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GETTING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH AND ADULTS  
TO FINISH HIGH SCHOOL THROUGH AN  
ICT-BASED LEARNING SYSTEM:  
A THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR ON  
ESKWELA IN ROCES AVENUE CENTER, QUEZON  
CITY, PHILIPPINES

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A case study was conducted in November 2012 among 16 enrollees of the eSkwela Center at Roces Avenue, Quezon City, one of the four pilot e-learning centers established in 2006 in the Philippines. The study aimed to describe the characteristics of the eSkwela program and find out the learners' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in relation to their enrolment and studying at eSkwela. The "theory of planned behavior" by Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein (1985) was used as framework in the data gathering among the enrollees and key informant interviews of facilitators and administrators of the eSkwela program.

The eSkwela elicited a positive attitude among learners. The positive attitude was reinforced by their perception that their significant others believed that eSkwela would help them finish high school and have a better life. Further, they felt confident that they could finish because they had control over facilitating factors such as use of technology, lessons, pacing, cost, time, language, feedback, and teachers. Hence, they have enrolled in the program and many of them said they were willing to study again using the

Alternative Learning System (ALS) mode. Further, they have not only shared the information on eSkwela, but they have also proactively convinced others to enroll in the program. Hence, they themselves have become 'testimonials' to the eSkwela program.

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**KEYWORDS:** e-learning, ICT4E, alternative learning system, e-education, youth and adult learning, interactive e-learning materials, blended and collaborative modes of instruction, performance-based assessment in a problem, eGovernment fund

## INTRODUCTION

COUNTRIES WITH HIGHER rates of literacy and education are enjoying much progress and privileges in all spheres of life. There is a high correlation between education and economic growth. Hence, education has been given much importance as a key factor in achieving development (Allana, 1988). However, providing basic formal education, especially in developing countries like the Philippines, poses problems such as expensive tuition fees, inaccessible learning materials, and inaccessible schools to the marginalized and economically challenged families.

With the country's fast increasing population, not everyone is able to enter and finish at least primary education. Based on the Philippines in Figures 2010 by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in 2000, the household population consisting of 5 years old and over was approximately 66.6 M. Only 27.9 M graduated from elementary; of these, 18.9 M graduated from high school and only 6.6 M completed college degrees. A total of 3.9 M indicated not completing any grade.

As for the reasons for not attending school, the 2003 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMs) cited by Tan's (2008) study showed that 30.5% are employed or looking for work; 19.9% found the cost of education too high; 11.8% had to do housekeeping; and others cited that the nearest school was far, there was no school around their area, they had no transport going to the school, or they could not cope with school work.

Given this situation, alternative modes of education such as e-learning are being explored and adapted by various sectors of society. E-learning is a generic term for all technologically

supported learning using an array of teaching and learning tools as defined by the technical committee of reviewers in Open Learning and Distance Education of the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED-OLDE). These learning tools include phone bridging, audio and video tapes, video teleconferencing, satellite broadcasting, and the more recognized forms of web-based training or computer-aided instruction, also commonly referred to as online courses (cited by Librero, 2007).

In response to all the above mentioned problems of high school education, the Bureau of Alternative Learning System of the Department of Education (DepEd-BALS) was mandated by virtue of Executive Order No. 356 (September 14, 2004) to include an "alternative learning system for out-of-school youth and adult learners" (Section 2 of PA 9155, The Governance of Basic Education Act of 2011). This alternative system provides learners a venue to acquire a high school diploma through the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Program (UNESCO, 2009).

UNESCO (2009) comprehensively describes the alternative learning system—eSkwela—that was implemented in 2006. eSkwela was proposed as the flagship project of the Commission on Information and Communications Technology (CICT) in collaboration with DepEd-BALS. The project had an initial grant from the APEC Education Foundation (AEF), but it now runs with continuing support from the eGovernment Fund of the Philippines.

With the use of relevant interactive e-learning materials, blended and collaborative modes of instruction, and performance-based assessment in a problem- or project-based learning environment, eSkwela seeks to bridge the ever-increasing digital gap and social chasms between those who are educated and those who are not (eSkwela Terminal Report, 2011). It aims to broaden access to ICT-enabled learning opportunities through a non-formal community-based e-Learning program for Out-of-school Youths and Adults (OSYA) and other members of the marginalized sectors. In other words, it makes use of ICT in providing educational opportunities for OSYA who were not able to finish their basic education.

Using appropriate and relevant ICT for Education (ICT4E) resources, the DepEd hopes to broaden access to quality education while making learning interactive, more engaging, and more fun for the learners. Through eSkwela, it aims to bridge the widening

gap between those who are educated and those who are not. Further, DepEd aims for a 100 percent increase in the number of A&E test passers among the learners in the implementation areas for eSkwela.

CICT acknowledges that ICT is effective in educating OSYA and is considered as one of the most powerful uses of technology for national development. As explained by Corazon C. Rubio, Assistant Schools Division Superintendent and ALS in-charge, Quezon City, "eSkwela helps the OSYA learn how to use computers and the Internet as tools of survival in the 21st Century.... [It] uses technology and multi-sensory approaches, which allows the learners to use their high order thinking skills in studying."

The Medium-Term Development Plan of the Philippines (MTPDP) 2004-2010, the National Framework Plan for ICTs in Basic Education (2005-2010), and the 2002 Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) advocate the use of ICT as "a powerful enabler of capacity development ... targeted towards specific development goals like ensuring basic education for all and lifelong learning, among others." Furthermore, the MTPDP "provides for the wider use of computers to support teaching-learning processes, the promotion of e-learning and information literacy, and the establishment of e-learning competency centers" (UNESCO, 2009).

eSkwela's instructional model is a blended type of learner-centered instruction, consisting of three elements: [1] computer-aided learning via interactive e-learning modules and use of a customized Learning Management System; [2] teacher-facilitated instruction as aligned with the pace and need of each learner; and [3] collaborative group activities and projects. Hence, the learners undergo a self-paced and diverse approach to learning. They are guided by trained learning facilitators who use the learner-centered ICT-supported module guides such as localized and interactive e-learning modules, project based-activities, and different online educational tools and resources. This makes learning fun and enjoyable, but at the same time, relevant and valuable to the learners. If the learners decide to take the A&E Test and they passed, they would receive Certificates equivalent to elementary or high school diplomas.

The initial four pilot sites were located in the cities of major islands of the Philippines, namely in Quezon City (where this study was done); and in San Jose Del Monte City, Bulacan, both in Luzon; in Cebu City in the Visayas; and in Cagayan de Oro

City in Mindanao. In each of the pilot sites, the infrastructure deployed included 21 computers, server, LCD projector, 3-in-1 printer, two A/C units, digital camera, tables and chairs, and relevant peripherals. There were also funds for site renovation, relevant educator's training, e-learning modules, a customized Learning Management System (LMS), project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities, and free Internet connection for one year (wireless) (UNESCO, 2009).

From a pilot run of four sites in 2006-2007, a total of 95-CICT eSkwela Centers were operational by the end of June 2011, or the end of the project's life. It has served an estimated 6,309 diverse learners since 2007, indicating its viability as a learning system. Several models are now being used such as ALS Office-based, school-based, barangay-based, city hall-based, mobile (laptop, container van), and Internet café-based depending on the 'host' community (HCDG-CICT, 2011).

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The eSkwela program is designed with an approach in learning that is self-paced, project-based, and learner-centered and devises the life skills approach. It uses an ICT-enabled, inquiry-based, interdisciplinary, and thematic approach to teaching and learning. It is also multi-stakeholder in approach wherein the communities, local governments, DepEd divisions, non-government, and civic groups are expected to provide support and participate in the implementation, maintenance, and sustenance of the program.

The eSkwela centers range from community e-centers, publicly-owned Internet cafes, centers on top of public markets, and even inside container vans. Learners can enroll anytime of the year provided that they meet the qualifications and requirements of the program. The program is designed specifically for each individual, hence both the teacher and the learner discuss what to include in the program. Once the learner is initially admitted, he or she will take the Functional Literacy Test (FLT) which provides a tool for the teacher to assess the learners' strengths and weaknesses. After the FLT, the learner then fills up the Individual Learning Agreement form, which states the learners' competencies, chosen modules, and time period of the program. Once the modules are in place, learners study their module on their own assigned

computer at the center at their own comfortable pacing. Learners must finish the modules within 10 months.

E-learning has been used by other countries for two decades now, but it has only been pursued in earnest in the Philippines since the early 2000s. Hence, most studies have been done in countries abroad and mostly for higher education. Studies from different countries (UNICEF, 2009; UNESCO, 2009) have shown that e-learning is an effective form of education especially for out-of-school youth and adults (OSYA).

A few studies have also been conducted on e-learning as an open learning system, particularly in basic education for the OSYA in the Philippines. Cuyno (2011) found that learners had a positive attitude towards e-learning in terms of ease of use and usefulness. This could have been influenced by their sufficient personal computer exposure prior to eSkwela. Ramos, et al. (2007) documented a study entitled "ICT-Enabled Distance Education in Community Development in the Philippines," done from 2004 to 2006 by the non-profit organization Molave Development Foundation, Inc. to find out "the effectiveness of using digital and electronic media for effecting changes in the knowledge, attitude, and practices of Filipino communities in relation to hygiene and sanitation." Aside from knowledge improvement, the community members who were part of the study found that the learning process through the ICT-enabled modules was enjoyable and involving. Javier (2009) also showed the positive perception of the Generation Youth (GenYo) e-Learning Management Program on teacher-learner communication in the First Asia Institute of Technology and Humanities.

Other studies focused on alternative learning using ICT-mediated modalities but for farmers such as the Farmers' Mobile Internet Bus (MIB) (Manlangit, 2010) and the Farmers' Information and Technology Services Information System (FITS) (Garcia, 2012). De Castro (2006) also found the advantages as well as challenges of the use of e-forum as a learning tool among stakeholders in community-based natural resources management in some Southeast Asia countries.

However, a local study has yet to comprehensively evaluate the eSkwela model for OSYA in the Philippines after seven years of implementation and just over a year after the project was eventually turned over to the DepEd-BALS as a regular program. Hence, this study aimed to fill in these gaps by determining the

perception and attitude of the learners towards the eSkwela using the theory of planned behavior as context.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to analyze the learners' overall perception of the eSkwela program as an alternative open learning system of choice.

Specifically, it aimed to:

1. determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the current eSkwela learners in Quezon City, a pilot eSkwela center;
2. discuss the learners' attitudes towards education and e-learning;
3. discuss the learners' perceived subjective norms regarding studying in eSkwela;
4. discuss the learners' perceived behavioral control in studying at eSkwela; and
5. analyze the learners' intention and actual behavior in studying at eSkwela.

## THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE STUDY

The theory of planned behavior proposed by Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein in 1985 evolved from their theory of reasoned action proposed in 1975. This original theory of reasoned action was, in turn, grounded on various theories of attitude such as learning theories, expectancy-value theories, consistency theories, and attribution theory. According to the theory of reasoned action, if people evaluate the suggested behavior as positive (attitude), and if they think their significant others (*e.g.*, loved ones, relatives) want them to perform the behavior (subjective norm), this results in a higher intention (motivation), and they are more likely to do so.

Ajzen introduced the Theory of Planned Behavior by adding a new component, that is, "perceived behavioral control." This is because some studies in the past have shown that behavioral

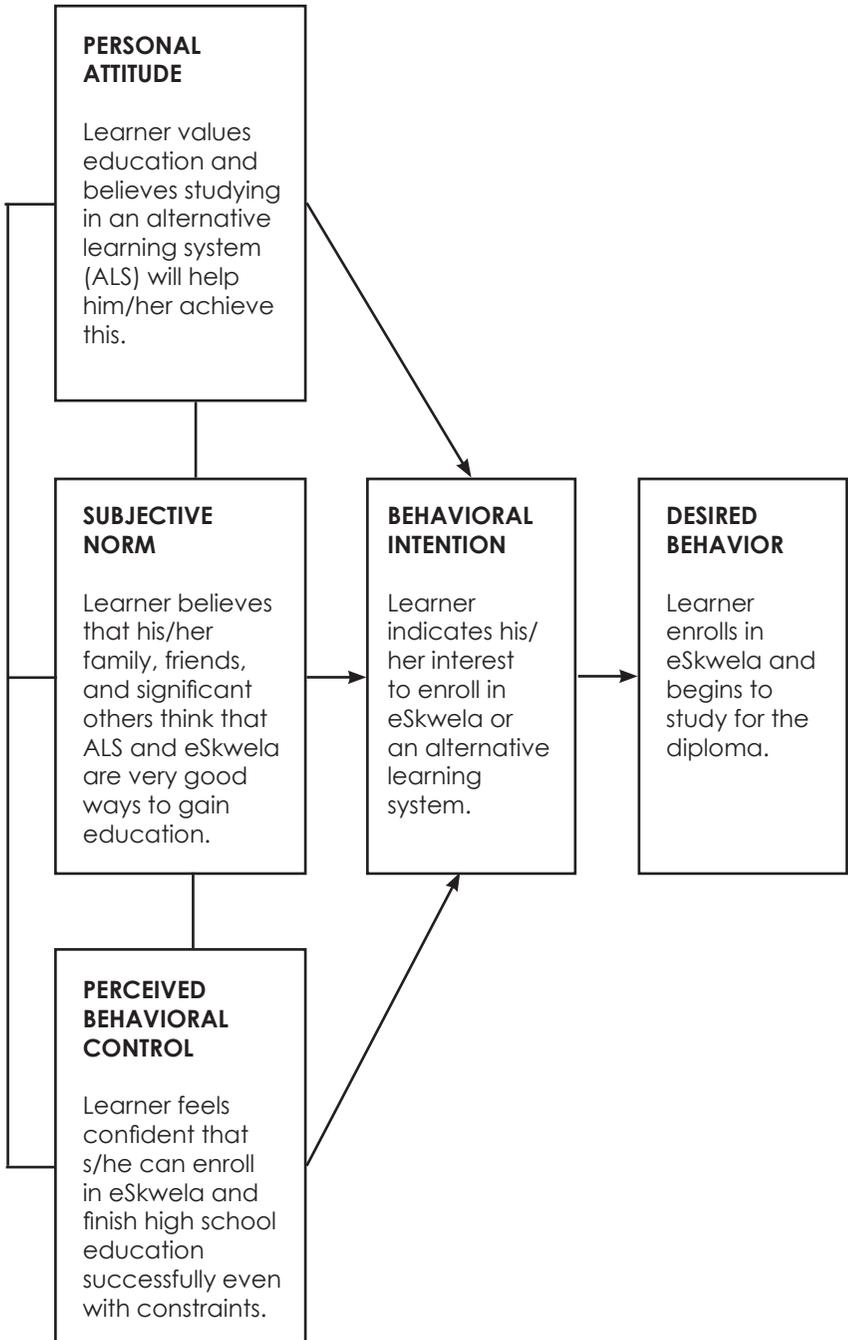


Figure 1. **Theoretical framework of the study**

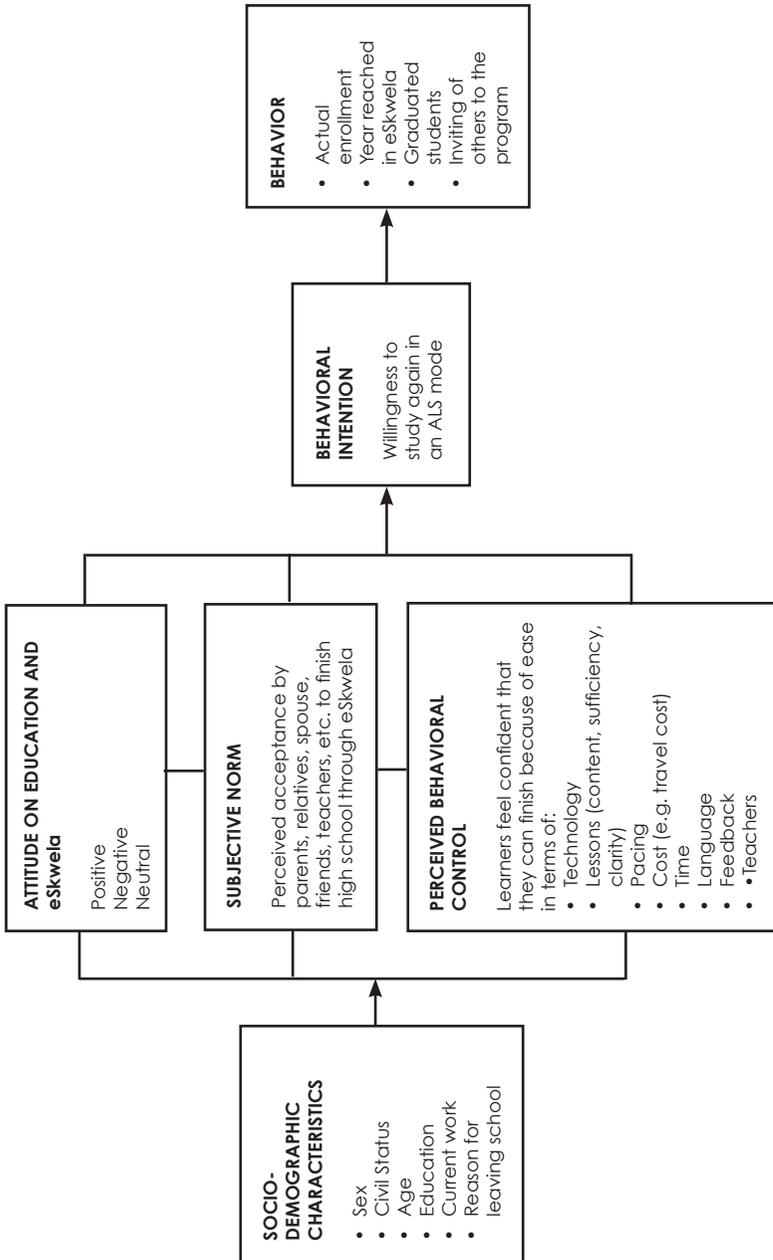


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

intention does not always lead to actual behavior because of circumstantial limitations. Behavioral intention cannot be the exclusive determinant of behavior where an individual's control over the behavior is incomplete. Hence, by adding behavioral control, Ajzen (1991) extended the theory of reasoned action to cover non-volitional behaviors for predicting behavioral intention and actual behavior. A high correlation of attitudes and subjective norms to behavioral intention, and subsequently to behavior, has been confirmed in many studies (Ajzen, 1991).

This study adopts the premises of the Theory of Planned Behavior. It acknowledges the joint influence of attitudes, norms, and perceived control in affecting behavioral intention as a motivating force in the behavioral process (Figure 1). The researcher posits that learners who have positive attitudes towards performing a particular behavior (learning in eSkwela), and who believe that "significant others" are in favor of or support the desired action, will more likely attempt a particular behavior (enroll and study in eSkwela).

The conceptual framework (Figure 2) provides the specific variables for each component of the theoretical framework. Considered independent variables were attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, while the dependent variables were behavioral intention and desired behavior.

Attitude refers to an individual's positive or negative evaluation of the particular behavior. This included the learners' evaluation of various aspects related to the eSkwela such as education in general, distance education or alternative learning, use of ICT in education, concept of eSkwela, life after eSkwela (job, future etc.), and benefits from eSkwela (productivity, self-esteem etc.). Subjective norm refers to an individual's perception about the particular behavior, which is influenced by the judgment of significant others. It was the perceived acceptance by parents, relatives, spouse, friends, teachers, and others that presumably encourage the learners to finish high school by enrolling in eSkwela. On the other hand, perceived behavioral control refers to the learner's perceived ease or difficulty of performing the particular behavior. The learners would feel confident that they could finish high school in the eSkwela because of the technology, lessons (content, sufficiency, and clarity), pacing, cost, time, language, feedback, and teachers in eSkwela. The socio-demographic profile of the learners were added as these influence to some extent the learners' attitude,

perceived subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control.

Behavioral intention refers to an individual's readiness to perform a given behavior or the willingness to study again in an alternative learning system mode. Finally, behavior refers to an individual's observable response in a given situation with respect to a given target. This included actual enrolment in the eSkwela, year reached in eSkwela, and the learners' actual invitation to others to enroll in the program.

## METHODOLOGY

### Design of the Study

The research was a case study of 16 selected eSkwela enrollees in Quezon City. A case study is "an analysis of an individual unit... It is often an in-depth examination of a single event or case over a period of time and provides systematic way of regarding events and gathering data, analyzing the information, and providing the results" (Yin, 1994).

### Locale and Time of Study

The research was conducted in the eSkwela branch in Roces Avenue, Quezon City in November 2012. Aside from being one of the pilot centers and the pioneering center of eSkwela in Quezon City, the Roces branch also has one of the highest number of enrollees in its eSkwela project since it started, according to Melissa Albino, Education Program Specialist at the Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS).

### Respondents and Sampling Scheme

The BALS was not able to provide a concrete number of nationwide eSkwela enrollees since they were still in the process of consolidating their data. Hence, the respondents were purposively taken from the present and official list of enrollees in the eSkwela Quezon City branch as provided by the center. For this study, 16 out of the 19 current enrollees in eSkwela Roces Center took part in the study.

The criteria for choosing the respondents were as follows:

1. Must be enrolled in the eSkwela program of BALS during the duration of the study (between October to November 2012).
2. Must have been enrolled in eSkwela for at least three months.
3. Must be 15 years old or above, the age required to be admitted in the program.
4. More or less must represent spectrum of learners (e.g., male, female, married, single, mother, working, not working).

One-on-one interviews were also done with the key informants from relevant departments, administrators, and some of the tutors or guides of said program. These included the Director of DepEd BALS, Education Program, Specialist at BALS, eSkwela Laboratory managers at the Roces Avenue, Quezon City center; and learning facilitators at the eSkwela Center.

### **Research Instrument and Data Collection**

The study used a guide questionnaire for the learners, which was devised by the researchers to answer/measure the variables in the conceptual framework. The questionnaire included multiple choice items, open-ended questions, and the use of a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was first pretested on two representative learners and revised accordingly. A major revision was its translation into the native language of Filipino so that the respondents would be able to better understand the questions. Key informant interviews of administrators and teachers were done to have an in-depth understanding and evaluation of the eSkwela program. A voice recorder was used for all interviews, and the recordings were later transcribed and analyzed. Secondary data were gathered from the official brochures and brief packages on eSkwela from DepEd-BALS.

### **Data Analysis**

The results of the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. To measure attitudes, a 5-point Likert scale was used. Interviews with the key informants,

on the other hand, were transcribed and analyzed. Statistical test was not performed because of the purposive nature of sampling and the almost complete enumeration of learners.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-demographic Profile of eSkwela Learners

Out of the 16 learners, majority were female (56%), single (100%), and with an average age of 20 years. More than half (63%) of the respondents did not have any work, a quarter were house helpers, while the rest (12%) had their own business. Hence, the alternative schooling offered by eSkwela was appropriate for their schedule, budget, and needs. Their reasons for leaving the traditional school were because of financial constraints (50%) or family problems (13%).

### Learners' Attitudes Towards Studying in eSkwela

Most of the learners had a very high positive attitude towards studying in the eSkwela program and with e-learning in general. Majority of them agreed on most of the statements regarding education and eSkwela. These features were flexibility of schedule, self-paced study, supportive facilitators, and student-centered approach.

The eSkwela allowed the learners to be more flexible in finishing high school. Although originally there was no strict schedule to follow and learners were allowed to study at the center whenever they wanted to, the Roces Center adapted a weekly schedule to ensure a more efficient study habit. Each student must spend eight hours a week at the center. Most working students chose the Wednesday schedule so that they would only go to the center once a week, which makes it easier for them to ask for a leave from their employers.

The calendar year is determined by the A&E Test date, usually held in October or November every year. The A&E Test is the culminating activity of eSkwela, and to pass it is the learners' ultimate goal. The eSkwela Center issues a certificate to the learner, which proves that s/he is enrolled in the program. Once s/he passes the A&E Test, s/he may get the high school diploma, which the DepEd issues.

Almost all of them (98%) 'agreed' and 'highly agreed' that education is important, and it is a means for them to have a better life. As UNICEF (2009) pointed out: "a lack of education is a part of the definition of poverty, and thus, education is a means to reduce it." They believed that education, in whatever form or however one achieves it, is truly significant in one's life.

Majority (94%) also 'agreed' and 'highly agreed' that eSkwela is a very effective alternative for them to finish their high school education. This was not only because eSkwela is not as expensive as formal education but also because of the nature of teaching. The method of teaching is not as strict as formal education; the schedule is flexible for the learners; and it is more accessible without sacrificing the quality of the lessons.

Aside from this, Grandstaff (1974) explained that non-formal education, such as that of eSkwela, shows a strong potential for involving those who are most likely not included in the formal schools such as the poor, the isolated, the rural, the illiterate, the unemployed and the under employed whether because of limited resources such as time and cost.

Most of them (87%) likewise 'agreed' and 'highly agreed' that they would gain more self-confidence and trust in their abilities because they become independent learners, they are able to use ICT in their study, and they are able to study despite financial difficulties. Their highly positive attitude towards finishing their education through eSkwela indicates that the program can be effective and important in answering the country's problem of providing education for all.

Majority of the respondents (76%) 'agreed' and 'highly agreed' that through eSkwela, their lives and future will improve and become better. This may also stem from the testimonials of past learners based on their positive experiences during their enrollment in eSkwela as well as on their positive experience afterwards in finding a job, thus giving them an opportunity to grow and improve their current status.

Majority (75%) 'agreed' and 'highly agreed' that the use of computers for learning is highly desirable. Majority of the curriculum in eSkwela use online modules via the computer. The Roces branch has about 20 working computers. It has two laboratory managers permanently stationed at the center and three teaching facilitators who rotate their schedules with the other nearby centers.

Because of this alternative mode of education, majority (75%) believed that they would be able to get a good job afterwards, and that they will be able to improve their lives (75%). Nevertheless, some learners only wanted to learn a few skills such as computing equations, which they could use for their jobs, and not really to take the A&E test.

Majority of the respondents (69%) 'agreed' and 'highly agreed' that through eSkwela, they would be able to help the country. Apparently, the learners' first priority was to secure a good job and provide for their families after schooling.

### **Respondents' Subjective Norms Regarding Studying in eSkwela**

Strong family ties and the improvement of the quality of life for the family were strong motivations to pursue learning through eSkwela. For instance, all (100%) of the respondents perceived that it was important to their loved ones that they finish their education. Their significant others desired for them to enroll, study, and finish their education, hence they were more likely to actually accomplish the behavior. Of all the respondents, 100% perceived that their loved ones believed that education is important because it would give them a better future.

Based on the interviews, five of the respondents explained that they also wanted to finish their education to help their family. Family ties are very strong in the Filipino culture, and they see education as a way out of their current (marginalized) situation. Members of the family helping out the parents or the family as a whole is a part of the Filipino culture and plays a big part in motivating the learners to enroll and study in eSkwela. One respondent pointed out that "education is the best inheritance parents can give to their child". Another learner said that being educated is the only wealth one can be proud of.

As for their loved ones' opinions on eSkwela, half (50%) agreed that eSkwela is the best alternative to obtain an education, while six (38%) agreed that eSkwela is a good way to finish schooling. They perceived eSkwela to be an effective way of getting an education not otherwise possible through formal schooling. However, one respondent believed that his loved ones thought that the education gained in eSkwela was not enough. This may be because some parents still think that formal education is the

best method of education.

Overall, strong family ties and the improvement of the quality of life for the family were strong motivations to pursue learning through eSkwela. The more their significant others believed that education as well as eSkwela could help them achieve a better life for their families, the more convinced and influenced the learners were in actually enrolling and studying through the program. This indicates that their significant others' opinions and beliefs mattered to the respondents' decision-making and actions; hence, they should be included in any communication strategies to promote eSkwela.

### **Respondents' Perceived Behavioral Control in Studying at eSkwela**

Four variables were perceived to be facilitating factors that all the respondents (100%) had control over. These were the use of technology, the lessons, feedback from the teacher/tutor, and monitoring of the teacher/ tutor.

Most of the respondents indicated that the use of technology, specifically the use of computers and of the Internet, was very helpful in their quest for knowledge. Technology made everything easier, efficient and more convenient for students. One respondent explained that having computers at hand and at his fingertips enabled him to study his modules, hence making learning a very fulfilling experience for him.

All of the respondents believed that they had control over the lessons or modules. They found the lessons easy to understand and the texts easily readable. Aside from the general topics discussed in the modules, certain skills, methods, and approaches needed and which were highly practical and applicable in life were also taught.

All the respondents also said that constant feedback from the teachers and tutors that came from their being monitored closely facilitated their learning. The study site had two learning facilitators. The facilitators (who hold degrees in education) said that there is no grading system in the eSkwela process. They simply monitored the learners' development and improvement via the discussions and the portfolio, which the learners submitted at the end of the program. These portfolios included the quizzes that the learners answered at the end of each module. Both of the

facilitators also gave out mock exams, which included essays for those who would like to take the A&E Test.

Almost all (94%) of the respondents felt they had control over the content of the lessons or modules. This could be because in consultation with their teachers, the learners could choose which modules they will study depending on their needs or to address their academic 'inadequacies.' Hence, they had relative independence over what learning strands they were going to pursue. Related to this was their perceived control over the quantity of the lessons or modules used (88%), the clarity of the modules (81%), the language of the materials (88%), as well as the pacing (75%) of the lessons.

eSkwela is self-paced education, and each learner is given the freedom to study his/her modules at his/her own pace as long as she/he finishes all of the given modules in less than 10 months. The modules are in English and Filipino, two languages which they could choose from, thus making the lessons easier to understand. The modular structure of the lessons in a simple format also contributed to making the lessons easier to digest.

Majority (87%) of the respondents perceived that they had control over the clarity of the teacher's lessons. Most of them found the teacher's instructions to be clear, hence greatly aiding them in their studies.

Most importantly, majority (75%) also perceived the cost to be within their control or capacity as they said that the center is subsidized by the local government and other concerned sectors.

Based on these findings, majority of the respondents perceived that they had control over many of the variables that could facilitate in finishing their high school studies or their goal. With pervading poverty in the country, anything that would entail fewer resources in exchange for something of quality is of great value. A respondent summed it all up when he stated, "Working while studying is not that easy. I prefer eSkwela because it requires less effort, time and budget. eSkwela offers all of these without sacrificing the quality of our education."

### **Respondents' Intentional and Actual Behavior in Enrolling or Studying at eSkwela**

**Behavioral intention.** Seven respondents (44%) each chose 'yes' and 'no' as an answer on whether or not they would enroll in

another non-formal institution like eSkwela. Two respondents mentioned the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) as their choice of non-formal institution. They said that they would enroll there in order to increase their knowledge especially in making a living or in becoming part of livelihood programs.

Those who answered 'no' (44%) stated that they wanted to enroll in a formal school next, given the chance. This may be an indication that eSkwela may be their stepping stone to get that high school diploma in order to get to a formal college later. It may also be because they would still like to be able to finish college in a formal setting.

**Actual behavior.** More than half (69%) of the respondents first enrolled in 2012, three respondents (19%) enrolled in 2011, while two (12%) enrolled in 2010. They have been studying from three months to more than a year.

Over a quarter (31%) of the respondents each visited the eSkwela center once every Wednesday and twice every Tuesday and Thursday, while the rest (38%) visited twice every Monday and Friday. Most of the respondents (57%) spent three to four hours each day in the learning center. Being working students, that schedule was convenient for them because it was easier for them to have one day off from work.

Many respondents (32%) mentioned that they shared their eSkwela experience to their parents, while 20% shared it to their friends or neighbors. Over a quarter (38%) of the respondents endorsed and persuaded their friend/ neighbor to also enroll in eSkwela. A few (6%) were able to persuade their parents and their spouse/ partner to enroll.

However, half of the respondents were not able to persuade anyone to enroll in eSkwela. It could be because they still haven't finished the program during the time of the study, and they were just waiting for the results of the exam for them to be more enthusiastic in sharing about their experiences.

When asked whether they would still enroll in a college institution after their eSkwela program, 11 respondents (69%) answered yes, while a quarter answered no (15%). One respondent explained that he wanted to finish college so that he would gain more self-confidence and prove that he can get an education. Another mentioned that it is his duty to his family to finish college.

The results showed that their desire to go to college firmed

up their decision to enroll in eSkwela. They wanted to be able to continue and eventually finish tertiary schooling, whether in another non-formal school or in the formal education set-up.

## CONCLUSIONS

In essence, for many of the enrollees, the eSkwela is an affordable way of gaining an education. It fits the need of financially challenged and less privileged people who have less access to formal education. It also takes advantage of ICT to facilitate the delivery of education services that could democratize the provision of education for all. Hence, having an alternative method of education such as eSkwela is seen as a very good option and effective approach for the learners. It provides an alternative opportunity for the less privileged to meet the requirements of formal education.

The learners were highly influenced by their significant others' opinions. The more they perceived their significant others wanted them to enroll and study in eSkwela, the more likely they would actually study in the program.

While the study did not use a statistical correlation to establish causality of the variables in the conceptual framework, results indicated that the eSkwela elicited a positive attitude among learners. The positive attitude was reinforced by their perception that their significant others believed that eSkwela would help them finish high school and have a better life.

Further, they felt confident that they could finish because they had control over facilitating factors such as the use of technology, lessons, pacing, cost, time, language, feedback, and teachers. Hence, they have enrolled in the program and many of them said they were willing to study again using the ALS mode. Further, they have not only shared the information on eSkwela, but they have also proactively convinced others to enroll in the program. Hence, they themselves have become 'testimonials' for the eSkwela program to other learners.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and on the feedback of the respondents themselves, these recommendations are forwarded to improve

the eSkwela program:

**On the modules.** At present, the e-learning modules appear to be mainly digitized versions (or pdf) of the former BALS printed modules. Hence, many students could actually just borrow the printed modules, and read them, and they would still learn very much the same as when they use the e-learning modules in the computers. The interactive videos are those accessed during class sessions with the teachers or facilitators.

Some of the learners suggested including videos on the re-enactments of lessons, adding more modules, tackling deeper and more complex topics so that the learners would be more advanced somehow, giving shorter quizzes or seat work, providing more opportunities and activities not involving computers such as class interactions, having discussions with other learners, and allowing the students to take home assignments where they needed to bring 'books' to their house.

**Promotion using multimedia.** The learners suggested advertising the eSkwela in the Internet (e.g., social media) or in commercials so that it would reach a wider audience, especially potential learners. Other platforms could also include providing IEC materials or collaterals such as more tarpaulins, fliers, and brochures. Eventually, when budget permits, even temporary billboards, quarterly awareness campaigns, and annual radio and televisions plugs could be looked into. Communication strategies should be improved to reach 'investors' in the community.

**Readiness of LGUs and public support.** It is important to reconize the government's support, whether financial or not, so that more centers and schools would be established in order to help more people in need.

Since eSkwela banks on the stakeholder approach as one of the reasons for its success and effectivity, it is vital that LGUs and the general public are ready to support the program, not only during the start or during the preparations but also all throughout the implementation process in order to secure the program's sustainability. With their much-needed support, the project can be assured of use not just for a few months but for years.

In line with this, training programs and seminars can be strengthened for the LGUs and public regarding their role and their importance in such an endeavor. Through this, they would be able to fully grasp what is expected of them and understand how vital they are in the whole alternative education program.

Budget from the generated revenue could be set aside as counterpart fund for the eSkwela program with the Department of Education to ensure sustainability in the communities.

To sum up, eSkwela provides a good and effective alternative for education. Therefore, interested stakeholders from all over the country should be encouraged to establish more centers in order to bring education to the marginalized and less privileged communities. The eSwela is cost effective and entails less time, money, and effort for both the learner and the center.

It is also recommended that [1] eSkwela centers around the nation be studied in order to get more conclusive findings and information since the current study was done at only one center, albeit a pilot site, hence it has a limited number of enrollees; [2] more KIs, such as those from CICT, may be interviewed in order to get a more holistic view of the eSkwela process. CICT informants would be able to share their experiences during the conceptualization stage of the project, during the implementation stage, and even up until the monitoring stage; [3] a tracer study may be conducted to find out where the past enrollees or graduates of eSkwela are and their current situations (e.g., life after eSkwela); and finally [4] the e-learning readiness of LGUs in terms of staff, facilities, technical skills, and possibly even governance may be looked into.

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