improvement. The study not only addresses a gap in existing literature but also offers practical insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers involved in adult education programs.

Keywords: Phenomenology, ETEEAP Program, Lived Experiences, Adult Learners

Introduction:

The Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) presents a unique educational pathway in the Philippines, offering working professionals an alternative route to attaining a bachelor's degree without the constraints of traditional schooling. Established in 1996 by Executive Order No. 330, ETEEAP recognizes and acknowledges the knowledge, skills, and experiences gained through individuals' work lives (Executive Order No. 330, s. 1996).

This program caters to individuals with at least five years of work experience, allowing them to apply their professional expertise for academic credit, potentially reducing the total number of units required for graduation (UNESCO, 2023b). ETEEAP operates through deputized higher education institutions that assess individuals' competencies through various methods, including portfolio reviews, diagnostic examinations, and project presentations (Commission on Higher Education, 2017). This personalized and competency-based approach aims to bridge the gap between formal education and professional experience, empowering working adults to pursue their academic goals without compromising their careers (Taawan, 2020).

ETEEAP gives recognition to competencies attained through work experiences and equates them credits to the required units of competency in a given college curriculum, effectively shortening the time spent for college education among adult students, while also minimizing the costs. This program has seen its relevance in a developing country like the Philippines given that a big number of the population live below poverty. Often, people have to sacrifice college education to find a living at an early age in order to feed a family, while access to free college education has been sparse (UNESCO, 2023b).

ETEEAP's legislative framework received significant updates in 2021 with the issuance of Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 29 (Enhanced Policies, Standards and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) for Undergraduate Degree Programs, 2021).

CMO 29 series of 2021 clarified the eligibility criteria for program participation, emphasizing the requirement of at least five years of relevant work experience and specifying acceptable alternative evidence for those lacking formal



education credentials (CHED, 2017). Furthermore, the policy introduced provisions for online delivery of certain program components, including lectures, seminars, and even thesis defense, to cater to the diverse needs and geographical constraints of working professionals (Enhanced Policies, Standards and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) for Undergraduate Degree Programs, 2021).

The policy ushered in several key changes, lowering the eligibility age to 23, making the program more inclusive and responsive to younger individuals seeking alternative pathways to higher education. It also embraced diverse assessment methods, recognizing the value of skills honed outside traditional classrooms. Portfolio reviews, workplace demonstrations, and prior learning assessments now complement traditional exams, ensuring a more holistic evaluation of individuals' knowledge and capabilities.

Furthermore, industry-relevant skills received heightened focus, aligning ETEEAP programs with the ever-evolving job market. HEIs are encouraged to tailor their offerings to regional development needs and emerging in-demand skills, empowering graduates to hit the ground running with the expertise employers seek. Notably, streamlined application processes and greater institutional autonomy in program design contribute to a more accessible and adaptable ETEEAP experience (UNESCO, 2023c).

The CHED data from 2019-2021 reveals some intriguing trends within the ETEEAP program. While the initial year saw robust enrollment and graduation numbers, with 7,622 enrollments and 3,534 graduates, the figures dipped significantly in the following academic year, with a decrease of 27% in enrollees (5,538) and 39% in graduates (2,154). This decline raises questions about the factors influencing participation and program completion within ETEEAP (Commission on Higher Education et al., 2022).

Several potential explanations could be explored. The COVID-19 pandemic's onset in 2020 may have deterred prospective students due to concerns about health safety, financial constraints, or the shift to online learning. Additionally, external factors like economic or employment uncertainties could have impacted working professionals' ability to commit to the program's demands. Alternatively, challenges within the program itself, such as assessment procedures, academic rigor, or support structures, might have contributed to higher dropout rates.

Despite the decrease, it is crucial to acknowledge the program's ongoing value. Over 5,000 individuals still enrolled during the pandemic year, highlighting the continued demand for alternative pathways to higher education. Moreover, the graduation rates, hovering around 30%, indicate that ETEEAP successfully empowers a significant portion of its participants to achieve their academic goals.

A private Catholic College is among the schools deputized by the Commission on Higher Education to offer the ETEEAP in the Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Arts, Business Administration, and Hospitality Management. Its enrollment in the program has spiked since 2014 when it started an extensive campaign for awareness and since people are beginning to see successful ETEEAP graduates in various fields. In 2022, enrollment of adult students has increased to almost a hundred students in a cohort. Adult students typically finish within a year (La Consolacion College Bacolod, 2023).

Adult students come from various career backgrounds with a huge number of them coming from the BPO industry. A sizeable number of the population would be government employees, cooperatives, non-government and private organizations -- but most of them are either on probationary employment status or may be tenured but in the lower salary brackets. There are also adult students who are running their own business or are in the real estate sector (La Consolacion College Bacolod, 2023).

The diversity of socio-economic background and the underlying motivations of adult students in the ETEEAP makes it an interesting subject to study, thus, this research is about the experiences and how adult students realize their dream of a college degree. Since the first cohort of the ETEEAP graduated in 1999-2000, enrollment in the program has invariably increased, but very little has been done to understand the experiences of adult students both as a student and as they play their multiple roles in their lives.

The aim of this qualitative research was to dig deeper into the experience and to describe how adult students experience and understand the impacts of ETEEAP to their personal, academic and professional growth. By attempting to understand the perspectives of the students on the program, the layers of educational experience can be defined and how the adult students see it will shed light to further research on how the implementation can be done better on the operational or policy level. This study also attempts at describing the value that the adult students put into college education and their stories of struggles and perseverance to realize it.

The researcher's motivation to delve deeper into the experiences of adult students and their understanding of the impacts of the ETEEAP on their growth is deeply rooted in his extensive involvement with the program. Having



served as an assessor and instructor in the ETEEAP since 2013, the researcher possesses a firsthand understanding of the intricacies and transformative potential of the program.

The researcher's recent appointment as the Assistant Coordinator of the program and Head of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies program further solidifies his commitment to enhancing the educational journey of adult learners through the ETEEAP. This insider perspective positions the researcher uniquely, allowing him to draw upon a wealth of practical insights and nuanced observations gained over years of direct engagement with ETEEAP students. As a result, the researcher is driven by a desire to contribute substantively to the existing body of knowledge surrounding adult education, shedding light on the multifaceted impacts of the ETEEAP from the lens of both an instructor and a program administrator.

Methodology:

Methodological Perspective

This phenomenological study aims to explore the lived experiences of adult students participating in the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) and its impact on their personal, academic, and professional development. The focus of this research is to bring forward the voices of the students, providing a comprehensive understanding of their narratives. Given the qualitative nature of the study, a constructivist epistemological framework was adopted, which emphasizes knowledge as constructed through social interactions. This approach was suitable as it highlights subjective interpretations and values the context-specific nature of students' experiences in the ETEEAP.

Epistemology

Grounded in constructivism, the research asserts that knowledge is co-created through social contexts rather than existing independently of human consciousness (Crotty, 1998). The study focuses on how students construct and interpret their experiences in the ETEEAP, acknowledging the subjective, evolving nature of reality. This aligns with Guba and Lincoln's (1994) view that research involving human participants should recognize the multiplicity of realities and how values shape the research process. The researcher engaged in self-reflection to manage biases and ensure that the student participants' perspectives were prioritized throughout the study, allowing for a detailed understanding of the students' experiences and meaning-making processes.

Theoretical Tenets

In line with constructivism, the study's theoretical framework draws from pragmatic principles, which consider knowledge as an accumulation of lived experiences shaped by interaction (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher aimed to uncover how students navigated the ETEEAP and its influence on their growth, believing that truth evolves through continuous engagement and reflection. The subjective and interactive researcher-participant relationship was crucial in understanding how ETEEAP influenced personal, academic, and professional aspects of the participants' lives.

Qualitative Discovery

A qualitative approach was selected to explore participants' emotional responses and perceptions, differing from the quantitative paradigm that focuses on generalizations and statistical analysis. This study sought to explore complex social phenomena by examining patterns that emerged from the participants' narratives (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Through in-depth conversations, participants revisited their experiences in the ETEEAP, allowing them to construct meaning within their social contexts. This method aimed to capture the depth of student experiences, focusing on how they perceive and internalize their learning journey.

Research Design

This study employs a phenomenological research design rooted in the work of Edmund Husserl, who emphasized understanding lived experiences. This approach, widely used in education and social sciences, aims to explore how individuals make sense of their everyday experiences. By following Creswell's (2007) procedural guidelines, the researcher systematically explored how students experienced the ETEEAP. Data were gathered through individual interviews, and the analysis involved identifying significant statements that led to descriptions capturing the essence of the participants' experiences.

Sampling, Subjects, Setting, and Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted within the ETEEAP context at a higher education institution in Negros Occidental. Four adult students, selected using purposive and criterion-based sampling, participated in the study. The criteria



included recent graduates from ETEEAP and the ability to express themselves in English, Filipino, or Hiligaynon. Participants were contacted, provided with informed consent, and offered assurances of confidentiality. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed, with pseudonyms used to protect participants' identities. All data were securely stored, and the participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Data Collection Methods

The primary method for data collection was individual semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 45 to 60 minutes. This method allowed participants to freely share their experiences, enabling the researcher to explore in-depth perspectives on how the ETEEAP influenced their growth. Interviews were conducted in a private, distraction-free environment, and all sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The data were transcribed and verified by participants for accuracy, ensuring that their narratives were accurately captured.

Data Analysis Process and Procedures

The data analysis followed Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method, which involves several stages. First, the researcher read and reread the interview transcripts to gain a deep understanding of each participant's experience. Significant statements related to the research question were identified and grouped into clusters of meaning. From these clusters, themes emerged, which were then synthesized into a comprehensive description of the participants' experiences.

This description, referred to as the "exhaustive description," captures the essence of how the students experienced ETEEAP. The themes were cross-referenced with the original interview data to ensure accuracy, and any discrepancies were noted and addressed. Participants were also invited to review the findings and offer feedback, ensuring that their voices were authentically represented in the final analysis.

Throughout the process, the researcher engaged in constant reflection, revisiting the data and adjusting interpretations as necessary. This iterative approach ensured that the analysis was both rigorous and faithful to the participants' lived experiences.

Findings and Discussion:

Emerging Themes

Driven by a commitment to data quality (Richards, 2009), the researcher meticulously integrated rigor into every step of the study, from data collection to analysis. This meant ensuring precision, contextual relevance, detailed descriptions, practical value, and a deep, reflective connection to the participants' lived experiences. Saldana's (2009) coding framework provided a crucial roadmap, guiding the initial cycle of open, theoretical, and memo coding. Each method offered a unique lens, revealing the data's multifaceted stories.

Embracing the dynamic nature of qualitative research, the researcher navigated a series of feedback loops (Richards, 2009). Immersion in the data was key, as concepts were explored, clustered, and refined through iterative cycles of learning, seeking feedback, revisiting the data, and recategorizing. Memoing served as a vital tool, capturing insights and guiding the coding focus.

The second cycle employed pattern and focused coding (Saldana, 2013). Pattern coding delved deeper, identifying relationships and patterns within the initial codes, leading to the formation of broader category clusters. Focused coding then scrutinized the evolving data composition, assessing the significance and frequency of codes and refining the clusters for a more concise representation. This meticulous process aimed to capture the essence of adult students' experiences and their nuanced understanding of how the ETEEAP program impacted their personal, academic, and professional growth.

Data Coding

The influence of the ETEEAP extends well beyond the acquisition of knowledge, as reflected in the meticulous crafting of 27 coded clusters derived from 346 impactful statements. These clusters vividly illustrate the evolution of learners' identities, enriched experiences, transformed perspectives, and newfound commitment to learning. Whether navigating educational hiatuses or confronting disorienting dilemmas, the program cultivated a supportive environment where collaborative learning thrived, inclusivity blossomed, and critical thinking skills flourished. Ultimately, the program not only equipped learners with transferable skills but also empowered them to contribute meaningfully and ignited a sustained passion for growth.



Table 1: Clustered Response Frequency

Coded Cluster	<i>Participant Pseudonym</i>				<i>totals</i>
	MJ	RJ	ML	JL	
Identity and Self-concept	4	6	7	4	21
Experience	4	5	8	6	23
Educational Hiatus	1	1	2	2	6
Disorienting Dilemma	3	3	2	4	12
Perspective Transformation	1	4	1	1	7
Readiness to Learn	1	1	7	2	11
Self-Direction and Intrinsic Motivation	4	4	4	9	21
Supportive Environment	3	3	6	2	14
Inclusivity and Acceptance	1	1	1	1	4
Orientation to Learning	3	1	2	1	7
Recognition of Prior Learning	3	3	3	3	12
Collaborative Learning	1	7	1	7	16
Cultivation of Thinking Skills and Diligence	1	1	2	4	8
Fostering Dynamic and Interactive Environment	1	2	1	3	7
Relevance of Learning	1	1	3	1	6
Experience-Based Learning	2	1	1	4	8
Transferable Skills and Real-World Application	6	5	7	2	20



Coded Cluster	<i>Participant Pseudonym</i>				<i>totals</i>
	MJ	RJ	ML	JL	
Reciprocal Learning	1	3	1	1	7
Balancing Responsibilities	6	2	5	2	15
Commitment and Dedication	3	2	2	6	13
Challenges And Transformative Opportunities	1	3	5	6	15
Opportunities For Growth And Transformation	1	2	1	2	6
Professional Relevance and Career Advancement	3	1	9	1	14
Identity Transformation	5	6	3	11	25
Empowerment and Contribution	6	10	4	8	28
Continued Aspiration and Goal-Setting	2	3	1	5	11
Acknowledgment of Transformative Nature of the Learning Experience	1	1	1	6	9

As mentioned earlier, the data underwent multiple rounds of refinement through both initial and subsequent coding efforts. The evolving code clusters underwent continuous modifications as the data was scrutinized through different analytical lenses. The initial 27 coded clusters were further consolidated into four overarching data clusters, each encapsulating a developing conglomerate of meaning. These clusters were identified as Identity and Self-concept, Learning Process, Learning Environment, and Outcomes and Impact. Ultimately, the analysis culminated in the identification of four core themes elucidating the phenomenon of interest. These themes revolved around the ways in which students experience and comprehend the impacts of the ETEEAP on their personal, academic, and professional growth: **Identity Evolution**, **Enriching Experiences**, **Transformed Perspectives**, and **Newfound Commitment to Learning**.

The narratives of MJ, RJ, ML, and JL collectively illustrate the theme of **Identity Evolution** through self-discovery, overcoming challenges, embracing opportunities for growth, and ultimately transforming into more resilient, confident, and empowered individuals. The ETEEAP program acts as a common thread, catalyzing these transformations and contributing to the multifaceted evolution of their identities.

MJ's narrative within the ETEEAP program unfolds as a powerful exploration of evolving identity. Born as Mar and self-identified as transsexual, MJ grappled with challenges within traditional educational settings, leading to a prolonged hiatus in her academic journey. The program became a catalyst for her personal transformation, allowing her to express her evolving identity symbolized by the addition of the letter "J" to her nickname. A remarkable aspect of MJ's evolution is her shift from being a highly competitive individual to recognizing the value of self-competition. She emphasizes the realization that she can achieve her best by competing with no one but herself. This transformative insight aligns with her admission of impatience, a trait that made the ETEEAP's short-term nature a perfect fit for her. Through the program, MJ not only honed skills relevant to the workplace but also developed effective time management abilities. The narrative underscores how the ETEEAP program served as a



canvas for MJ to navigate the complexities of her identity, fostering self-awareness, resilience, and a newfound appreciation for self-competition and adaptability.

RJ's narrative unfolds as a compelling saga of evolving identity, navigating through the intricate tapestry of challenges and triumphs. Born blind and facing financial obstacles due to her congenital visual impairment, RJ's resilience became the guiding light illuminating her journey. A pause in her education at the age of 20 due to pregnancy and marriage marked a temporary setback, accompanied by the suspension of her scholarship, leaving a sense of disappointment. However, RJ's commitment to redeem her image and honor the support she received fueled her determination to resume her education. This decision led her to complete a college degree through ETEEAP, delving into the realm of business with passion and dedication. RJ's transformation is not merely academic; it's a profound shift marked by gratitude, confidence, and a positive outlook. The challenges she faced and overcame, coupled with the support of her classmates, family, and friends, have collectively shaped RJ's evolving identity, empowering her to transcend past judgments and resolutely pursue her aspirations. The ETEEAP program serves as a transformative catalyst, allowing RJ to pick up where she faltered, providing a platform for self-discovery, growth, and the realization of her dreams.

ML, an overseas Filipino worker in Ghana, embarked on an educational journey through the ETEEAP program, recognizing the competitive job market's demand for educational qualifications. Despite facing interruptions in her college education, her husband's encouragement led her to pursue a degree. Enrolling in La Consolacion College Bacolod ETEEAP, ML found a tailored approach considering her work experiences and educational background. The program challenged her with a significant time zone difference but instilled in her a new perspective on the value of continuous education. ML's commitment to both work and studies resulted in a swift promotion from Receptionist to Office Administrator within three months, affirming the ETEEAP's role in her professional growth and paving the way for higher-level job positions. Now managing a team and enjoying increased incentives, ML's career trajectory reflects the transformative impact of the ETEEAP program on her professional life in Ghana.

JL's evolving identity is shaped by a resilient journey marked by challenges as an Internally Displaced Person, adding layers of complexity to her pursuit of education. Despite showcasing remarkable skills in community organizing, the absence of a college degree posed professional challenges, leading to internal struggles with feelings of diminishment. The ETEEAP program served as a transformative catalyst, altering her perspective on her choice of major and her attitude toward the English language. Her intrinsic motivation, fueled by life challenges and a desire to secure a better future for her son, led to a newfound enjoyment in her studies and a significant improvement in language proficiency. Notably, JL faced adversity midway through the ETEEAP program, battling Bell's Palsy. Her steady focus and determination to succeed allowed her to overcome this challenge, further highlighting her resilience. This transformative journey culminated in JL's aspiration for higher education and stands as a profound testimony to divine guidance in her life.

The theme of **Enriching Experiences** resonates strongly in the narratives of adult students, as exemplified by the experiences of MJ, RJ, ML and JL.

MJ's narrative within the ETEEAP program encapsulates a journey of enriching experiences, highlighting the transformative nature of her educational pursuit. Despite initial financial constraints and the dynamic nature of the study load, MJ's eagerness to obtain a degree, framed as the key to her "*bread and butter*," propelled her forward. The program's recognition of her prior learning experiences and the emphasis on non-formal and informal skills assessments provided a pathway for academic growth, contributing to a dynamic learning environment. The task-oriented learning approach of ETEEAP resonated with MJ, allowing her to navigate the supplemental requirements within the compressed timeframe of the program. The program's demands tested not only her adaptability but also her time management skills, reshaping her weekend priorities and instilling a newfound appreciation for the meaningful investment of time. MJ's commitment and dedication, shaped by these challenges, resulted in significant personal and professional growth. Her professional life in marketing saw tangible benefits from the practical tools acquired, and the program's impact on her communication abilities highlighted the holistic nature of the enriching experiences within the ETEEAP journey.

RJ's narrative within the ETEEAP program unfolds as a tapestry of enriching experiences, demonstrating resilience and determination in the face of her visual impairment. Overcoming initial concerns, RJ navigated the virtual learning environment with the aid of assistive technology, showcasing her determination to access information and pursue her educational goals. The supportive and accommodating atmosphere fostered by teachers and staff contributed to a positive virtual learning experience for RJ. Facing academic challenges, she sought assistance from classmates, embracing a collaborative and reciprocal approach to learning. RJ's journey was marked by self-direction and intrinsic motivation, as evidenced by her active participation in in-person requirements and engagement with professors. The acquisition of marketing management skills, despite her non-business background, underscored the program's professional relevance and its potential for career advancement. Beyond personal fulfillment, RJ's degree has opened doors for her to re-engage as a volunteer, showcasing a profound identity transformation marked by gratitude and confidence. Her commitment to giving back to Resources for the



Blind Incorporated, where her journey began, reflects the enduring impact of her enriching experiences within the ETEEAP program.

ML's journey with the ETEEAP program has been a tapestry of enriching experiences. As an OFW in Ghana, West Africa, ML faced a redirection in her educational path but found resonance in the ABELS program, recognizing its relevance to her interactions with locals in her current setting. Despite initial hesitancy, ML's perspective on language proficiency evolved, aligning with her professional aspirations and the growing demand for academic credentials in her job. The ETEEAP program provided a tailored approach that considered her work experiences and educational background, expediting her degree completion efficiently.

Balancing family, work, and ministry commitments posed challenges, yet the program became a catalyst for honing ML's time management skills. ML's proficiency in English, a skill sharpened through ETEEAP, transformed her into a valuable language resource at her workplace, showcasing not only mastery but also a willingness to assist others. Beyond academics, ML's ETEEAP journey became a catalyst for professional growth, aiding her in navigating cultural nuances in her diverse clientele. The comprehensive support from the academic institution and the workplace created a conducive environment for ML's success, marking the program as a transformative force in her life.

JL's immersion in the ETEEAP program has been a transformative odyssey marked by enriching experiences and unwavering determination. Introduced to the program through friends' success stories, JL overcame initial challenges to become the first to submit an application for admission. Her professional responsibilities as a Farm Worker I, coupled with a desire to enhance her communication skills, motivated her pursuit of a degree.

The ETEEAP classes, characterized by dynamic interactions and diverse experiences, provided a fulfilling challenge, encouraging JL to showcase her knowledge and skills in each course. Her commitment to balancing a complex routine, commencing at 5:00 am, underscored discipline and dedication. This disciplined approach extended beyond task management to emotional resilience, as JL conscientiously explored her reactions to stress. Thesis writing, a challenging phase in her journey, required intense study and perseverance, even taking a toll on her health. JL's passion and determination, however, propelled her forward, leading to remarkable grades and improved language proficiency. Her intrinsic motivation and self-directed pursuit of knowledge, evident in her enthusiasm for both mandatory and non-mandatory classes, reflect the transformative power of her academic journey. JL's exceptional grades and aspirations for higher education stand as a testament to her commitment to continuous learning and building on her existing qualifications through the ETEEAP program.

All adult students found the ETEEAP to be an enriching experience. First, all of them found the academic rigor required of the program to be demanding in terms of time and focus which required balancing multiple responsibilities as they grappled with learning about the emerging technologies used in distance learning and not to mention, the difficulty of the subjects. They found the instructors to be competent and helpful. The interactions which fostered diversity and allowed them to share their experiences to enrich the theories excited them and developed in them a love for learning as shown in their anticipation to attend their classes. They found research, which was the terminal requirement of the program the most challenging, but also they said that they are most proud of their thesis output as a testament that they deserve the recognition a diploma brings.

The inclusive and diverse environment at school provided opportunities for excellence, such as RJ leading an outreach project despite her visual impairment. The key to success, they revealed, lies in effective time management, a competence they claim to have mastered. Despite living in different locations and facing responsibilities in households, workplaces, and community engagements, they found the environments to be very supportive, fostering an overall enriching experience. This collective experience fueled their sense of pride, appreciation for the program, and motivation to pursue further learning and give back to the community.

The theme of **Transformed Perspectives** is evident in the narratives of MJ, RJ, ML, and JL as they recount their experiences with the ETEEAP program. Each story reflects a profound shift in the way these individuals perceive education, themselves, and their potential for growth.

All four adult students who participated in this narrative inquiry shared varying hesitations before undertaking the ETEEAP. MJ had concerns about his capability to fulfill the financial requirements of the program. RJ initially intended to major in Human Resource Management, aligning with her background in co-managing their family construction business. However, she was recommended to switch to Marketing Management, which prompted hesitations due to potential challenges and her visual impairment. Similarly, JL was hesitant to accept the recommendation to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies, as she had never appreciated the English language in her work experiences dealing with grassroots issues, where communication was primarily in the mother tongue. ML, on the other hand, believed she might be too old to obtain a college degree. These initial hesitations later transformed into a profound appreciation of their abilities within the ETEEAP program, proven by their success in overcoming its demands and challenges.



MJ's journey highlights the transformative power of commitment and dedication, emphasizing the shift from initial hesitations to a newfound purpose. Stagnant for over two decades, MJ found renewed purpose through the ETEEAP program. The condensed timeframe and demanding tasks tested her patience and adaptability, challenges that turned into opportunities for personal growth. The emphasis on output-based learning not only pushed her to meet deadlines but also instilled in her a sense of tenacity. This transformation is encapsulated in her newfound ability to manage time effectively and her commitment to continuous learning, showcasing the profound change from initial uncertainties to a resilient and committed approach.

Similarly, RJ's narrative centers around the transformative effect of adapting to change and taking the initiative, addressing hesitations prompted by program recommendations. Initially drawn to a program aligned with her passion, RJ embraced the ETEEAP administrator's recommendation to switch to marketing management. Despite facing challenges and potential hesitations from classmates due to her visual impairment, RJ proactively engaged with her peers, showcasing the importance of initiative and effective communication. This shift in perspective allowed her to acquire skills in marketing management, challenging preconceived notions about her capabilities and demonstrating the transformative power of embracing change.

ML's story underscores the theme of lifelong learning and the recognition of prior experiences, reflecting on her initial doubt about pursuing education at her age. The ETEEAP program, with its focus on recognizing work experience and previous education, enabled ML to fast-track her degree. The program's emphasis on cultivating thinking skills, diligence, and study habits served as a transformative force, challenging her initial reservations. Additionally, ML's encounter with unfamiliar territory during the thesis challenged her, highlighting the transformative nature of acquiring new knowledge and skills, especially through research, showcasing a shift from doubt to confidence.

JL's narrative adds a unique perspective, emphasizing the transformative impact of Sister Joan's recommendation and overcoming initial resistance. Initially resistant to pursuing English Language Studies, JL's experience demonstrates the significance of aligning academic pursuits with personal and professional contexts. The program not only enhanced his language proficiency but also broadened his approach by integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experience. JL's proactive approach to learning, even incorporating English language exposure during sleep, speaks to the transformative power of dedication, showcasing the evolution from reluctance to proactive engagement in the learning process.

Collectively, these narratives paint a comprehensive picture of how the ETEEAP program has transformed the perspectives of individuals from diverse backgrounds. The program serves as a catalyst for personal and professional growth, challenging preconceptions, fostering adaptability, and instilling a lifelong commitment to learning. The theme of "Transformed Perspectives" emerges organically from the rich tapestry of these stories, showcasing the profound impact of the ETEEAP program on the lives of its participants.

The theme of **Newfound Commitment** to Learning is evident throughout the narratives, reflecting a transformative journey for each individual in their pursuit of education through the ETEEAP program.

All adult students expressed intent to pursue continuing education after the ETEEAP, with specific aspirations related to their career goals. Interestingly, three of them, namely MJ, RJ, and JL, are keen on obtaining qualifications to become professional teachers. MJ aims to specialize in English Language Studies to teach at the baccalaureate level. RJ is driven by the desire to give back to the PWD community, intending to teach computer skills and the use of assistive tools for the blind, drawing from her personal experience. JL envisions providing education tailored for farmers, aligning with her professional background and community involvement. On the other hand, ML has her sights set on a master's degree in Human Resource Management, aligning with her role as an HR manager in the company in Ghana where she is working.

MJ's narrative emphasizes the transformative power of the ETEEAP program in overcoming personal challenges and fostering a renewed commitment to learning, a commitment that extends beyond the program's duration. MJ acknowledges her impatience and the struggles she faced as a regular student, making the condensed 10-month ETEEAP program a perfect fit for her. The focus on output-based learning and monthly tasks compelled MJ to stay committed, showcasing the rigorous nature of the program. The understanding and support of teachers played a crucial role, making the learning process manageable. The narrative underscores MJ's evolving perspective on learning as a continuous journey, aligning with her aspirations for further education, contemplating master's degrees in applied linguistics or journalism, setting the stage for her future role as a professional teacher.

RJ's story portrays a newfound commitment to learning intertwined with her desire to contribute meaningfully to society. Reflecting on the satisfaction derived from ETEEAP classes, RJ praises the accommodating and approachable teachers who have been instrumental in her educational journey. The collaborative spirit among classmates showcases a collective commitment to overcome difficulties, a commitment that extends beyond



personal growth to impact the community positively. RJ draws inspiration from older classmates and professors pursuing advanced degrees, reinforcing the idea that it's never too late to pursue one's dreams. The narrative highlights RJ's determination to save and invest in education for future aspirations, showcasing a commitment to continuous learning and personal growth, laying the foundation for her envisioned role as a teacher benefiting the visually impaired.

ML's experience with ETEEAP reinforces the theme of commitment to learning, intertwined with her ambitions for further academic pursuits. ML emphasizes the program's emphasis on earning the degree through hard work and the cultivation of critical thinking and diligence. The transformative aspect of learning is evident as ML discusses the evolution of knowledge, especially in adapting to digital tools and online learning. The newfound confidence in English language skills not only positions ML as an instant editor at work and home but also hints at her future plans. Contemplating a master's degree based on current career positions, ML's narrative underscores her commitment to continuous learning, aligning with her vision for professional growth and development.

JL's journey reflects a commitment to education despite facing personal challenges, and her narrative is interwoven with aspirations for further academic accomplishments. The joy derived from ETEEAP classes and the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical experience contribute to a holistic learning approach. JL's commitment is further evident in attending even non-mandatory classes, showcasing genuine enthusiasm for learning that goes beyond immediate requirements. Despite facing Bell's Palsy and challenges in the workplace, JL remains steadfast in pursuing education. Her aspiration to reach educational levels equivalent to those who once bullied her reflects a deep commitment to personal and academic growth. The narrative portrays the newfound validation and motivation stemming from completing the ETEEAP program, setting the stage for JL's envisioned role as an educator for farmers, merging her commitment to education with her community-focused goals.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this research addresses a notable gap in existing literature by exploring the transformative journeys of adult students within the ETEEAP, a subject that has not received specific attention in previous studies. As both a researcher and a higher education practitioner involved in instructing and administering the ETEEAP, the researcher's personal engagement with adult learners heightened his curiosity about this unexplored aspect. The study sought to fill this void by investigating how students perceive the impacts of the ETEEAP on their personal, academic, and professional growth, utilizing a phenomenological methodology to derive descriptive themes.

Interviewing four adult students from marginalized groups, as outlined in CMO 29 series of 2021, within a deputized college, yielded rich and insightful data. The identified themes, namely Identity Evolution, Enriching Experiences, Transformed Perspectives, and Newfound Commitment to Learning, collectively illuminate the nuanced ways in which students experience and comprehend the ETEEAP's impacts.

The narratives within the "Identity Evolution" theme reflect profound changes in participants' identities, demonstrating the program's role as a catalyst for self-improvement and self-reflection. The "Enriching Experiences" theme underscores the program's dynamic nature, offering more than a mere degree-seeking endeavor by providing practical insights, collaborative tasks, and exposure to diverse perspectives.

"Transformed Perspectives" highlight the participants' shift in views on education, challenges, and personal capabilities. The fusion of theoretical knowledge with practical experiences contributes to a more enlightened worldview, influencing academic as well as personal and professional approaches to challenges. The "Newfound Commitment to Learning" theme showcases participants' dedication to continuous learning, extending beyond academics to encompass personal growth and future aspirations, such as pursuing master's degrees and transitioning to teaching roles.

This research project, shaped by the intentional focus on the participants' voices, provides deep insights into how students experience and perceive the impacts of the ETEEAP on their personal, academic, and professional growth. The narratives shared by the adult students highlight the profound influence of the ETEEAP program, shaping individuals holistically and fostering a lifelong commitment to learning and self-improvement. In essence, this study serves as an initial step towards a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact on the lives of adult students, contributing valuable knowledge to the field of adult education and program administration.

References:

- Abdi, A. A., & Kapoor, D. (2009). Global perspectives on adult education: An introduction. In *Global Perspectives on Adult Education* (pp. 1–16). Palgrave Macmillan US. http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230617971_1
- Abele, A. (2014). How gender influences objective career success and subjective career satisfaction (pp. 412–426). Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139128933.024>

Asian Development Bank. (2022, December 6). ADB to invest in upgrading Filipinos' skills for better jobs. Asian Development Bank. <https://www.adb.org/news/adb-invest-upgrading-filipinos-skills-better-jobs>
 Authors, V. (2020). Routledge Library editions: Adult education. Taylor & Francis.

Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1997). *Women's Ways of Knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind 10th anniversary edition*. Basic Books.
 Bloom, B. S. (1969). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals*.

Brookfield, S. (2005). *The power of critical theory: Liberating adult learning and teaching*. Jossey-Bass.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. SAGE.

Enhanced Policies, Standards and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) for Undergraduate Degree Programs, (2021). <https://eteeap.org/resources/ched/CMO-No-29-S-2021.pdf>

Commission on Higher Education. (2017, December 12). Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP). Govph; Republic of the Philippines Office of the President. <https://ched.gov.ph/expanded-tertiary-education-equivalency-accreditationeteeap/>

Commission on Higher Education, Perez, M. M., & Mangubat, M. (2022, January 25). ETEEAP and LEP Data. CHED Statistics; Republic of the Philippines Office of the President. <https://ched.gov.ph/statistics/>

Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults*. Jossey-Bass.

Cranton, P., & Taylor, E. W. (2013). A theory in progress? *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 4(1), 35–47. <https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela5000>

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139–167. Philpapers. <https://philpapers.org/archive/CREDTI.pdf?ncid=txtlnkusaoip00000603>

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Day, C., & Sachs, J. (2005). *International handbook on the continuing professional development of teachers*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. SAGE Publications.

Dilla, V., & Ibarra, F. (2022). Evaluation on prior learning assessment of the expanded tertiary equivalency and accreditation program (ETEEAP): Its implications for tertiary education policy. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 22(15). <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v22i15.5562>

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2009). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Transaction Publishers.

Gutierrez, A. N. A. (2019, January 21). 5NBMC-Sustaining talent in the bpo-gutierrez. Unknown. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330514125_5NBMC-Sustaining_Talent_in_the_BPO-Gutierrez

Inhelder, B. (2001). *Working with Piaget: Essays in honour of Bärbel Inhelder*. Psychology Press.

International Labour Office. (2004). *Lifelong learning in asia and the pacific: Asia-Pacific regional forum for lifelong learning*, 8-13 september, 2001, Chiangmai, Thailand. International Labour Office.

Jarvis, P. (2009). *The Routledge International Handbook of Lifelong Learning*. Routledge.

Jarvis, P. (2012). *Adult education and lifelong learning: Theory and practice*. Routledge.

Jones, S. R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2021). Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Essential elements and issues. Routledge.

Kegan, R. (2009). The evolving self. Harvard University Press.

Knowles, M. S. (1970). The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy. The Association Press.

Knowles, M. S. (1975). Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers. New York : Association Press.

Knowles, M. S. (1980). The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy. [Wilton, Conn.]: Association Press ; Chicago : Follett Publishing Company.

Knowles, M. S. (1984). Andragogy in action: Applying modern principles of adult learning. Jossey-Bass.

Knowles, M. S., III, E. F. H., & Swanson, R. A. (2014). The Adult Learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development. Routledge.

La Consolacion College Bacolod. (2023). ETEEAP Enrollment. In LCC Bacolod Statistical Bulletin.

Locke, K. D. (2000). Grounded theory in management research. SAGE.

Manuel, M. (2019). Utilization of Distance Learning Modular Approach in Pangasinan State University – Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (PSU-ETEEAP). Southeast Asian Journal of Science and Technology, 4(1), 199–205.

Marquardt, M., & Waddill, D. (2004). The power of learning in action learning: A conceptual analysis of how the five schools of adult learning theories are incorporated within the practice of action learning. Action Learning: Research and Practice, 1(2), 185–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1476733042000264146>

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2014). Designing qualitative research. SAGE Publications.

Maslow, A. H. (1970). Motivation and personality. New York : Harper & Row.

McNabb, D. E. (2015). Research methods in public administration and nonprofit management. Routledge.

Merriam, S. B. (2002). Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis. Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2013). Adult learning: Linking theory and practice. John Wiley & Sons.

Merriam, S. B., & Caffarella, R. S. (1999). Learning in Adulthood: A comprehensive guide. Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., Caffarella, R. S., & Baumgartner, L. M. (2012). Learning in Adulthood: A comprehensive guide. John Wiley & Sons.

Merriam, S. B., & Mohamad, M. (2000). How cultural values shape learning in older adulthood: The case of Malaysia. Adult Education Quarterly, 51(1), 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07417130022087116>

Mezirow, J. (1991). Transformative dimensions of adult learning. Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress. Jossey-Bass.

Moscoviz, L., & Evans, D. (2022, March 14). Learning loss and student dropouts during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A review of the evidence two years after schools shut down. Center For Global Development | Ideas to Action; Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/learning-loss-and-student-dropouts-during-covid-19-pandemic-review-evidence-two-years>

Nadhira, F. (2021). Promoting investments in education in ASEAN: Inclusive education, cross-border education programs, and ICT capabilities. Center for Indonesian Policy Studies. <http://dx.doi.org/10.35497/353775>

Panahon, A., II. (2012). Developing Cross-Cultural Competence in Adult Learning in the ASEAN Context. In Occasional Paper Series. Ateneo Graduate School of Business. https://gsb.ateneo.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/op_no_9_-_developing_cross_competence_in_adult_learning.pdf

PBEd. (2023). State of Philippine Education Report 2023. PBEd. <https://www.pb.ed.ph/blogs/47/PBEd/State%20of%20Philippine%20Education%20Report%202023>

Executive Order No. 330, s. 1996, (1996). <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1996/05/10/executive-order-no-330-s-1996/>

Richards, L. (2009). Handling qualitative data: A practical guide. SAGE Publications.

Rogers, C. R. (1995). On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Römer, K. (2022, April 6). Building learning societies in Southeast Asia. ONLY CONNECT. <https://thelifelonglearningblog.uil.unesco.org/2022/04/06/building-learning-societies-in-southeast-asia/>

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data. SAGE Publications.

Saldaña, J. (2009). The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers. Sage Publications Limited.

Servaes, J. (2016). Sustainable development goals in the Asian context. Springer.

Shah, R. W. (2020). Rewriting Partnerships: Community Perspectives on Community-Based Learning. University Press of Colorado.

Smith, K., Lee, L., Osborne-Lampkin, L., & Rall, J. (2020). Self-study guide for evidence-based practices in adult literacy education. Regional Educational Laboratory South East. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED604748.pdf>

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

Taawan, A. (2020, December 23). ETEEAP – the program with a noble purpose. ETEEAP.Org. <https://eteeap.org/>

Taylor, K., & Marienau, C. (2016). Facilitating Learning with the Adult Brain in Mind: A conceptual and practical guide. John Wiley & Sons.

Tough, A. M. (1979). The adult's learning projects: A fresh approach to theory and practice in adult learning.

UNESCO. (2020). Trends in Adult Learning and Education in Africa (4th ed., Vol. 4). UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. https://uil.unesco.org/system/files/uil_ale_in_africa_eng_24.3.2020_onlineversion_small.pdf (Original work published 2020)

UNESCO. (2023a, April 5). Fifth global report on adult learning and education. Institute for Lifelong Learning. <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/grale5?hub=270>

UNESCO. (2023b, December 8). Case study: Recognizing life and workplace skills through the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP). Institute for Lifelong Learning. <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/articles/case-study-recognizing-life-and-workplace-skills-through-expanded-tertiary-education-equivalency-and>

UNESCO. (2023c, December 11). Recognition, validation and accreditation in Philippines. Institute for Lifelong Learning. <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/articles/recognition-validation-and-accreditation-philippines>

UNESCO, & Lanceta, A., ADR. (2017, May 29). General Briefing on ASEAN and ASEC. UNESCO Bangkok; UNESCO. <https://bangkok.unesco.org/sites/default/files/assets/article/Education/files/session-2asean-cooperation-education-sdg-4.pdf>

Valle, R. S., & King, M. (1978). Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology. Oxford University Press, USA.

Vasquez, B., Singco, J., Gullas, R., & Codilla, J. (2017, May 6). A Study on the ETEEAP Program: Its Outcomes and Impact on Graduates. 9th Taiwan-Philippines International Academic Conference. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jedidiah-Singco-2/publication/355925474_A_Study_on_the_ETEEAP_Program_Its_Outcomes_and_Impact_on_Graduates/links/6184a9fe3c987366c32b9b9e/A-Study-on-the-ETEEAP-Program-Its-Outcomes-and-Impact-on-Graduates.pdf

Wang, C.-Y. (1997). Advancing Lifelong Learning through Adult Education Policy in Chinese Taipei. Educational Resources and Information Center. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED411878.pdf>

Welton, M. (1991). Shaking the Foundations: The Critical Turn in Adult Education Theory. Canadian Journal for Study of Adult Education, 5(Special Issue), 21–42. Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education.



Wlodkowski, R. J., & Ginsberg, M. B. (2017). Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults. John Wiley & Sons.

World Bank. (2017). Skills Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement Operation. The World Bank. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/849071488682856000/pdf/India-Skill-Strengthening-PAD-02102017.pdf>

World Bank Group. (2021, July 28). Through thick and thin: Philippines - World bank partnership since 1945. World Bank Group. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/07/28/through-thick-and-thin-philippines-world-bank-partnership-since-1945>