



ETULay! Bridging the Learners' Gap on Blended Learning through Nationwide Volunteer Online Tutoring Initiative

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Abstract: From March 2020 up to the present (February 2022), elementary and high schools in the Philippines have not resumed their full classroom capacity. The majority of learners are still learning from home without assurance of when they are going back to the schools. In order to augment the department's blended program, the EdTech Unit of Information Communication Technology Services (ICTS) of the Department of Education (DepEd Philippines) has launched an online tutoring program using Facebook and YouTube to reach a larger number of learners all over the country. The program was conceived in January 2021 and has served more than two million learners in the Philippines. Using qualitative content analysis from the responses of the participants, this paper aimed at knowing the experiences of parents, this paper presents the experiences of participants in the program during the first year of its implementation. Upon the first year of its implementation, the participants were generally enthralled and positive for the initiative as it helped them ease with explaining some context that parents may not have the grasp of the information. Parents also were given springboard to talk about topics which are rather difficult to discuss with their children. Participants also highlighted that ETULay served its purpose well but hoped to be more inclusive and graphics-enhanced in the next years to come.

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Introduction

The pandemic has brought a huge impact on the learning setup of learners all over the world. With its rapid spread, students, especially young learners, were left with little to no training on doing blended or fully online learning (Núñez & Cuisia-Villanueva, 2020). The pandemic has intensified the need for technology and internet connectivity because it's only the main source with which educators can communicate and deliver lessons to them (Ribeiro et. al. 2021).

According to UNICEF (2021), at least 200 million school children live in countries that remain unprepared for remote or online learning. Having been too dependent on their teachers back in the classroom they are left alone to learn, unsure of full support from their parents at home (Rotas & Capahay, 2020). Parents are our pillars of learning. Undoubtedly, they are the first teachers we ever had in our lives. Their role in our learning cannot be discounted in the system of education (Amirudin et.al., 2021). However, it is not always a guarantee that parents or guardians will support their kids as they also have other responsibilities at home and other kids to take care of.

In the research conducted by Quirino State University, Philippines (Samoy et. al. 2021) about the parents' role in tutoring during the pandemic homeschooling, the research

found out that though parents are positive in assuming additional responsibilities, they still encounter roadblocks in doing so because they are not used to that setup and the fact that they are not trained for it. In the study, the authors mentioned that tutoring has become their family bonding and at the same time learning situation for parents who only achieve little to no education.

Thus, in order to aid parents at home in teaching their kids, the DepEd's (Department of Education) Educational Technology Unit (ETU) in central office in Manila has developed a program to augment parents' capacity in tutoring their kids at this challenging time (Heller & Fantuzzo, 2019). Through the initiative of people in the education system and their passion to uplift learning, they crafted a tutoring and remedial program where teachers all over the archipelago can volunteer to teach and explain lessons.

According to Lavy and Schlosser (2005), remedial classes provide those learners who have fallen behind a way to catch up in standards set by the school. It also gives opportunities to those students to master skills they acquired in regular classes (Drew, 2019). It is believed that remedial classes improve the overall proficiency of learners in the language in all aspects of reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Eur, 2013). And in order to have consistency with the lessons being delivered, ETULay is anchored on DepEd's MELC or Most Essential Learning Competencies. The MELC list serves as the primary reference of all schools under the DepEd's umbrella and that is determined to cope with the local context and to adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The main purpose of this article is to inform global readers about the initiative the selected people do in order to augment the deficiency of online teaching-and-learning avenues. The word is coined from ETU which stands for Educational Technology Unit of Department of Education (DepEd) and "tulay" is the Filipino word for bridge. According to the DepEd secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones, the ETULay is one of the programs that would upgrade the creative delivery of learning through the efficient use of available technology. The program is streamed through StreamYard and broadcast on Youtube and Facebook. It is headed by ICTS-EdTech Unit Head Mark Anthony Sy at the start of 2021, the initiative's goals are: (1) to empower and give the parents full confidence in assisting their children, (2) help learners to fully understand the lesson, and (3) help teachers in explaining the lesson.



Figure 1. ETULay's Official Facebook Landing Page

As education in the past two years has been happening at home, this program augments parents and guardians with the knowledge and skills they need to help them tutor their children in the absence of teachers. This gives them confidence about the content that

they are reading from the module delivered to them. In addition, learners are able to interact directly with teachers or tutors during the live sessions if they have questions that their guardians or parents could not answer. However, if they are unable to participate in live programming they can still watch and view lessons at their own time from YouTube or the Facebook Page. Lastly, since not all teachers can meet their students all the time, the tutors help them explain the lesson since the lessons are centralized and the recordings are applicable to the whole country. It saves time for local teachers in recording or localizing their lessons.

Because the program is not part of the regular curriculum structure and delivery, it is not compulsory or does not have any credit or requirements for learners to attend. The program is modeled and patterned to the instructional delivery program of Region IV-A (CALABARZON)'s *Pivot 4A CuBE* program. Pivot 4A CuBE is an expanded learning program by Region IV-A to deliver lessons regularly through local television and cable providers. The channel is named Pivot IV-A, available in Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon provinces (deped.gov.ph).

Meanwhile, ETULay's main purpose is to assist learners in the lessons and it serves as remedial sessions on reading and Mathematics. The program also gives sessions that focus on Storytelling, Wellness, Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), English, Filipino, Mathematics, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao or civics (EsP), Research, and Health for a comprehensive learning experience for all Filipinos (deped.gov.ph). More on that, the program also caters remedial classes for Special Education (SPED) learners and ALS learners. ALS or Alternative Learning System in the Philippines is a system to which out-of-school youths or adults who wish to get a school education can opt to this program without having to join the regular curriculum structure of the Department of Education. ETULay also applicable to these set of learners who want to master their academic skills.



Figure 2. A screengrab of One of the Tutoring Sessions of the ETULay Program

With different lessons focusing on all year levels (K-12) and Special Education (SPED), including ALS each session is volunteered by public school teachers who are selected to deliver the session. These teachers come from different parts of the country. Each volunteer-teacher is given a timeslot to conduct the session and they prepare their session according to the topic and the year level they are on. And after a year since its inauguration, ETULay has benefitted more than two million learners all over the country and is continuously increasing.



Research Method

The research employed qualitative content analysis in processing the non-verbal data gathered through Google Forms. During content analysis researchers quantify and analyse the presence, meanings, and relationships of words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the data (Bengtsson, 2016). The data gathered from the survey was then reviewed in accordance to their relevance on the research topic. The codes that are prevalent among the respondents are the benefits the program gives to: (1) parents or guardians, and (2) to the learners. The codes then are presented through narratives order to give legitimacy and to validate others who have the same feelings or opinion on the program.

Thus, the paper presents a review and feedback of parents or guards after a year of ETULay's implementation. Each session, live participants were sent a Google Forms link to provide their feedback about their experience after the tutorial - hence it is qualitative. The qualitative narrative is a research design that focuses context of the participants' personal experiences (Butina, 2015). The data then is processed and summarized through a narrative presentation in the discussions.

The participants of the survey were students and parents/guardians who are active on the internet and are able to attend live sessions of ETULay. Participants have access to the required technical setup, like smartphone, tablet, or computer laptop/desktop. In the link, the participants were only asked two (research) questions: It is suggested that the authors avoid organizing the article content into the smaller parts than second subheading in this section. However, in case of unavoidable factors, the writing style must follow the "Results and Discussion" section. (1) What is your experience about the lesson or program as a whole? and (2) What can you suggest to improve the implementation of the program?.

Results and Discussion

The following are the codes that are prevalent on the responses among the participants of the survey. The data presented are written in narratives translated from Filipino to English.

Experiences of ETULay Participants

First the participants were thankful for the dedication of the teachers to spend their time in preparing and presentation on the lessons related topics at school. One parent said:

"The program helped me and my kid learn while we were watching. Even if the lessons are simple, it allows my child to see a real teacher on the screen with all the colors and audio."

Many parents commended the experience because they learned to navigate video conferencing programs which they thought they would never. One of them mentioned:

"At first, I was confused on how to navigate the Zoom. My kid is only in second grade, setting up could be tedious and thankfully they have video tutorials on how to navigate in the program. ETULay improved my digital skills even if I don't use them regularly as a stay-at-home mom."

With those higher grade levels (10-12 grades), their parents are thankful that the tutors were able to explain rather complicated topics such as research, pre-calculus, Java, and many more. One student mentioned:

"ETULay helped me understand the concept of research. In our module (printed), I can hardly understand clearly because I haven't got someone to ask a question. During our tutoring session, I was able to ask and clarify concepts. The tutor was clearly knowledgeable about the subject matter."



As parents assume the majority of responsibilities in the teaching-learning process (Stelmach, 2021), they are bombarded with information that they thought would be easier for them to explain to their kids. A parent typed in the form:

“I have four kids enrolled in the public school in Cebu City. So, I have to deal with four different levels of studies. These are really burdensome to me if one of my kids needed help and I could not do it. I am glad that ETULay supplements their lessons and tutors are patients especially during Mathematics and English classes. The recorded lessons on ETULay also keep me equipped to face my kids during our module activities.”

The program also civics or Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao gives an avenue to the learners to reflect about their lives. Even parents are amazed. One parent from San Carlos City, Pangasinan mentioned:

“The lesson integrated real-life lessons which are sometimes hard to talk about with my own kids. The session provided a bridge for us to talk about real-life lessons that kids of this generation really need.”

As the aim of ETULay is to augment and remedial sessions for reading and mathematics, parents have realized that these tutorials with Filipino teachers are way better than tutorials made by foreign nationals because they use the mother tongue (Kayao lu, 2012). One guardian narrates:

“The tutorial is personalized and easier to understand because the tutor speaks our language. It allows my kid who has difficulty understanding the lesson in English. Even though I enjoyed the session, it was fun! The tutor’s personality is like a ray of sunshine. He seemed to know what he was doing and he came prepared.”

Because the program is just on its first maiden year, lessons seemed easier to achieve more audience however, more parents and students suggested introduce lessons that are at the higher level of difficulty.

“We appreciate the program but some learners who have mastered the skills would want more advance topics. My kid who is in Special Science class would be happy to join for advance levels of classes on ETULay.”

Because the program is just in its first year, it has also come with some setbacks which can be totally improved as time goes on. Though generally negative feedbacks were more on technicalities like audio, video, fluctuating internet connection, or improving graphics of presentations were present in most comments. Aside from technical issues comments, the participants also mentioned to introduce more difficult topics on the program to challenge advance learners as they got bored of the easier topics usually presented in the ETULay.

Findings

Based on the data and feedback gathered from the participants, the implementation of ETULay was overall successful and they could not ask for more but to improve the quality of presentation in terms of audio quality, graphics, and resolution (Long, Sinclair, Fraser, Larson, & Harrell, 2021) to have a better interface in future episodes of the program. They are satisfied with the delivery and they are aware that these tutorials sessions are not a replacement to the actual lessons but rather an augmentation to the learning they get from



their respective institutions. These help them learn better and faster with animations graphics and sounds (Khan & Vlacic, 2006).

The participants highly suggest going on in this program regardless of when they go back to the regular four walls of the classrooms. The majority of participants thought that the tutorials as useful, accessible, well designed and helpful in completing assignments (Bolliger & Supanakorn, 2011). Parents also are delighted with this initiative because instead of their kids spending a lot of time in non-academic activities on their devices such as social media or mobile games, ETULay diverted their attention to improving their academic skills even at home. Parents' participation in students' learning also enhanced their relationships with their kids during the pandemic (Sari & Maningtyas, 2020). It allowed parents to have springboard of talking about topics that are rather difficult to discuss with their own children (Parczewska, 2021).

As people become more connected to the internet, the more content can be accessed ETULay shall continue to produce more content to ride the wave with other creators. This will enable the program reach more audience in the country. The Department of Education is supportive of this initiative and hopes that teachers will continue to dedicate a part of their time to providing and improving the nation's generation of learners.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that, regardless of the heightened and endless mutation of the virus, people continue to adapt to the situation and education sector does allow its learners to be left behind by doing its best to cater to those who are in need. As the program continue to thrive in this pandemic, ETULay planners and researchers may, in the future, include advanced lessons for fast learners so they could also improve their acquired skills. Participants (volunteer teachers, parents, and learners) are optimistic for improvement in the program as it continues to stream and serve. Current remedial sessions are good for catching up to those who have fallen behind and mastery to the ones who understand more the lessons.

Recommendation

For future researchers, this study is a valid presentation of participants' experiences in the program. Hence, these can be used as foundations for future in-depth scientific undertaking if intended to implement a more complex program for basic or higher education, or even technical education.

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