

Chapter 30

Empowering Filipino Youth Through Technology and Community



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Although the Philippines has achieved sustained economic growth in recent years, national education outcomes continue to lag behind other countries in the region. Asian Development Bank (ADB) research has shown that for most children in the Philippines, secondary education will be their highest educational attainment, while a proportion of secondary education-aged children will stop or forego schooling for work (Maligalig et al. 2010). Consequently, the tertiary enrollment rate for college-age Filipino youth is only 45%, limiting employment opportunities for the rest who do not pursue higher education (Ken Research 2014).

The level of formal educational attainment is not the only barrier Filipinos face in terms of human capital. Roughly, 30% of those who have pursued or completed a college degree or higher are tagged as the “educated unemployed.” Most are young Filipinos fresh from college, who are believed to be unprepared and unequipped for entry-level jobs. Often, this involves a slow school-to-work transition, where it will take a college graduate 1 year to find the first job and up to 2 years to find more permanent employment. This is attributed largely to the mismatch between skills and qualifications held by young jobseekers and those required for jobs in the labor market (Moya 2018).

Improving quality and performance outcomes for the Philippine education system is a significant, multifaceted, and long-term task. However, it is important to consider near-term factors that may be contributing to these broader issues, as well as alternative interventions that may support Filipino youth in meeting current and emerging skills and job requirements.

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Issues and Challenges

A critical matter to consider is the proportion of Filipino youth who are not entering higher education. Based on observation and research, this gap is partly influenced by three factors that create a disadvantage among students: lack of information, lack of access, and lack of guidance.

Lack of Information

Despite the availability of thousands of higher education institutions across the country, there is limited awareness of options beyond the top-ranking universities in the Philippines, which are located mainly in Manila, and those found within one's own province or region. In other countries, including the United Kingdom and the United States, centralized information systems exist to help students understand what, where, and how to pursue higher education. These are substantial and clear in terms of what courses are offered by the various schools, what job opportunities are available in line with the course selected, and basic instructions on application processes and requirements.

Lack of Access

In addition to comprehensive sources for basic school profiles, course listings, and potential academic paths to employment, students are actively looking for information on scholarships and student financing. Given economic conditions in the Philippines, it is clear that affordability is a major factor that influences education decision making and often limits options available to students. However, they typically do not know how or where to find relevant opportunities that may help alleviate costs.

Lack of Guidance

Finally, what students could benefit from adequately preparing for their future is proper guidance and advice. While the information on schools and careers can be made available using various channels and tools, this knowledge should be paired with appropriate support that can help students evaluate their choices. Students could then have a better understanding of options most suitable to them based on academic strengths, interests, or feasibility. Moreover, additional context from the employment side, including job trends, demands, or emerging societal needs can play a role in charting a path forward.

Proposed Solutions

To arrive at potential solutions, society must also consider the cultural climate surrounding youth in the Philippines. Gen Z, specifically the segment of Filipino youth born between 1995 and 2015 (aged 14–24) and comprising about 20% of the population, is native to a world that is largely digital and increasingly interconnected. Based on initial research, two approaches are proposed for addressing the issues and challenges facing youth when advancing their education and career.

Leveraging Trends in Technology to Reach Youth at a Broader Scale

According to Kantar Millward Brown Philippines, a leader in brand strategy consulting, more than half of Gen Z uses the Internet throughout the day. About 80% are seeking articles to read or videos to watch, indicating that they are hungry for information (Ng 2017). This is reflective of the broader population of the Philippines, where Internet penetration is now nearly 60%, and which ranks number one globally for time spent on social media. Moreover, We Are Social reports that mobile internet connections have improved considerably in many developing economies, and the Philippines in particular has seen an impressive jump in average mobile connection speeds (Kemp 2017).

These data point to a significant opportunity to meet Filipino youth where they are online, and specifically on social media and through mobile devices. Taking this a step further, innovative technology, through the use of data and analytics, is now enabling internet users to have more personalized experiences, opening the potential for more engaging discovery, or learning opportunities for students.

Creating an Ecosystem that Approaches Education to Employment from Various Perspectives

ADB's review of education outcomes in the Philippines reported that the Department of Education has forged partnerships with private and business sectors in implementing initiatives that have resulted in valuable contributions. Specifically, the report recommends partnerships with successful businesses to develop a technical–vocational curriculum that would give students better chances of being hired by enterprises in their communities (Maligalig et al. 2010).

This example highlights that higher learning or career readiness should be approached not only from the viewpoint of education. As students continue their pursuit of degrees or certifications, there is also a growing need for input and insight from other players who are vested in the next generation's development. Early and

ongoing involvement is relevant not only for businesses but also for other public and private institutions, comprising a holistic ecosystem that holds a common interest in ensuring that Filipino students are adequately equipped to meet the challenges and demands of the future.

Examples of Good Practices

Based on the two proposed approaches, harnessing technology and multi-stakeholder involvement, three examples can be considered for successful implementation of interventions targeted toward Filipino youth.

Creation of Online Platforms Supported by Offline Engagement

Recognizing that students are seeking information mainly online, digital destinations where they can access comprehensive data on schools, courses, and careers would provide significant benefit. Using technology, information available through the Internet and other resources can be easily gathered and collated, creating a centralized database that enables convenient searching and browsing. Schools can also play an active role in this initiative by providing accurate and updated information that supports students in making informed assessments of their options. Providing information online can also be supplemented by in-person activities that would (i) build awareness around the existence of these platforms as new information sources, (ii) create connections between students and multiple stakeholders who can support them in their education-to-career path, and (iii) reach and similarly support youth who may not have easy access to the internet.

Promotion of Opportunities Addressing Affordability

As students seek scholarships and other options to finance their higher education, sharing available opportunities online can increase awareness and access for a large number of eligible students who would not have learned about them otherwise. In the Philippines, there are countless benefactors including government agencies, corporations, and foundations that aim to support scholars, and engaging them through a shared and centralized online initiative could amplify reach and attract more student candidates.

Development of Engaging Multimedia Content

Finally, issues around lack of information, access, and guidance can be addressed by creating content that meets students online and on their preferred social media channels such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. The ability to produce articles, imagery, and video that speaks to this audience can help engage and ultimately guide them on important decisions concerning education or career. Multimedia content could then be strengthened and made more credible by stakeholders who share expert advice and serve as positive influences for students and future jobseekers.

Application of Practices

In the experience of Edukasyon.ph, an online technology platform that aims to empower Filipino Gen Z youth to make better-informed choices about education, career, and life decisions, the following initiatives have been implemented.

Development of Edukasyon.ph and Execution of School Fairs Across the Philippines

Edukasyon.ph is an online platform that provides information on 13,000 schools, 20,000 courses, and 4,000 scholarships that senior high school and college students across the Philippines can choose to pursue. For more than 700 educational partners, locally and abroad the platform enables students to inquire and apply directly on the platform, online, at no cost to the students. In 2018, Edukasyon.ph acquired the website FindUniversity.ph, which similarly lists higher education institutes and available academic programs across the country. By providing choice, access, and convenience, Edukasyon.ph's online platforms are now visited by 10 million students a year. Students have actively engaged and benefited from its use, with more than 500,000 registered users, 600,000 monthly searches, and more than 85,000 monthly inquires and applications coursed through the platform. With more than 70% of students accessing the platform through mobile devices, Edukasyon.ph is adequately designed and optimized for this audience.

In recent years, Edukasyon.ph has also implemented successful offline engagements together with local government units, corporate partners, and media partners. In close collaboration with the local Department of Education divisions across the country, more than 30 school fairs nationwide have complemented the use of online platform, reaching a total student population of more than 15,000 as of 2018. At each school fair, students have gained relevant information on pursuing higher education opportunities, scholarships, and knowledge to prepare them for future employment.

Launch of Project Layag Scholarship Platform

On addressing affordability, a common barrier for students, Edukasyon.ph in partnership with De La Salle University Science Foundation launched Project Layag, a nationwide online scholarship platform that democratizes access to financial support for Filipino youth. In addition to the thousands of scholarships listed on Edukasyon.ph, this targeted initiative provides added convenience by making certain scholarships available for direct online application on the platform, at no cost to the student. Project Layag is an ongoing effort to ensure that all existing scholarship opportunities are accessible to eligible students through the website.

To date, more than 30 higher education institutions, foundations, and scholarship providers, including Insular Life Foundation and the PHINMA Foundation, have been integrated into the platform.

Implementation of Corporate-Partnered Campaigns

Involvement from reputable businesses, particularly through engaging multimedia campaigns, has also been a recent focus of Edukasyon.ph to ensure that students can access guidance on potential career paths and values that could help them succeed in the future. The campaigns are equally aligned with the partners' business objectives, allowing brand messaging to be seamlessly integrated with Edukasyon.ph content categories that are co-created with its writers.

A collaboration with [24]7, a customer experience company, examined the business process outsourcing industry by “debunking myths about call centers.” Through an engaging online video campaign on Edukasyon.ph, students were able to understand the professional demands and opportunities in these roles through the lens of experienced experts in the field. For [24]7, Edukasyon.ph provided a wide-reaching platform that boosted the company's visibility as an industry leader and drove student interest around its employee recruitment initiatives.

Another campaign developed in partnership with FWD Group, an insurance provider, sought to engage Filipino youth around financial literacy with knowledge and skills to promote sensible management of personal finances. Edukasyon.ph-led blog content approached the topic through “signs of becoming an adult,” advising Gen Z readers that growing up comes with important responsibilities, including banking and budgeting, managing retirement funds, and preparing for the future overall.

Implications for the Future

With the availability of online resources targeted at Filipino youth, who are increasingly turning to the Internet for answers, more can be done to inform and empower them. In the case of online platforms like Edukasyon.ph, there is a significant opportunity to raise awareness of educational options, especially as more doors are being opened each day. This can extend to technical and vocational education and training, online degrees and courses for lifelong learning, internships, or on-the-job training opportunities, as well as additional tools for student financing, including loans.

In building an ecosystem in support of fruitful education-to-career paths, there is also room for increased stakeholder participation. As industries and societies embrace interconnectivity, they must also realize that youth is an important segment to invest in, as they will be drivers of sustainability.

Finally, based on current trends, it can be expected that Gen Z will become even more digital in the next 5 years and beyond. Increased Internet penetration in the future, if not absolute, will require that all education-to-employment programs be designed as digital first, and not merely as a secondary component of learning.

Conclusion

Although there is no quick solution to improving national education outcomes in the Philippines, supplemental resources that leverage the digital youth culture and employ multi-stakeholder approaches can be valuable tools. For technology platforms, a unique benefit is the ability to track and harness data analytics and insights to better understand what is working and what else can be done to achieve meaningful results.

As existing models produce and replicate stories of success—from education to employment to sustainable careers—more students will be motivated to make the right choices for themselves, more stakeholders can be engaged to lend their support, and the more extensive impact can be created for the Filipino youth.

Link to the presentation material: <https://events.development.asia/materials/20171212/edukasyonph>.

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