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# THE IMPACT OF COMPETITIVENESS ON THE EMPLOYABILITY OF PHILIPPINES INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS: STREAMLINING THE PROGRAM WITH THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET

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**Abstract.** Industrial Design as a profession seeks to strategically address the industries' needs for aesthetically functional designs through innovation with the ultimate goal of improving quality of life and building business success. The Design practice in the Philippines can be considered to be at its prime with spotlights focused on internationally renowned designers. Several names made a mark in the international scene showcasing Filipino ingenuity and craftsmanship and this has proven the marketability of Filipino designers locally and abroad. Quality of the Industrial Design program and its relevance and applicability to the current trends in design practice have gained not much attention for the past few decades of its existence. The contents of curriculum and core competency- building capacity of institutions to hone future designers may have had too little attention, not enough to withstand the competition this profession poses. The research revolved at the competencies level of practicing Filipino designers and their employability in the international arena. Technical knowledge, certification or licenses, and relevant experiences were treated as indicators of competencies; on the other hand, their employability was established through their work- base, level of work, immediacy of employment and years of practice. These variables were tested to provide a clear grasp of how competencies can influence the ability of designers to be employed in the global market. The results provided remarkable assessments on how designers perceive their level of competencies and have offered a glimpse on how Filipino designers were received globally. It is the thrust of this study to provide academic institutions an anchor for program development to address opportunities identified. Often, we associate competency with employability and equate it as a guarantee for success, however effective learning experience, relevance of program and effective relay of significant knowledge are key to ensure that graduates of the Industrial Design Program are equipped and ready to make their mark in the design industry.

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## INTRODUCTION

Industrial Design is a strategic problem-solving process that drives innovation, builds business success, and leads to a better quality of life through innovative products, systems, services, and experiences as defined at the 29th General Assembly in Gwangju South Korea (Professional Practice Committee of ICSID). With this explicit definition, this profession expresses its core foundations which are competencies and the ability to translate knowledge into viable opportunity for innovation with the combination of aesthetic and functionality (Bernik, Azis, Kartini & Harsanto, 2015).

Knowledge is the basis for wealth (Thurow, 2000). Knowledge is materialized through competencies and reflected in the quality of output that we make. In the highly competitive human market, competitiveness can be measured by a person's employability and his ability to translate his acquired knowledge to the effective execution of his job responsibilities (Krisnawati, Perangin-Angin, Zainal & Suardi, 2016). According to Hillage and Pollards (1998), 'employability is about having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment

and obtain new employment if required'. The definition encapsulates the objectives of why people pursue to gain knowledge, not just simply for the sake of knowing but with the intent of applying knowledge in a financially satisfying endeavor whether as an employee or an entrepreneur. To gain employment, one's skills coupled with innovation would result to employability (Brown & Heskeths, 2004). With the authors' contention, skills and competencies can be viewed as a determining factor to attract employers or clients in hiring the services of a designer. Swanson and Fouad (1999) contend that the adequacy between students' skills and their future working context will increase when students' self-knowledge is developed, thus potentially contributing to higher levels of performance and satisfaction. In this light, the role of academic institutions is highlighted in providing conducive learning environment, able to impart necessary competencies to aspiring designers in the Philippines. It was also stressed by Cabral-Cardoso, Estêvão and Silva (2006) that Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) must consider to boost transferable skills to

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future practitioners. To address this, Cobonpue (2016) opines that academic institutions such as De La Salle- College of Saint Benilde that offers Industrial Design Program provides relevant and practical- technical and business skills to its students to ensure their employability. On the contrary, De La Harpe, Radloff and Wyber (2000) state that there is a growing alarm in the existing undergraduate producing graduates who lack life-long learning skills and professional skills that they need to be successful in their careers. This is where academic institutions must collaboratively work to develop and enhance the current program curricula of the Industrial Design Program in the Philippines offering not just theoretical concepts but skills that embody professionalism and the yearning to learn more beyond the boundaries of schools.

To streamline and provide graduates who fit the needs of the industry specifically the global market, there is a need to tailor- fit competencies needed by employers. According to Dunne and Rawlins (2000), there is a lack of a common language of skills between HEIs and employers giving a notion that schools fail to produce graduates that satisfy the requirements of employers hence, the disconnect between the two institutions that produce and employ the workforce. Holmes (2001) expresses that skills should have the same meaning in the education context as the employment context allowing a streamline in the programs offered by schools with the actual needs of the industry making it easier for graduates to penetrate certain industries.

Knight and Yorke (2000), assume that good student-learning is dependent on curriculum, teaching and assessment thus, the relationship and the statement 'education for employability'. This statement sends a strong message that educational institutions are responsible in molding practitioners in their field of expertise and to some extent can be held liable to the success or failure of their graduates. Schools should then give emphasis on what to teach and how knowledge is transferred through effective methodologies as well as relevant qualifications of professors.

Filipino Industrial Designers have been paving the way for design innovations across borders. This has given an importance in the review of how competitive Filipino Industrial Designers have grown in the last five years. Filipinos are renowned for their originality, innovativeness, artistry and ingenuity. These skills have made them one of the most sought after designers internationally. Researches on determining employability of Filipino designers and highlighting their competitive advantages over foreign counterparts have been scarce and it is with this intent that proponents aspire to establish the competencies level of Philippines Industrial Designers and their chances of employability in the global arena given their strengths or weaknesses on the competencies they possess.

### **Statement of Problem**

The research aimed at determining the competencies and employment status of Filipino Industrial Designers across the globe and to identify necessary augmentations that can be employed to enhance current curricula of the Industrial Design Program in the Philippines. Specifically, it sought to answer the following inquiries:

1. What is the employability rate of Philippines Industrial Designers in the international arena?
2. How do the Philippines Industrial Designers perceive their level of competitiveness based on the following indicators:
  - Technical Knowledge
  - Certification/Licenses
  - Relevant Experience
3. Can competitiveness be positively attributed to the employability of Philippines Industrial Designers in the international arena?
4. What recommendations can be formulated to improve the Philippines Industrial Designers' specifically future designers' competitiveness to increase employability?

### **Research Hypothesis**

#### **Null Hypothesis**

There is no significant relationship of the employability of Philippines Industrial Designers in the international arena with their level of competitiveness.

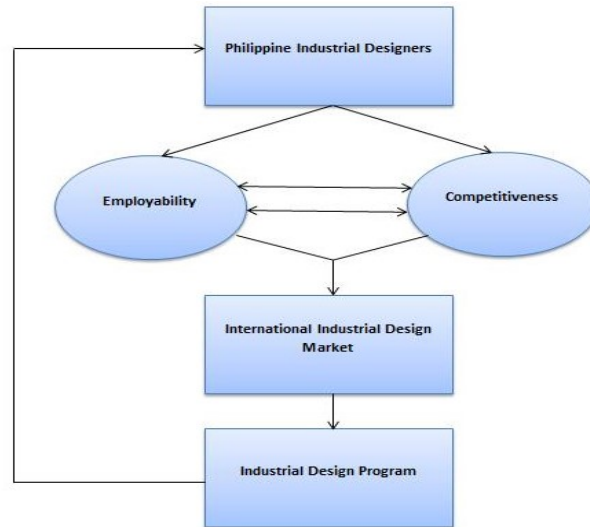
### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The research was directed at surfacing and discovering the strengths and weaknesses of the Industrial Design Program in the Philippines as manifested by the acquired competencies practitioners profess on how they perceive their competitiveness in the practice of their profession. Variables such as employability and competitiveness were the main factors assessed by the respondents and its relationship was established to determine the degree to which competencies influence the employability of a designer. It is also imperative that these assessments be translated into how designers can be better instilled with necessary skills as they venture into the global market through enhancing current program curriculum and syllabi and integrating a more relevant and tailor-fit program design which is confined into the objective of any academic institution of producing graduates of social significance who are contributory to their respective fields of specialization. The approach of this study encompasses institutional efforts but rather aspires to formulate inclusive prerogatives from Colleges and Universities that offer the Industrial Design Program and eventually streamline its program offering into a more uniform and standard learning platform for students despite multi-faceted

specializations. It is the ultimate goal of this academic endeavor to provide opportunities to aspiring Filipino designers for international employment through an academic foundation

that offers learning that prepares them to be competitive in the global arena.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Skandia Navigator**



**METHOD**

The research utilized the descriptive survey method which aims to gather data without manipulating the context of the study. This paper is also in essence quantitative and qualitative as it interprets statistical data gathered from the respondents through statistical tools to present the nature, composition or processes of a phenomenon. A set of well- structured questionnaires duly validated by experts was floated to prospective respondents who are currently employed and practicing Filipino designers across the globe. One hundred (100) Industrial Design graduates from the Philippines working locally and abroad were tapped to be the respondents of the study. To assess employability of respondents, the level of work, the immediacy of employment and the years in design practice were considered. On the other hand, to determine the level of competitiveness, indicators such as technical knowledge, certification or licenses and relevant experiences were determined. These variables were assessed through a Likert four-

point scale to determine their level of agreement. Lastly, the Pearson Correlation was used to establish the relationship between employability and competitiveness given the weighted mean of the assessed variables.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Profiles of the respondents were established by identifying their demography: 62 (62%) of the respondents were male and 38 (38%) were female respectively. Most of the respondents were aged between 20 and 25 or 39 (%), 19 (19%) belonged to the age bracket of 26-30, 21 (21%) belonged to the age bracket of 30-35, and 21 (21%) of the respondents were aged 36 and above respectively. The work-base also identified that 1 (1%) of the respondents worked in the United States or other US territories, 92 (92%) were locally based in the Philippines but had clients abroad, 1 (1%) worked in Europe, 2 (2%) worked in Australia and 4 (4%) worked in the Middle East respectively.

**TABLE 1**  
**Level of Work**

Level of Work	f	%
Managerial	29	29.00%
Supervisorial	31	31.00%
Rand and File	40	40.00%
Total	100	100.00%

On the level of work of the respondents, 29 (29%) of the participants held managerial positions in their respective organizations, 31 (31%) held supervisory positions and 40 (40%) held rank and file positions. It can be inferred that most of the Fil-

ipino industrial designers preferred a position that allows them to have a first-hand application of their technical skills in design thus being content with holding non-managerial positions in the design industry.

**TABLE 2**  
**Employment Immediacy**

Employed Within	f	%
0-6 months	53	53.00%
7-12 months	15	15.00%
After 1 year	32	32.00%
Total	100	100.00%

On the immediacy of employment of Filipino designers, 53 (53%) were employed in 0-6 months after graduation, 15 (15%) were employed in 7-12 months and 32 (32%) were employed after 1 year respectively. This result is a positive indicator of the employability of Industrial Design graduates in the Philippines given more opportunities to practice their profession as

early as they graduate. It can be conclusive that with the immediacy of their employment, it is clear that their academic foundation and exposure were relevant and significant considering them one of the most sought after designers across the globe.

**TABLE 3**  
**Years of Design Practice**

Years in Design Practice	f	%
0-1 years	25	25.00%
2.5 years	30	30.00%
6years or more	45	45%
Total	100	100.00%

On the respondents' years of design practice, 25 (25%) were in practice for 0-1 year, 30 (30%) were in practice for 2-5 years and 45 (45%) were in design practice for 6 years or more respectively. The results can clearly define the passion that Fil-

ipino designers have having stayed in practice for more than six years. This could mean designers are seeing a positive horizon in the design industry and exploiting opportunities for a lucrative livelihood or profitable business ventures.

**TABLE 4**  
**Technical Knowledge of Filipino Designers**

Technical Knowledge	WM	Interpretation
Newest trends in design and practice	3.30	Agree(A)
Technical skills on drawing, drafting, rendering and modeling	3.31	Agree(A)
Production processes such as wood-working/metal/plastic	3.19	Agree(A)
Fundamental to advance knowledge on management, marketing and branding	3.28	Agree(A)
Knowledge in operation analysis	3.34	Agree(A)

The respondents' technical skills provide a glimpse on the overall competencies of Filipino designers with an average weighted mean of 3.28 interpreted as Agree (A). The data enshrined the level of competencies as they apply new trends to design practice with a weighted mean of 3.30 interpreted as Agree (A), technical skill with a weighted mean of 3.31 interpreted as Agree (A), production processes with a weighted

mean of 3.19 interpreted as Agree (A), fundamental and advance knowledge of business concepts with a weighted mean of 3.28 interpreted as Agree (A) and finally knowledge on operation analysis with a weighted mean of 3.34 interpreted as Agree (A). Overall the results show high levels of competencies in terms of technical knowledge among the respondents.

**TABLE 5**  
**Certification/Licenses of Filipino Designers**

<b>Certification/Licenses</b>	<b>WM</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Valid license/certification recognized locally and abroad	2.23	Disagree(D)
Refresher courses in design and allied academic and technical programs	2.66	Agree(A)
Designs patented and recognized locally and internationally	2.17	Disagree(D)
Bonafide member design organization locally and internationally	2.36	Agree(A)
Attend seminars and workshops in design	2.82	Agree(A)

Filipino designers' certification or licences provide a below average weighted mean of 2.45 interpreted as Disagree (D). This is manifested in the following variables assessed: valid license or certification with a weighted mean of 2.23 interpreted as Disagree (D), refresher courses in design or allied programs with a weighted mean of 2.66 interpreted as Agree (A), design patents with a weighted mean of 2.17 interpreted as Disagree (D), membership in design organization with a weighted mean of 2.36 interpreted as Agree (A) and seminars and work-

shops in design with a weighted mean of 2.82 interpreted as Agree (A). The result is reflective of the government's and academic institutions' minimal prerogatives in institutionalizing the design profession and establishing standards in standardizing practice of the profession. Underutilization of patent rights registration also plays a role in the proliferation of design infringement, despite the opportunity to register designs and ideas, designers tend to neglect this platform to secure their designs.

**TABLE 6**  
**Relevant Experiences of Filipino Designers**

<b>Relevant Experiences</b>	<b>WM</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Full practice of profession locally and internationally	3.10	Agree(A)
Share best practices through trainings/workshops	2.74	Agree(A)
Teaching field of expertise in the academic industry	2.58	Agree(A)
Exhibit designs/products locally and internationally	2.86	Agree(A)
Extensive and wide array of design portfolio	3.01	Agree(A)

Relevant experiences could provide the design industry an avenue for a robust growth of the design practice with an average weighted mean of 2.86 interpreted as Agree (A). This is reflected with the full practice of the profession with a weighted mean of 3.10 interpreted as Agree (A), sharing of best practices with a weighted mean of 2.74 interpreted as Agree (A), teaching in the academic industry with a weighted mean of 2.58 interpreted as Agree (A), exhibiting designs and products with a weighted mean of 2.86 interpreted as Agree (A)

and design portfolio with a weighted mean of 3.01 interpreted as Agree (A). It has to be noted that the inability to develop other designers through academic endeavors seemed to be the challenge among colleges and universities that are in dire need for practitioners to teach future designers. Most designers do not have the vocation to teach and would prefer the actual application of their professions; however, designers must have a higher calling for cascading pertinent information to aspiring designers to make them more adept and competitive in their

field. A designer would be in a better position to teach given their experiential knowledge. On the other hand, exhibit serves as an exposure for designers but this opportunity seemed to be lacking among Filipino designers. Overall there are still areas

of opportunity that should be given more attention attributed to relevant experiences. If these issues were addressed, it could provide designers and aspiring designers vast opportunities for knowledge sharing and exposure of design portfolio.

**TABLE 7**  
**Relevant Experiences of Filipino Designers**

	Mean	S.D.	Pearson Correlation	Decision	Remarks
Employability	2.10	0.03	0.882729323	Reject Ho	There is a significant relationship
Competitiveness	2.86	0.17			

df=2; significance level = 0.05

It can be inferred that the employability of Industrial Design graduates relies significantly on their level of competitiveness as manifested by their high level of competencies with a Pearson Correlation value of 0.882729323 thereby the null hypothesis is rejected. It is then conclusive that there is a significant relationship of the employability of Philippines Industrial Designers in the international arena with their level of competitiveness.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The employability of Filipino designers boasts high levels of acceptability in the global design industry having most of the graduates employed mostly in six months or less. This is a vindication that the efforts of Colleges and Universities to provide relevant learning experience among students are effective and are reflective of the quality of the Industrial Design Program being offered in the Philippines. A significant number of Filipino designers have also been in practice for more than six years holding managerial, supervisory and rank and file positions, most of them locally based with international clients and some of them based in major continents across the globe. Technical knowledge among Filipino designers was one of the strong points and key to their global competitiveness. Trends in design practice as well as technical skills in drawing, drafting and rendering were skills that allow designers to be efficient in their profession. Moreover, production process, operations analysis and an in-depth knowledge of business concepts provide an entrepreneurial perspective for aspiring designers. Local and international recognition can be considered a weakness for Filipino designers. Although certifications are provided in other countries, in the Philippines, the profession is yet to be institutionalized thereby no licensure or professional certification is available for local designers and there are limited professional organizations that can be tapped. Furthermore, designers tend to settle with their degrees and opt not to seek for higher learning; Seminars and workshops are also limited

giving lesser opportunities for skills update and cross- skilling. Often, patent is still an issue which remains to be addressed by the government as well as the designers themselves. Relevant experiences showed positive indicator of how designers are able to practice their profession to its fullest extent. However, sharing technical knowledge through trainings, workshops and academic set-up was one of the weak points of Filipino designers. Exhibits can also be considered an area of opportunity not optimally exploited for local and international exposure. At the culmination of the research, it draws a conclusion that competencies highly influence the employability of Filipino designers as these competencies have direct impact on the perception of employers on how well designers can carry out their job responsibilities effectively and efficiently.

Having identified the strong and weak points of Filipino designers and their current state of employment in the global arena, it is then the prerogative of the proponents to provide founded recommendations that can further improve their competencies through relevant programs that can be pursued within the academic realms. On technical knowledge, it is undeniable that Filipino designers possess necessary skills and this can be further improved by integrating a more holistic approach in balancing theoretical and technical foundations of students and providing them more immersive activities that engage them in actual design practice and its business aspects. On the certification or licenses, Colleges and Universities across the Philippines that offer Industrial Design Program must streamline its course offerings and institutionalize specific specializations in design to formulate proposals allowing professionalization of the Industrial Design practice with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) or at least be recognized by Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) as a core competency aligned with specific specializations. Designers and students alike are also encouraged to be a member of professional organizations locally and abroad as well as involve

themselves more in seminars, workshops and enrol in design and allied courses beyond their degrees. Patenting of design and ideas must be intensified with the support of academic institutions and must be integrated in the syllabi of the program to provide students guidelines in having their designs registered and protected. On a suggestive note, the government is highly encouraged to simplify application processes for patent registration. Academic institutions must also endeavor to provide relevant seminars on patenting as well as promote design patenting by establishing patent offices in schools offering In-

dustrial Design Program. Exhibit opportunities must also be provided to students through institutional networking locally and abroad and maintaining a database of prospective exhibit opportunities through sponsorships. Finally, on relevant experiences, apart from the actual design practice, designers and students must be instilled with the perspective on the significance of teaching specialization to aspiring designers through facilitating trainings and workshops as well as the possibility of teaching in the academe.

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