

Empowering Teachers and Principals from a Remote Rural Province through AMA Education System's (AMAES) e-Learning Solution

Dr. Lilibeth F. Taa

Deputy Head Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer

AMA Education System

lftaa@amaes.edu.ph

Abstract

This case study focused on the best experiences and challenges experienced by the teachers and principals from a remote and connectivity-challenged rural province in the Philippines as they endeavor to complete a Master's degree in Computer Education at the AMA Education System (AMAES). The study also sought to find out their wishes towards enhancing the learning experience. The program was made possible by the partnership between a college in the province that does not have the requirements to offer the master's degree program and AMAES that has government permit to offer the course and the technological infrastructure to deliver an e-learning solution to address internet connectivity issues in the province. This solution is the delivery of the master's program through the mixed use of VSAT technology and Webcasting.

The participants' narratives showed that their topmost best experience is the empowerment they feel at being able to access the course that they want. The biggest challenge involves the economic and temporal demands of taking up graduate studies. Towards enhancing the learning experience, the participants wished for the early announcement of the schedule of academic activities and payment of fees to help them plan expenditures strategically. They also wished that the professors would give more timely feedback to their written submissions.

Keywords: e-learning, Webcast, VSAT, teachers, principals, partnership, internet connectivity

- **Purpose of research:**

This narrative research intends to describe the lived experiences of school teachers and principals who are currently taking the Program Master's Degree in Computer Education from AMA Education System through an e-learning solution using a mix of VSAT technology and Webcast. These adult learners are situated in the remote province of Northern Samar, Philippines that was devastated by Typhoon Haiyan or Yolanda in 2013. AMAES is located in the Philippines' National Capital Region. The learners are separated by a distance of 754 kilometers. The distance can be inconveniently covered by over 19 hours of travel by land and ferry or over four hours by air and land travel.

- **Methodology**

This study applied the qualitative research method, specifically the narrative research method. Students enrolled in the Master of Arts in Computer Education (MACoEd) program were requested to narrate their stories as students in MACoEd following a narration guide. The guide adopted the Appreciative Inquiry approach and thus focused on the students' best experiences, challenges, and wishes for the program. The written narratives were triangulated using phone interviews where found necessary.

- **Major results**

The Best Experiences Include -

1. The empowerment the teachers and principals feel at being able to enroll in a Master's degree program through VSAT and Webcast technology.
2. The VSAT and Webcast class experience that enables a live and two-way human interaction despite limitations.
3. The cooperative face-to-face learning activities with co-learners.
4. Access to the professors' lectures (that are recorded during the live broadcast and uploaded in the LMS) anytime and anywhere.

5. Very good course content.
6. Course assessment activities are fewer and these focus on essential learning outcomes.
7. Being a part of an innovative e-learning solution.

The Challenges Encountered-

1. The biggest challenge is the economic situation of the teachers and principals. Being a second class province, the salary of teachers and school principals in Northern Samar is approximately USD400/month. That is where they draw their tuition fees and other school expenses from, the resources for sustaining theirs and their families' needs, and even some teaching-related expenses.
2. The second challenge is the demand of their work in the school that leaves little time for complying with course requirements. As with teachers and principals in other parts of Southeast Asia, these teachers and principals spend around eight hours in school attending to academic and administrative tasks.
3. Since the VSAT and Webcast-delivered classes are implemented in such a way that the students have to go to the partner college to attend the live interactive broadcast, the challenges include the long, expensive, and difficult journey that most have to take. For some, this requires crossing a river by boat followed by a three-hour travel by land. In spite of this, the students still go to school – fired by the passion to learn and earn a master's degree.
4. The next challenge is the weather. During heavy rains and typhoons, going to the campus becomes unsafe. For those who manage to go to school, there are instances when the clarity of the broadcast video and/or audio is badly affected.

• Wishes for the VSAT and Webcast Delivered Courses

The adult learners gave the following suggestions in order to enhance their learning experience:

1. For management to announce the schedule of academic activities and payment of fees in advance to help them plan the allocation of their personal funds.

2. For the professors to give more timely feedback to their written submissions.

- **Implications and Conclusions**

The results of this narrative research yielded the following implications and conclusions:

The mixed use of VSAT Technology and Webcasting-

1. offers an effective solution to the challenge of access to quality education and intermittent internet connection;
2. enables the retention of a human touch between the professor and the learners;
3. exemplifies the innovative use of technology towards addressing some education challenges.

- **Key references**

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