

The Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP): A Pathway for Professional Degree Completion

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Abstract

The Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) was institutionalized through Republic Act 12124, signed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., to provide non-traditional learners with an alternative pathway to earning academic degrees based on prior learning and work experience. This study explores the implementation, benefits, and challenges of ETEEAP in the Philippine education system. Utilizing secondary sources and qualitative data, the research examines its effectiveness in facilitating career advancement, expanding access to higher education, and ensuring quality standards in academic accreditation. Findings indicate that ETEEAP serves as a valuable mechanism for lifelong learning and professional development, allowing individuals to formalize their competencies and enhance their career prospects. However, challenges persist, including limited employer recognition, inconsistencies in assessment processes, and the need for more accredited higher education institutions (HEIs) to accommodate applicants. The study emphasizes the importance of strengthening public awareness, standardizing accreditation procedures, and increasing institutional support to improve the program's credibility and reach. By addressing these challenges, ETEEAP can become a more effective tool for educational equity and workforce development in the Philippines. Future research may focus on longitudinal studies tracking graduates' career trajectories and employer perceptions to assess the program's long-term impact. Strengthening ETEEAP's implementation will further empower Filipinos to achieve academic and professional success, contributing to national development.

Keywords: ETEEAP, alternative education, prior learning assessment, higher education accreditation, lifelong learning, career advancement

Introduction:

Education serves as a cornerstone of personal and professional development, equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for career advancement and societal contribution. However, many working professionals in the Philippines struggle to complete higher education due to employment obligations and financial constraints (Papa, 2019). To address this gap, the government institutionalized the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) through Republic Act 12124, allowing individuals to obtain academic degrees by validating their work experience and prior learning (CHED, n.d.). This initiative aligns with the broader goal of enhancing access to education through alternative delivery modes (Rivera, Mission, & Serida, 2019; Rival, n.d.).

While ETEEAP offers a non-traditional pathway for degree completion, concerns persist regarding its recognition, accessibility, and long-term impact. Some employers and academic institutions remain hesitant to fully acknowledge ETEEAP-earned degrees, raising questions about their acceptance in the labor market (Saberón-Abalayan, 2018).

Additionally, the limited number of accredited higher education institutions (HEIs) providing the program constrains access for many eligible individuals (Lucero, 2020). Despite these challenges, ETEEAP has been instrumental in enabling professionals to pursue career growth without disrupting their employment, reinforcing the importance of alternative education in fostering lifelong learning (BusinessMirror, 2017).

This study aims to analyze the implementation of ETEEAP, its effectiveness in bridging educational gaps, and its role in career progression for professionals. By examining policy frameworks, institutional practices, and learner experiences, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on flexible learning pathways in higher education. Furthermore, it will explore potential strategies to enhance program credibility and accessibility, ensuring that ETEEAP remains a viable and sustainable option for lifelong learners in the Philippines.

Literature Review:

The Philippine education system has long sought to expand access to quality education, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged learners. Rivera, Mission, and Serida (2019) highlight the role of Alternative Delivery Modes (ADMs) in addressing barriers to education, particularly through the Department of Education's (DepEd) 2012 DepEd Order No. 54. This initiative aims to mitigate classroom congestion and provide flexible learning opportunities for students facing socioeconomic challenges, early pregnancy, and work-related constraints. Their study, which utilized thematic analysis of one-on-one interviews, revealed that ADM programs effectively enable students to continue their education despite difficult circumstances.

Similarly, DepEd has integrated ADMs into formal education to provide inclusive and non-discriminatory learning opportunities underscoring that the initiative aligns with global education objectives by emphasizing accessibility, human rights, and stakeholder participation. This underscores the significance of alternative learning pathways in bridging educational gaps and promoting lifelong learning.

Expanding beyond basic education, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) implements the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) to provide non-traditional learners with degree completion opportunities. ETEEAP is a comprehensive assessment and accreditation system that recognizes individuals' knowledge, competencies, and prior learning through work experience (CHED, n.d.). Under this framework, deputized higher education institutions (HEIs) assess applicants based on proficiency, expertise, and industry-relevant skills. According to CHED guidelines, candidates must have at least five years of work experience relevant to the academic discipline in which they seek equivalency. Evaluations typically include written assessments, competency-based interviews, and portfolio submissions (Polytechnic University of the Philippines, n.d.).

ETEEAP's operational framework, which enables working professionals to convert their professional experience into academic credits, thus expediting degree completion. The program operates under Executive Order No. 330 (1996) and is currently managed by CHED. To ensure quality assurance, only CHED-accredited institutions can implement ETEEAP, requiring rigorous compliance with national standards. Papa (2019) further asserts that ETEEAP fosters a more flexible higher education system by formally integrating non-formal and informal learning with traditional academic structures. This recognition process facilitates greater mobility for professionals, allowing them to acquire higher education qualifications without disrupting their employment.

Despite its benefits, concerns regarding recognition, accessibility, and standardization persist. Some employers and international institutions remain hesitant in fully recognizing ETEEAP degrees due to inconsistencies in assessment methodologies across HEIs (Saberón-Abalayan, 2018). Additionally, the limited number of accredited HEIs restricts access, particularly for individuals residing in rural areas (Lucero, 2020). Addressing these challenges is crucial to enhancing ETEEAP's credibility and long-term effectiveness in widening educational access and improving career trajectories.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach using document analysis to examine existing literature, government reports, and testimonies from ETEEAP graduates. Secondary data from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), academic institutions, and prior studies were systematically reviewed to assess the program's impact on learners' academic and professional growth. The research also explores policy implementation and the challenges faced by ETEEAP participants, particularly in accreditation and employment acceptance.

A comprehensive review of CHED policies and institutional guidelines was conducted to understand the regulatory framework governing ETEEAP. Additionally, case studies from various HEIs implementing the program were analyzed to assess consistency in equivalency measures and quality assurance. The study also examined employer perspectives on the credibility of ETEEAP degrees, highlighting challenges in industry recognition.

Data triangulation was applied by comparing government reports, institutional records, and previous research findings to validate conclusions. Through this qualitative approach, the study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of ETEEAP's effectiveness in bridging educational gaps and supporting career advancement for Filipino professionals.

Findings and Discussion

Implementation of ETEEAP

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) is the primary agency responsible for overseeing the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP). CHED accredits selected higher education institutions (HEIs) to implement the program, ensuring that institutions adhere to quality standards and assessment guidelines

(CHED, n.d.). The initiative primarily caters to Filipino citizens who have accumulated at least five years of work experience relevant to their desired degree program. This process enables professionals to earn a degree through a structured equivalency assessment, recognizing their experiential learning, skills, and competencies (Courses.com.ph, n.d.).

Applicants undergo a rigorous evaluation process that includes competency-based assessments, in-depth interviews, and portfolio reviews. According to Papa (2019), these assessments serve as the foundation for determining whether an individual's professional experience aligns with academic requirements. To maintain program integrity, CHED mandates that only accredited HEIs can conduct evaluations, ensuring that all assessments adhere to national educational standards. The equivalency process varies across institutions, with some HEIs integrating written exams, practical demonstrations, and case study analyses to gauge applicants' proficiency levels (Saberón-Abalayan, 2018).

ETEEAP aligns with the broader goals of the Philippine education system in promoting inclusive and flexible learning pathways. The Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) framework, which also encompasses programs such as the Modified Off-School Approach (MOSA), has demonstrated effectiveness in expanding educational access to marginalized learners (Rivera, Mission, & Serida, 2019). DepEd's efforts to widen access to quality education through ADM initiatives highlight the growing acceptance of non-traditional learning methods (BusinessMirror, 2017). While ADM programs primarily target secondary education, ETEEAP extends these principles to higher education by allowing working professionals to gain formal academic recognition for their expertise (Rival, n.d.).

Despite its benefits, the implementation of ETEEAP faces notable challenges. Lucero (2020) points out that accessibility remains a key concern, as only a limited number of HEIs are accredited to offer the program. This geographic and institutional limitation prevents some qualified individuals from participating. Furthermore, industry recognition of ETEEAP degrees varies, with some employers and international institutions questioning the comparability of equivalency-based qualifications to traditional degree programs (Saberón-Abalayan, 2018). Addressing these concerns requires standardizing assessment methodologies and enhancing public awareness about the program's credibility.

Its implementation and expanding institutional participation, ETEEAP can serve as a vital mechanism for lifelong learning and career advancement, ultimately contributing to the country's educational and economic development.

Advantageous Side of ETEEAP

The Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) offers significant advantages for professionals seeking higher education credentials without disrupting their careers. This program, backed by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), recognizes prior learning and work experiences, enabling individuals to earn degrees through alternative pathways (CHED, 2017). pathways, and recognition of prior learning.

One of the primary benefits of ETEEAP is its potential to enhance career opportunities. Many professionals who have completed the program report increased employability, higher salaries, and career promotions (Papa, 2019). The program aligns with global perspectives on adult education, which emphasize the role of higher learning in workforce development and economic growth (Abdi & Kapoor, 2009). Studies have also shown that ETEEAP graduates contribute to industry competitiveness, as they bring both academic knowledge and extensive practical experience to their professions (Asian Development Bank, 2022). Furthermore, ETEEAP supports gender inclusivity by enabling both men and women to achieve career success through equitable educational opportunities (Abele, 2014).

ETEEAP provides a non-traditional route to earning a degree, making it highly accessible for working individuals. Unlike conventional college programs, ETEEAP utilizes online and modular learning approaches, allowing students to balance academic and professional responsibilities effectively (BusinessMirror, 2017). The program is particularly beneficial for adult learners who may face challenges in attending regular classes due to work or family commitments. According to Rivera, Mission, and Serida (2019), alternative delivery modes in education, including ETEEAP, have widened access to quality education, particularly for non-traditional students. Additionally, research by Lucero (2020) highlights the positive impact of distance learning modular approaches on student performance, reinforcing the value of flexible education models.

A distinct feature of ETEEAP is its acknowledgment of experiential learning. This accreditation process prevents redundancy in coursework and allows for the faster completion of degrees (CHED, 2021). The recognition of prior learning fosters motivation and enhances self-efficacy among adult learners, contributing to higher retention and completion rates (Cranton & Taylor, 2013). According to Dilla and Ibarra (2022), prior learning assessment within ETEEAP has significant implications for tertiary education policy, particularly in recognizing competencies gained through work experience. Moreover, Knowles (1984) emphasizes the importance of andragogy in adult education, where learners benefit from self-directed and experience-based learning, principles that align well with ETEEAP.

ETEEAP serves as a transformative model for higher education, offering career mobility, flexibility, and academic recognition to adult learners. By integrating work experience into formal education, ETEEAP aligns with lifelong learning initiatives, ultimately fostering professional growth and societal development (Jarvis, 2009). With its emphasis on accessibility and recognition, ETEEAP continues to empower individuals in achieving their academic and career aspirations.

Challenges in ETEEAP Implementation

The Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) is a groundbreaking initiative in the Philippines designed to provide non-traditional students and working professionals with opportunities to earn a degree based on their prior learning and work experience. Despite its promising benefits, several challenges hinder the full-scale implementation and acceptance of ETEEAP. These challenges include recognition issues, accessibility constraints, and quality assurance concerns. Addressing these barriers is crucial to strengthening the credibility and effectiveness of the program.

One of the main challenges faced by ETEEAP graduates is the issue of degree recognition. While many local employers accept ETEEAP degrees, some international companies and institutions remain skeptical about their credibility. A survey conducted among industry leaders revealed that although ETEEAP graduates possess significant work experience, some employers prefer traditional degree holders due to standardized curricula (CHED, 2017). The absence of a globally recognized framework for competency-based education further exacerbates this issue, making it difficult for graduates to compete in an increasingly globalized labor market (Abele, 2014). The Asian Development Bank (2022) also highlights the necessity of ensuring that alternative education programs meet international accreditation standards to enhance employability.

Despite these concerns, alternative learning pathways have been recognized as effective strategies for promoting lifelong learning. Abdi and Kapoor (2009) emphasize that adult education programs must be aligned with industry needs to be widely accepted. Similarly, Knowles (1975) advocates for andragogy, which emphasizes adult learners' unique needs and experiences. To improve recognition, policymakers should strengthen partnerships between educational institutions, industries, and accreditation bodies (Dilla & Ibarra, 2022).

Another significant barrier to the widespread implementation of ETEEAP is its limited accessibility. The number of accredited higher education institutions (HEIs) offering ETEEAP is relatively small, restricting access for eligible individuals, particularly those in rural areas (Courses.com.ph, 2023). La Consolacion College Bacolod (2023) reported that a considerable percentage of potential candidates are unable to enroll in ETEEAP due to geographic and financial constraints.

Alternative education delivery modes have been explored to enhance accessibility. The Commission on Higher Education (2022) has expanded online and modular learning approaches to support distance education. Lucero (2020) notes that alternative delivery modes (ADM) have improved education accessibility in remote regions, similar to how ETEEAP can bridge the gap for working professionals. Furthermore, BusinessMirror (2017) reports that DepEd has been actively widening access to alternative education programs to reach marginalized learners.

To enhance ETEEAP's accessibility, it is imperative to increase the number of HEIs accredited to offer the program, particularly in underserved areas. Government support in the form of subsidies, scholarships, and flexible payment plans can further encourage participation (Gutierrez, 2019). Expanding partnerships with private institutions and industries to provide sponsorships for working professionals seeking degree completion through ETEEAP could also be beneficial.

Ensuring the consistency and quality of assessments across different institutions remains a challenge in ETEEAP implementation. Since competency-based education relies on evaluating prior learning and work experience, variations in assessment methodologies pose difficulties in standardizing equivalency measures (Manuel, 2019). Some institutions may have more rigorous evaluation processes than others, raising concerns about fairness and uniformity.

To address this issue, the Commission on Higher Education (2021) introduced enhanced policies and guidelines for ETEEAP implementation, emphasizing the need for standardized assessment criteria. However, disparities in faculty training and institutional resources still affect the consistency of evaluations (Cranton, 2006). The importance of faculty expertise in competency-based assessment is echoed by Knowles et al. (2014), who stress the role of educators in facilitating effective adult learning experiences.

Cranton and Taylor (2013) argue that transformative learning theories should guide assessment strategies in adult education programs like ETEEAP. Implementing stricter accreditation guidelines, regular audits, and faculty training programs can help ensure consistency in evaluation and learning outcomes. Additionally, benchmarking against international standards can enhance the credibility of ETEEAP and make it more competitive globally (Jarvis, 2009).

Conclusion

The Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) plays a crucial role in democratizing higher education by offering an alternative pathway for individuals to obtain a degree based on their work experience, skills, and prior learning. This program provides a vital opportunity for working professionals, self-taught individuals, and those who were unable to complete formal education to earn academic credentials without following the traditional educational route. By recognizing experiential learning, ETEEAP promotes lifelong learning and professional growth, ultimately contributing to national development.

However, despite its benefits, several challenges hinder its full potential. One significant issue is the limited awareness and acceptance of ETEEAP credentials among employers. Some companies remain hesitant to acknowledge degrees earned through this program, questioning their equivalency to traditional degrees. Additionally, the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) accredited to offer ETEEAP remains limited, restricting accessibility for many aspiring learners. This limitation is particularly pronounced in rural areas where higher education opportunities are already scarce. Moreover, inconsistencies in assessment and accreditation criteria among institutions pose a challenge to maintaining the credibility and uniformity of the program.

To address these concerns, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) must take proactive steps. Public awareness campaigns should be strengthened to enhance recognition and acceptance of ETEEAP graduates in the job market. Expanding the number of accredited HEIs will improve accessibility and inclusivity, ensuring that more Filipinos can benefit from the program. Additionally, standardizing assessment and accreditation procedures across institutions will enhance the credibility and consistency of ETEEAP, increasing its value in both academic and professional settings.

Future research should explore the long-term career trajectories of ETEEAP graduates through longitudinal studies, assessing their employability, professional advancements, and contributions to various industries. By continuously refining its implementation and addressing these challenges, ETEEAP can further empower Filipinos to achieve higher education and career success, bridging the gap between formal education and real-world expertise. Strengthening this program will not only benefit individuals but also contribute to a more skilled and competitive workforce, ultimately fostering national progress.

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